Course Description

This course introduces students to the theory and practice of urban politics in the United States. Much of the first half of the semester will be devoted to investigating how urban power and politics changed as cities evolved from small mercantile entities into industrial juggernauts before transforming once again into postindustrial centers of an ever-expanding metropolis or decaying landscapes of despair. How have cities responded to the challenges produced by large-scale economic, social, cultural, and technological change? How do the political processes and institutions of the past continue to influence those of the present?

During the second half of the semester we will focus on the contemporary period by analyzing how cities have sought to overcome the structural and political constraints that limit their capacity to address chronic problems such as inequality, poverty, crime, and inadequate schools, housing, and public transportation. Why have some cities made more progress in dealing with such issues than others? Recent scholars of city politics have emphasized the role of electoral and governing coalitions as the key to urban revitalization. How are such coalitions constructed? Why do some endure while others fade away? How do social divisions based upon race, ethnicity, and class reinforce or undermine collective efforts to promote political change? How do various ideological approaches to the ongoing challenges faced by cities differ from one another? Why have some been more effective, and under what circumstances? We will conclude the course by thinking about the future prospects of American cities.

Course Requirements

Class Participation 10%
Newspaper portfolio 20%
First Paper (5 pages) 20%
Second Paper (5 pages) 20%
Third Paper (10 pages) 30%
Film outside of class on Sunday, October 28 no grade

Note: Papers submitted after the due date will be penalized by one third of a grade each day they are late.
Newspaper Portfolio

Our academic examination of urban politics will be deepened if we simultaneously follow the reporting of relevant news in the media. To that end, students are expected to read at least one daily newspaper such as *The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Philadelphia Inquirer*, or perhaps your home city’s primary newspaper on a regular basis and be able to draw upon material in these newspapers in class discussions when appropriate. More specifically, each student should assemble, over the course of the semester, a portfolio of articles pertaining to urban politics. There is no set number of articles to include in your portfolio, but a couple of dozen would seem to be about right. Of that number, you should write short, reflective pieces (one or two paragraphs) on 5 to 10 of those articles and those reflective pieces should be included in your portfolio. At the end of the semester, please add to your portfolio a final, short essay (2 pages; about 250 words/page) on what your portfolio of articles tells you about who wields power in American cities. Your portfolio will be submitted on the last day of classes.

**Required Texts**


All other assigned readings will be on Moodle.

**Topics and Readings**

**Weeks 1-2**

I. Introduction to Course

II. Politics in the Preindustrial City

Gary B. Nash, “Artisans and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia,” in *Race, Class, and Politics: Essays on American Colonial and Revolutionary Society*


Weeks 2-3

III. Urbanization, Industrialization and the Political Response to an Urban Crisis

A. Machine Politics

Humbert S. Nelli, “European Immigrants and Urban America” in *The Urban Experience*, eds. Raymond A. Mohl and James F. Richardson

William L. Riorden, “To Hold Your District: Study Human Nature and Act Accordin’” in *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*

Robert K. Merton, “The Latent Functions of the Machine” in *Social Theory and Social Structure*

Alexander Callow, “That Impudent Autocrat” and “The House That Tweed Built” in *The Tweed Ring*

John M. Allswang, “Charles Francis Murphy: The Enduring Boss,” in *Bosses, Machines, and Urban Voters*

Raymond E. Wolfinger, “Why Political Machines Have Not Withered Away and Other Revisionist Thoughts” in *The Urban Politics Reader*, eds. Elizabeth A. Strom and John H. Mollenkopf

Film in class: “Scandalous Mayor”

B. The Reform Era

Andrew D. White, “City Affairs Are Not Political” in *American Urban Politics: The Reader*, eds. Dennis R. Judd and Paul Kantor

Jacob Riis, “Genesis of the Tenement” and “The Italian in New York” in *How the Other Half Lives*


Stanley Schultz, “The Engineered Metropolis” in *Constructing Urban Culture: American Cities and City Planning, 1800-1920*

Margaret Kohn, “Public Space in the Progressive Era” in *Justice and the American Metropolis*, eds. Clarissa Rile Hayward and Todd Swanstrom

