American Urban History

CAS HI 280

Professor Andrew Robichaud

Spring Quarter, 2016

CAS 208

Office:
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Office Hours:
Mondays 10-12
Fridays 10-11
And by appointment

Overview

How and why did cities emerge in the United States? What did American cities look like, smell like, and feel like over time? How and why did urban populations change? How did Americans understand cities and urban populations? In what ways are cities today the products of their historical pasts?

This course introduces students to the history of cities in the United States. We will examine the growth of cities in the Early Republic, focusing on the conditions that caused greater concentrations of human habitation, and the complicated and conflicting ideas about cities that emerged at the same time. We will examine the rise of the modern metropolis, and the political, social, and environmental dimensions of urban growth in the nineteenth century. We will examine the relationships between cities and migration and immigration, while also looking at the ways in which the distinctions of city and country have been continually drawn and redrawn over time. What caused these massive changes in urban and suburban life in America, and how do they connect to larger national and international trends?

Focusing on social, environmental, demographic, and cultural change, this course offers students an overview of the development and meaning of urban life in America.
**Evaluation**

Attendance and participation 30%
Paper 25% (April 22)
Final Presentation 10% (TBA)
Midterm Exam 15% (March 2)
Final Exam 20% (Finals Week)

**Final Paper**

Using Boston as an example, students will choose from three paper topics (or propose their own by week 4) and write a 7-10 page paper. More information on the paper will be presented in class. A hard copy of your paper with proper citations will be due in class on April 22.

**Class Participation**

Attendance and participation are mandatory. You will be evaluated not only for your attendance, but also for your active and thoughtful participation in class. If you are shy or unsure how to participate, please visit office hours so we can discuss how you can best prepare for class discussions.

Attendance is mandatory. For every unexcused absence, students will be marked down 3.33 points in their participation grade (out of 100 points). You are allowed one unexcused absence without penalty. Up to one unexcused absence may be made up by submitting a two-page reflection essay on the week’s readings.

This course will be a hybrid of lecture presentations by the professor and class discussions and analysis. Some days we will analyze materials together and in groups. Please come prepared to engage with your classmates every day, which means staying on top of readings for the week.

**Disabilities**

Students with documented disabilities or special needs should contact the professor within the first week for appropriate accommodations. For more information, please contact the Office of Disability Services at (617) 353-3658. All discussions will be confidential.

**Computers**

Using computers is not allowed during class unless specifically stated by the professor. One important part of historical thinking and scholarship is being present and focused. While computers can be helpful in certain types of historical analysis, they tend to be major distractions in a lecture setting. Please take notes by hand. If you have a
documented disability that requires you to use a laptop, please speak with the professor at
the beginning of the semester.

** Cell phone use is not allowed at any time. **

** Academic Conduct **
Your work for this course must be your own. Quoting or using another person’s ideas
without attribution, or presenting another person’s work as your own, are forms of
plagiarism. If you are found plagiarizing, you will receive a failing grade for the
assignment, and possibly the course, with possible further sanctions by the University
Academic Conduct Committee. Students should consult the Boston University Academic
Conduct Code: http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/
It is your responsibility to read these policies carefully and to know exactly what
constitutes plagiarism.

** Late Work **
Written work is to be handed in on the dates listed, at the very start of class or by the
specific time assigned. A paper will be marked down 1/3 of a grade for each day it is late
(an A will become an A-, a B+ will become a B, etc.). Assignments more than one week
late will not be accepted. I will consider extensions when there is a compelling reason
and sufficient notice. If you need an extension, let me know well in advance (at least a
full week).

** Required Books **
1. Chudacoff and Baldwin, eds., Major Problems in American Urban and Suburban
   History (A sourcebook of primary and secondary readings) (978-0618432769)
3. Thomas Sugrue, The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar
   Detroit (978-0691162553)

Readings marked with an asterisk (*) will be available on Blackboard.
Course Schedule

January 20, 22

Introductions

• Major Problems, preface and chapter 1, “Interpreting Urban and Suburban History”

January 25, 27, 29

Early American Cities and Networks of the Atlantic World
Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Charleston, and New York
“Lower Sorts” and Revolutionaries: Cities in the Revolution and Early Republic

• Major Problems, chapters 2 and 3

February 1, 3, 5

Industry, Boosterism, and the Rise of City Life

• Major Problems, Chapter 4
  • Michael Rawson, Eden on the Charles, Introduction and Chapter 1

[Possible: Boston Common Walking Tour]

February 8, 10, 12

The (Un)Sanitary City

• Major Problems, Chapter 5, “Dealing with Sickness and Sanitation, 1830-1900)
• Rawson, Eden on the Charles, Chapter 3
• Theodore Steinberg, “The Death of the Organic City” *
February 16, 17, 19

NOTE:
No Class Monday - Presidents’ Day
Class Meets on Tuesday, Feb. 16

The Animal City

- Etienne Benson: Squirrels*
- Catherine McNeur: Pigs*
- Clay McShane: Horses*

February 22, 24, 26

Chicago and the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis

- William Cronon, Nature’s Metropolis (introduction and selections)*
- Selections from Upton Sinclair, The Jungle*

February 29, March 2, 4

** MIDTERM - Wednesday March 2 **

Gilded Age, Class, and Immigration

- Major Problems, Chapter 6 and 7
- Film: “Hester Street”
- Josiah Strong, Our Country (selections)*

March 7-11

SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS

March 14, 16, 18

Urban Politics, Corruption, and Reform

- Major Problems, Chapter 9
- Plunkitt of Tammany Hall, selections*
March 21, 23, 25

Urban Communities, Urban Fractures

- *Major Problems*, Chapter 10
- George Chauncey, *Gay New York* (selections)*

March 28, 30, April 1

Urban Environments and Inequalities

- Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities* (selections)*
- Ellen Stroud, “Troubled Waters in Ecotopia”*

April 4, 6, 8

Suburbanization and Sprawl

- *Major Problems*, Chapter 13
- Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (selections)*

April 11, 13, 15

De-Industrialization and Idea of Urban Decline

- Major Problems, Chapter 14
- Sugrue, *The Urban Crisis* (part I)
- Film: James Baldwin, “Take this Hammer”

April 18, 20, 22

The Urban “Crisis,” and Urban Renewal

- *Major Problems*, Chapter 12
- Sugrue, *The Urban Crisis* (part II)

[Student Presentations this week]

PAPERS DUE ON APRIL 22
April 25, 27, 29

Boston and Detroit: Exploring Urban Divergence in the 21st Century

- Sugrue, *The Urban Crisis* (Part III)
- Rawson, *Eden on the Charles*, Epilogue

[Student Presentations this week]