

History 407: APPROACHES TO THE MODERN CITY

Wednesdays, 6:30-9 pm Walsh 491

Professor Jordan Sand (sandj@georgetown.edu / ICC 611)
(office hrs. Wed. 2-4 and by appt.)

This course approaches the subject of the modern city comparatively and thematically. Each student will focus on the study of one city. Class session will be divided between discussion of readings and short student presentations about the cities you are studying. You will be asked to submit three reports tied to your presentations, with data, analysis, and bibliography on your cities, followed by a final paper building on these reports. There will also be a group presentation with no write-up required.

The scholarly literature on the modern city is very broad. Most urban history, particularly work written in English, has tended to focus on Europe and North America and has relied on Eurocentric assumptions about the nature of modernity. Urban historians have treated the city as a bounded and readable entity. They have focused on the influence of planners and planning, whether as progressive or as destructive forces. Many cities outside Europe and America don't fit this approach well.

Meanwhile, a new sociological literature has emerged since the late twentieth century on "megacities," "global cities," the "information city" and even the "death of the city." This writing sets the problem of urbanism in a truly global frame for the first time. But it tends to assume that the urban phenomena becoming visible at present are new and anomalous. It therefore lacks longer historical perspective. Is the historical break in the history of cities as complete as the gap between these two literatures would lead us to believe? This course will draw from both of these literatures as well as from our own investigations to see if the history of urban modernity might be structured differently.

Themes have been chosen with three things in mind:

- The focus is historical. Although this course does not trace a singular process of urban development, each segment will draw upon historical cases to understand the issues with us in cities today from a broader perspective.
- The focus is on the material and spatial aspects of the city, or the expression of social issues in material and spatial form.
- One of our central questions will be: what kind of urban history can we construct without assuming the perspective of Euro-American urban sociology and planning history? The readings therefore mix a substantial amount of material from Japan (my area of specialization), China, and elsewhere. But the particular regions are less

important for our purposes than the material these studies provide for thinking about modern urbanism generally.

This will be a discussion-centered class, focused on student contributions.

Overview of Assignments

Under each session title, I have three headings: Topic, Readings, and Questions. The Topic represents what was on my mind when I chose the readings and why they are included in the course. This is just to start you thinking. The Readings are generally required of everyone, although there are a few I may make optional. The Questions are intended to help you frame further research if you choose to write about the topic of the week.

You must choose a city about which scholarly writing is available. This is crucial: in order to complete the assignments, you must be able to find academic books and articles written in a language you can read that discuss the history of your city in relation to several of the session themes in this syllabus.

You will write three short reports (1000-1500 words plus a bibliography containing at least five items) treating the theme of a given week in relation to the city you are studying.

I will ask each of you to sign up to present in class three or four times. This means that you may find yourself presenting once without submitting a write-up. The main purpose of the in-class presentations is to pool knowledge and ideas. They will be rapid-fire: timed at about six minutes. You are encouraged to prepare powerpoint slides or any other materials that help you communicate to the group. Sometimes we may not have time to hear a presentation from everyone who has written a report. But if you spread yourselves out on the sign-up sheet, everyone should have the opportunity to present three or four times in the semester.

At the end of the semester, each of you will submit a 3000-4000 word paper focused on a review of the literature and historical data on your city, synthesizing the reading and research from your short reports.

Rough grading breakdown:

General participation and presentations:	30%
3 short reports:	35%
Final report:	35%

Reading for the course and classroom laptop policy: I want you to bring either marked personal copies of the readings or thorough notes to class. Be ready with some talking points about each reading. Laptops should generally be closed in class to minimize distractions. Tablets may be out on the table provided you have only the readings on the screen. We are all

reading more and more on screens these days, and of course it saves paper to do so, but if, like me, you find that you absorb more by reading hard copy, I urge you to waste the paper.

Report Submission and Grading: Reports should be submitted digitally as Word files. They must be submitted the week in which we address the theme on which you are writing. I will not read reports submitted later than close of business (5 pm) Friday of the week due.

I will consider presentation materials together with your writing in evaluating the reports, but the report grade will be based primarily on the write-up. No extra points will be earned for presentations with unnecessary bells and whistles.