Jon C. Teaford, “Trumpeted Failures and Unheralded Triumphs” in *The Unheralded Triumph: City Government in America, 1870-1900*

Week 4

IV. Suburbanization and Urban Decline

A. The Suburban Century

Kenneth T. Jackson, Excerpt from *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* in *The Suburb Reader*, eds. Becky M. Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese

Jon C. Teaford, “Suburbia Triumphant, 1945-1964” in *The Twentieth Century American City*

Barbara Kelly, “Houses Fit for Heroes,” Excerpt from *Expanding the American Dream* in *The Suburb Reader*, eds. Becky M. Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese
James Wolfinger, “‘The American Dream—For All Americans’: Race, Politics, and the Campaign to Desegregate Levittown,” *Journal of Urban History*, May 2012

B. Suburbia Today

Charles McGrath, “We Stayed for the Kids…and Stayed and Stayed: The Pleasures of Tending an Empty Nest” in *The Suburb Reader*, eds. Becky M. Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese

**First Paper Due**

Weeks 5-6

V. A New Urban Crisis

A. Racial Transition and Conflict

Thomas Sugrue, “Racial Confrontation in Post-War Detroit” in *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*
Herbert J. Gans, “The West End: An Urban Village” and “Redevelopment of the West End” in *The Urban Villagers*
Bayard Rustin, “From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement,” *Commentary*, February 1965
Jonathan Rieder, “The Fenced Land” and “The Lost People” in *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn against Liberalism*
Film in class: “Rizzo”

B. Poverty and Fiscal Crisis

William Julius Wilson, “Societal Changes and Vulnerable Neighborhoods” in *When Work Disappears*
Slide presentation: Deindustrialization in Philadelphia
Jonathan Kozol, “Children of the Invincible City: Camden, New Jersey” in *Savage Inequalities*
Buzz Bissinger, “Prologue” in *A Prayer for the City*
Week 7

Fall Break

Week 8

VI. Regime Politics

Paul E. Peterson, “The Interests of the Limited City” in The Urban Politics Reader, eds. Elizabeth A. Strom and John H. Mollenkopf
Clarence N. Stone, Regime Politics, Chs. 3-10
Film in class: “Eyes on the Prize” (Profile of Mayor Maynard Jackson of Atlanta)

Week 9

VII. Racial and Ethnic Politics

William Julius Wilson, “Building a Foundation for Multiracial Cooperation” in The Bridge over the Racial Divide
Film outside of class: “Street Fight,” 7:30pm, Sunday, October 28, Sharpless Auditorium

Week 10

VIII. Cities in a Federal System

A. Cities and National Policy


B. Cities and the Metropolis

Myron Orfield, “Conflict or Consensus?” The Brookings Review, Fall 1998

Second Paper Due
IX. Visions of Urban Politics

Week 11

A. Privatism


B. Populism

Stephen Goldsmith, The Twenty-First Century City, Ch. 1-3, 6-12
Nathan Lewis, “Grappling with Governance: The Emergence of BIDs in a National Capital,” Urban Affairs Review, November 2010

Week 12

C. Managerialism

Tom Lowry, “The CEO Mayor,” Business Week, June 25, 2007
Julian Brash, Bloomberg’s New York, Introduction, Chs. 1-5

Week 13

D. Managerialism (continued)

Julian Brash, Bloomberg’s New York, Chs. 6-7
Film in class: “The World that Moses Built”

Thanksgiving Break

Week 14

E. Progressivism

Pierre Clavel, Activists in City Hall, Chs. 1-4

Week 15

F. Progressivism (continued)

Pierre Clavel, Activists in City Hall, Chs. 5-8
Thad Williamson, “Justice, the Public Sector, and Cities: Relegitimating the Activist State” in *Justice and the American Metropolis*, eds. Clarissa Rile Hayward and Todd Swanstrom

X. Conclusion: The Future of American Cities

   **Newspaper Portfolio Due Last Class**

   **Third Paper Due at End of Exam Period**