

New York University
Department of Social and Cultural Analysis
Constructing and Negotiating Difference in Urban Contexts V18.0541.001
Spring 2011

Wednesday 2:00-4:45pm
20 Cooper Square, 4th Floor, Room 485

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 1:00pm-2:00pm and also by appointment

Course Description

In this seminar we will analyze the ways that urban contexts take shape as particular kinds of political, economic, spatial, and cultural assemblages. In particular, we ask how the identities of people, practices, and objects are symbolically constructed within these sites. We will examine case studies that focus on urban spaces in the U.S. and throughout the world in order to track the patterned ways in which “difference” becomes a cultural concept that is recognized, acted upon, and transformed.

Three overarching questions shape the organization of the course:

1. What makes urban contexts distinctive sites/objects of analytical investigation?
2. How are social relations produced in and through urban space?
3. What theoretical and methodological approaches have been used to study urban life?

The course focuses on key themes in the analysis of urban space and social relations, including race, gender, colonialism, capitalism, and research methods. While individual sessions are dedicated to each of these themes, the course is ultimately rooted in an interlocking approach that understands the production of social relations, identity formation, and urban space as mutually constitutive.

Guidelines and Requirements

Due to the interactive nature of this course and the sensitive topics that it covers, it is imperative to maintain a high degree of mutual respect and maturity. Give one another the benefit of the doubt in class discussions, and analyze one another’s ideas without waging personal attacks. Do not eat, sleep, or carry on private conversations during class. Electronic devices may be used for note-taking purposes only. Disruptive students will be asked to leave. If there are particular learning issues that might exempt you from these regulations, please inform me at the beginning of the academic term.

Grading and Assignments

Percentage of Overall Grade

* Attendance and Participation	20%
* Ethnography Project	40%
* Blackboard Discussions	25%
* Facilitation/Discussion Questions	15%
	100%

1. Attendance and Participation (20%)

Twenty percent of your grade will reflect overall class attendance and participation. These points will be based on attendance, involvement in class by raising questions and issues, listening and responding respectfully to others, and participating in group work. Excellent class attendance and participation means not missing class without notice, being on time and staying for the full time (i.e., not packing up before the class ends), and being actively engaged in the class.

One of the best ways to learn something is to hang out with people who already know how to do what you need or want to learn. They can be role models and give you feedback. You can benefit from observing and working with others who are also learning. They, too, can be role models and provide support. To be prepared for the class you should do the assigned reading and assignments prior to the class, understand the major themes in the reading and/or ask questions related to your lack of understanding, raise questions and issues for discussion, and share materials with others in the class.

2. Ethnography Project (40%)

The primary writing requirement for this course is an ethnographic research project. You will identify, document, and analyze a set of urban contexts, actors, practices, and relations. You will compose a proposal, literature review, methodology, and analysis. The paper will be 15-20 pages in length. During Week 3, when we begin to discuss ethnographic research methods, I will present a more formal overview of this assignment.

3. Blackboard Discussions (25%)

In order to encourage discussion of the reading, I will post questions on Blackboard prior to each week's meeting. You can access the discussion question by logging onto Blackboard, then clicking on the "Discussion Board" tab. I will demonstrate this in class. You will have until Monday at 10pm to post an initial response to each week's question. Your initial response must range from 150-250 words. You will then have until Tuesday at 10pm to post a follow-up response to your classmates' initial response. These follow-

up responses must be no more than 100 words. In class I will often draw on your postings to prompt discussion.

Your participation in these online discussions will count for 25% of your grade. Points will be based on clarity, level of engagement with the reading, and the maturity demonstrated in your responses to your classmates' ideas. Everyone is entitled to skip up to three responses during the semester (either three initial responses, three follow-up responses, or some combination thereof).

4. Facilitation/Discussion Questions (15%)

You are each required to facilitate an in-depth discussion of a reading at least one time during the quarter; depending on the length of the reading you select, you might be asked to facilitate discussion on more than one occasion. You will present key ideas in the reading, lead a discussion based on the text, and offer examples to illustrate key concepts. Making the discussion successful requires careful preparation; therefore, to be fair to the rest of the class and to me, you may not change your selection or reschedule if you miss class or are unprepared on your designated date.

For the day that you sign up to facilitate discussion, you are expected to develop a set of discussion questions and a creative way in which to guide the discussion. You will prepare a handout with your reflections on the reading and your discussion questions. This handout should be approximately one single-spaced page. Feel free to bring in any audiovisual media to supplement your handout.

Your Discussion Question and Facilitation assignment will be worth 15% of your final grade. Points will be based on your preparation, relevant examples, and classroom presentation.

Course Schedule

*Note on readings:

All readings are available on the Blackboard site for this course in the "Course Documents" section. Please contact me if you have any problem accessing these readings. Students are expected to complete ALL readings for this course. While I have sought to alleviate the financial burden of purchasing books by scanning all of the course texts, students are certainly encouraged to purchase any and/or all of the larger texts from which these readings are excerpted. The primary text whose readings I am including is:

Gmelch, George, Robert V. Kemper, and Walter P. Zenner, eds. 2010. *Urban Life: Readings in the Anthropology of the City*. Longrove, IL: Waveland Press (abbreviated as ULRAC throughout the course schedule).

Week 1 (1/26): Introductions

Week 2 (2/2): Theorizing Urban Contexts

Wacquant, Loic J. D. "Three Pernicious Premises in the Study of the American Ghetto." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. 21 (2): 341-353, Jun/JdJe 1997.

Abu-Lughod, Janet. "The Specificity of the Chicago Ghetto: Comment on Wacquant's 'Three Pernicious Premises'." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. 21 (2): 357-362, June 1997.

