The Politics of the Creative Class in American Cities

Spring 2017

Political Science 327
Haverford College

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Course Description

Following several decades of declining fortunes caused by mass suburbanization and deindustrialization, conditions in many American cities seem to have stabilized and even improved in recent years. Some scholars believe that one positive source of change has been an influx of relatively young, well-educated individuals who are drawn to the varied amenities of urban life.

The economist Richard Florida has called this demographic group “the creative class” and argued that its growing presence in central cities sparks innovation and productivity while strengthening knowledge-based economies. City leaders eager to tap strategies to replenish depleted tax bases, bolster employment, and promote urban revitalization have enthusiastically embraced many of Florida’s ideas and policy prescriptions by redeveloping downtown districts and surrounding neighborhoods so as to entice the creative class to their environs.

This seminar examines creative class theory and its implementation by scores of U.S. cities and evaluates its impact. Considerable attention will be devoted to the social, cultural, and economic imprint of the creative class. For example, we will examine whether the expansion of the creative class has rejuvenated long-distressed neighborhoods or fueled gentrification and exacerbated urban inequality. Our primary concern, however, will be the understudied and yet critically important political impact of the creative class. To what extent do creative class individuals become engaged in civic and political affairs within their neighborhoods or the city as a whole? If they are engaged, do they tend to pursue their own class interests while neglecting the needs and interests of other urban groups? Or, given their presumed appreciation for diversity and tolerance, do they seek to build bridges to other communities in hopes of advancing a broad agenda of reform? In short, what is the role of the creative class in contemporary urban politics?

Course Requirements

Class participation                              20%
Field trip to Philadelphia (March 25 or 26)     no grade
Analytical paper (5-7 pages)                     30%
Research paper (12-15 pages)                     50%

Note: Papers submitted after the due date will be penalized one third of a grade each day they are late.
**Required Texts**


All other assigned readings are accessible through Moodle.

**Topics and Readings**

**Week 1**

I. Introduction to Course

**Week 2**

II. The Urban Context

Michael Katz, “What Is an American City?” in *Why American Cities Don’t Burn*
Carolyn Adams, et al., “Expansion, Decline, and Geographies of Inequality,” *Restructuring the Philadelphia Region: Metropolitan Divisions and Inequality*

**Week 3**

III. Creative Class Theory


**Week 4**

IV. The Impact of Creative Class Theory

A. Public Policy Initiatives

Creative Providence: A Cultural Plan for the Creative Sector, June 2009 (Peruse this document)  
[https://www.providenceri.com/efile/47](https://www.providenceri.com/efile/47)
B. Urban Renaissance

http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/the-avenue/posts/2016/05/23-mid-decade-big-city-growth-frey

“Downtown Rebirth: Documenting the Live-Work Dynamic in 21st Century U.S. Cities,”  
International Downtown Association,  

Alan Ehrenhalt, “A Prologue: Trading Places,” The Great Inversion and the Future of the American City


Robert J. Sampson, “Immigration and America’s Urban Revival,” The American Prospect, Summer 2015

Week 5

C. The Creative Class and Urban Inequality


Jamie Peck, “Struggling with the Creative Class,” International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, December 2005


Richard Florida, The Rise of the Creative Class, rev’d ed., Ch. 16

Week 6

V. Conceptual Challenges to Creative Class Theory

A. Sources of Economic Growth


B. Identifying the Creative Class


C. Rebuttal


**Analytical Paper Due**

Week 7

VI. The Geography of Growth: Alternative Perspectives

Joel Kotkin, *The Human City: Urbanism for the Rest of Us*, Chs. 1-2, 4-6
Alec MacGillis, “The Ruse of the Creative Class,” *The American Prospect*, January/February 2010

**Research Paper Topic Due** (Possible topics: Gentrification, charter schools, mass incarceration, immigration, and living wage ordinances in Philadelphia, etc.).

Week 8

**Spring Break**

Week 9

VII. Political Consciousness of the Creative Class

A. Historical and Cultural Roots

Alvin Gouldner, selected excerpts from Theses 4-7, 11, 14 and 15 in *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*
Ronald Inglehart, “Changing Values and Skills Among Western Publics: An Overview,” *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics*
B. Contemporary Politics

Judith Taylor, “No to Protests, Yes to Festivals: How the Creative Class Organizes in the Social Movement Society” in *Protest and Politics: The Promise of Social Movement Societies,* eds. Howard Ramos and Kathleen Rodgers

Week 10

VIII. Political Impact of the Creative Class


**Field Trip:** To creative class neighborhoods in Philadelphia (e.g. Fishtown, Kensington, Northern Liberties, University City, Powelton Village, Mantua, Point Breeze, and Grays Ferry)

Week 11

IX. The Political Impact of the Creative Class (continued)

Reflections on field trip to Philadelphia
Mark E. Kann, “Where the Rainbow Ends” (pp. 3-8) and “Of Principles and Politics” in *Middle Class Radicalism in Santa Monica*
Week 12

X. Social Capital and Community Revitalization

Robert Putnam, “Thinking about Social Change in America,” *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*


Week 13

XI. Political Mobilization, Coalition Building, and Progressive Politics


Weeks 14-15

XII. Presentations of Research: The Creative Class and Philadelphia Politics

XIII. Conclusion

Research Paper Due