Report format: I will be providing a simple template in Word for reports. Use this template or format your report to include the same information. Your bibliography should be annotated with a sentence or two per entry. When citing materials from the web, provide a webpage title and author, not just a url. If this information is not immediately evident, trace the page back to its source to identify it to the best of your ability.

Grades for individual reports will be based first on the quality of the research and basic documentation. Introduction of useful literature on a particular topic, cogently summarized and properly cited so that others can use the information, is more important in these short assignments than presenting an original thesis.

Grades will be applied roughly as follows:

A or A- = substantial coverage of a topic, effectively framed and succinctly summarized, completely documented.

B+ or B = Acceptable coverage, satisfactory framing, citations traceable if not as complete as they might be; or excellent in two of these respects but unsatisfactory in the third.

B- or C = Report relevant to topic, but inadequate in presentation and/or documentation.

D = Inadequate on all fronts.

F = Missing report.

The final papers will be graded as any research paper in history would be, on the basis of thesis, exposition, and documentation. There is no requirement that these papers draw on primary documents. A critical state-of-the-field survey of scholarship on a topic is welcome. These papers will build upon your short reports but should not repeat more than an occasional sentence from them.

Learning objectives: Students can expect to become expert on the history of one city while at the same time learning a wide range of critical issues and approaches in the study of modern cities around the world.

Absences: If you are ill and cannot attend class, notify me by Wednesday at noon. I do not need a doctor's note. If you must miss class for any other reason, give me notice well in advance with an explanation. All unexplained absences will damage your final grade.

Honor Code: Georgetown has a strict honor code. I am required to report any suspected violations. It will not be a matter we can negotiate privately. Don't get yourself in a mess. If you have any questions about fair use and citation, contact me *in advance of submitting your work*. Or bring the topic up in class: navigating the subtleties of fair use is a key part of learning the craft of academic research and writing.

Honor Council website: <http://honorcouncil.georgetown.edu/>

SCHEDULE

Session 1 (Jan. 15) Introduction

Review of syllabus and course goals. Discussion of research methods and choices of cities to focus on; discussion of building a collective bibliography and urban data file.

Preliminary assignment: introduce your city and resources on your city.

Session 2 (Jan. 22) The City as Ecosystem

Topic: Impact of the environment on settlement and city form; impact of the city on the environment. Resources and the boundaries of the urban region. Urban flora and fauna.

Readings:

Martin Melosi, "The Historical Dimension of Urban Ecology"

William Cronon, "Annihilating Space: Meat," in *Nature's Metropolis*

Ian Douglas, Robert Hodgson, Nigel Lawson, "Industry, Environment, and Health through 200 Years in Manchester"

Menno Schilthuis, *Darwin Comes to Town*, Ch.8, "Urban Myths"

Questions for individual city projects: How would you characterize your city as an ecosystem? How has it been shaped by its environment, and how has it in turn affected its surroundings?

Session 3 (Jan. 29) The City as Ordered Universe

Topic: The grid, the urban master plan, the forms and uses of planned public space. Street grids seem like the perfect embodiment of modern rationality. Are they? What else do they signify?

Readings:

Joseph Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*, 23-26, 41-65

Crouch and Mundigo, "The Laws of Indies"

Setha Low, "Cultural Meaning of the Plaza"

James Holston, "The Modernist City and the Death of the Street"

Questions: Does your city have a single overall plan? When was it made and with what aims? How much was realized? What remains of it today?

Session 4 (Feb. 5) The City Under Threat 1—War

Topic: War, terror, and aerial bombing.

Readings:

Lewis Mumford, *The City in History*, 356-371.

Kenneth Hewitt, "Place Annihilation"

Jeffrey M. Diefendorf, "Wartime Destruction and the Postwar Cityscape"

*primary source: le Corbusier, *The Radiant City*

Questions: How has war affected the history of your city? Are its marks visible? Did your city once have walls? When did they go up, and when did they come down? Have the techniques of modern warfare—including terror, broadly defined—shaped the city or urban policy?

Session 5 (Feb. 12) The City Under Threat 2—Natural Disasters and Disease

Topic: Fire, flood and earthquake. Disease. As soon as people began to gather themselves in cities they put themselves at risk. One of the great challenges for the construction and management of cities has been protection against natural hazards. A proposed definition of the modern city: an attempt to create a zero-hazard environment. Yet it is obvious this has always failed.