Gans, Herbert J. "Uses and Misuses of Concepts in American Social Science Research: Variations on Loic Wacquant's Theme of 'Three Pernicious Premises in the Study of the American Ghetto.'" *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. 21 (3): 504-507, September 1997.

Brenner, Neil. "What is Critical Urban Theory?" *City*. 13(2-3): 198-207, June-September 2009.

Week 3 (2/9): Distinctive Approaches to Analyzing Urban Contexts

Anderson, Elijah. 2003 (2nd ed.). *A Place on the Corner: A Study of Black Street Corner Men*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. (Selections)

Venkatesh, Sudhir A. 2000. *American project: The rise and fall of a modern ghetto*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Selections)

De Genova, Nicholas. 2005. "Decolonizing Ethnography." In *Working the Boundaries: Race Space, and "Illegality" in Mexican Chicago*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Pp. 13-55.

Week 4 (2/16): Sites of Urban Ethnography

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2000. "Locating Ethnography" *Ethnography* 1:2. Pp. 261-267

Bestor, Theodore C. "Networks, Neighborhoods, and Markets: Fieldwork in Tokyo." ULRAC Pp. 20-35.

Leggett, William. "Fieldwork in the Corporate Offices of Jakarta, Indonesia." ULRAC Pp. 72-81.

Week 5 (2/23): Urban Threat Narratives

Merry, Sally Engle. "Urban Danger: Life in a Neighborhood of Strangers." ULRAC Pp. 119-130.

Low, Setha M. "The Edge and the Center: Gated Communities and the Discourse of Urban Fear." ULRAC Pp. 131-143.

Davis, Mike. 1998. "The Dialectic of Ordinary Disaster." In *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*. New York, NY: Vintage Books. Pp. 3-55.

Week 6 (3/2): Urban (Im)Mobility

Gabiam, Nell. "Rethinking Camps: Palestinian Refugees in Damascus, Syria." ULRAC Pp. 144-156.

Pardue, Derek. "In Motion: Transportation and Knowledge in Sao Paolo." ULRAC Pp. 157-169.

Gmelch, Sharon Bohn. "Nomads in the City: Studying Irish Travellers." ULRAC Pp. 36-54.

Week 7 (3/9): Urban Inequality

Lewis, Oscar. "The Culture of Poverty." ULRAC Pp. 175-184.

Bourgois, Philippe. "Office Work and the Crack Alternative among Puerto Rican Drug Dealers in East Harlem." ULRAC Pp. 202-216.

Goode, Judith. "How Urban Ethnography Counters Myths about the Poor." ULRAC Pp. 185-201.

Mullings, Leith. 2005. "Resistance and Resilience: The Sojourner Syndrome and the Social Context of Reproduction in Central Harlem." *Transforming Anthropology*. 13(2): 79-91.

Week 8 (3/16): No Class (Spring recess)

Week 9: (3/23): Urban Institutional

Rosa, Jonathan. 2010. "'We are transforming at risk youth into young Latino professionals': Extreme Makeovers, Intra-racial Class Politics, and the Ambivalent Management of Stigmatized Identities." In *Looking like a Language, Sounding like a Race: Making Latin@ Panethnicity and Managing American Anxieties*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Chicago. (Pp. 33-51, 60-88)

Vigil, James Diego. "Gangs, Poverty, and the Future." ULRAC 232-242.

Week 10 (3/30): Making in Place in Urban Space

Conlon, Deirdre. 2004. "Productive Bodies, Performative Spaces: Everyday Life in Christopher Park." *Sexualities* 7(4): 462-479,

De Genova, Nicholas. "Locating a Mexican Chicago in the Space of the U.S. Nation-State." In *Working the Boundaries: Race Space, and "Illegality" in Mexican Chicago*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Pp. 95-143.

Week 11 (4/6): Gentrification

Pérez, Gina. 2004. *The Near Northwest Side Story: Migration, Displacement, & Puerto Rican Families*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. (Selections)

Smith, Taigi. 2002. "What Happens When Your Hood is the Next Stop on the White Flight Express? In *Colonize This: Women of Color on Today's Feminism*, Daisy Fernandez and Bushra Rehman (eds). Chapter 5, Pp. 54-70.

Slater, Tom. 2006. "The Eviction of Critical Perspectives from Gentrification Research." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. 30(4): 737-757.

Smith, Neil. 2008. On 'The Eviction of Critical Perspectives.' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. 32(1):195-197.

Week 12 (4/13): Urban Neoliberalism

Berrey, Ellen C. 2005. "Divided over diversity." *City & Community*, 4, 143-170.

Peck, Jamie, Nik Theodore, and Neil Brenner. 2009. "Neoliberal Urbanism: Models, Moments, Mutations." *SAIS Review*. XXIX(1): 49-66.

Dávila, Arlene. *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the Neoliberal City*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. (Selections)

Week 13 (4/20): World Cities, Global Cities

Robinson, Jennifer. 2011. "Cities in a World of Cities: The Comparative Gesture." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. 35(1): 1-23.

Foner, Nancy. "Transnationalism, Old and New: New York Immigrants." ULRAC Pp. 363-375.

Leonard, Karen Isaken Leonard. "Hyderabad: Continuities and Transformations." ULRAC Pp. 403-412.

Shandy, Dianna J. "Global Transactions: Sudanese Refugees Sending Money Home." ULRAC Pp. 394-402.

Zenner, Walter P. "Beyond Urban and Rural Communities in the 21st Century." ULRAC Pp. 413-420.

Week 14 (4/27): Urban Social Movements

Sokolovsky, Jay. "Civic Ecology, Urban Elders, and New York City's Community Garden Movement." ULRAC Pp. 243-255.

Gregory, Steven. 1998. *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (Selections)

Week 15 (5/4): Class Presentations