Readings:

Susan Kuretsky, "Jan van der Heyden and the Origins of Modern Firefighting" (Amsterdam), in *Flammable Cities*

Greg Bankoff, "A Tale of Two Cities: the Pyro-Seismic Morphology of Nineteenth-Century Manila" (Manila), in *Flammable Cities*

"Cholera in Nineteenth-Century New York"
(<http://www.virtualny.cuny.edu/cholera.html>)

Questions: How has your city been affected by natural hazards or epidemic disease? What measures were taken to eliminate these problems or mitigate their effects, when? What side effects did those measures have?

Session 6 (Feb. 19) Squatter Cities, Peasant Cities, Megacities

Topic: These days, there is a dystopian vision of the world's largest population concentrations, which sees them as chaotic, neglected, and inhumane—and there is a utopian vision of some of the same places that sees them as exciting, self-organizing human-technological systems. How do we assess these visions in particular places? What are their ideological bases? Can a longer historical view help us see beyond these polarized visions?

Readings:

Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, selections TBA

Video: "Lagos/Koolhaas"

*additional reading:

Felicity Scott, *Outlaw Territories: Environments of Insecurity/Architectures of Insurgency* ch.6, "Cruel Habitations"

James Holston, "Autoconstruction in Working-Class Brazil"

Questions: Where do the poorest residents live in your city? How did they get there? Are there or were there in the past districts of housing built by the occupants themselves?

Session 7 (Feb. 26) Provisioning the City

Topic: Food. It's remarkable if you think about it that in modern cities several million human beings can live in close proximity to one another, hardly any of them hunting, gathering, or farming any food at all, yet manage to get fed every day. Usually we treat this as a classic case of the working of market principles. But there are wide differences in what makes those markets work, how they connect producers to consumers, and what assumptions about food provision lie at their foundation.

Reading:

Jordan Sand, "How Tokyo Invented Sushi," in *Food and the City*

Margaret Crawford, "Urban Agriculture in the Pearl River Delta," in *Food and the City*

F. Cochoy and C. Grandclement-Chaffy, "Publicizing Goldilocks' Choice at the Supermarket: The Political Work of Shopping Packs, Carts and Talk," in *Making Things Public*

Questions: How far does the hinterland providing food to your city extend? Can you trace historical change in how food has been provided to residents of your city and from where? What are some of the distinctive features of the local economy and diet that have historically defined the food provisioning system in your city?

Two Classic Empirical Studies for Reference:

Thomas Farrington de Voe, *The Market Book* (NY, 1862)

George Dodd, *The Food of London* (London, 1856)

(both available full-text in Google books)

Session 8 (Mar. 4) The City as Ecosystem 2—Waste

Topic: Garbage, nightsoil, and other refuse—how modern cities transformed human products into waste and waste into usable products. A proposed definition of the city: a settlement that generates more waste than it can manage internally. Scavengers and the informal economy of waste and recycling.

Reading:

Susan Hanley, "Urban Sanitation and Physical Well-Being," in *Everyday Things in Premodern Japan*

S. Barles, "Urban Metabolism and River Systems: An Historical Perspective,

Paris and the Seine, 1790-1970"

Shih-Yang Kao, "The City Recycled: The Afterlives of Demolished Buildings in Post-war Beijing" (PhD dissertation, Berkeley).

Martin Medina, *The World's Scavengers*, vii-xi, 32-61, 183-197, 229-235

Questions: When was a sewer system built in your city, and what was the context? Where did it go? What role has landfill played in the development of your city?

March 11 SPRING BREAK

Session 9 (Mar. 18) The City as Social Body

Topic: Modern cities and the politics of the masses, the public square, and the public sphere. What do cities need public space for?

Readings:

Lynn Staeheli, Preface and "Permitting Protest in Washington, DC," in *The People's Property?: Power, Politics, and the Public*.

Wu Hung, "Tiananmen: A Political History of Monuments" in *Remaking Beijing*

Questions: Where are the key public spaces in your city? How have people used them? How are they restricted? Are the places where large numbers gather planned spaces? What has happened when people massed in some urban open space? Is there some key moment in the history of public space? Is this site the defining space of politics in your city, or does politics happen elsewhere?

Session 10 (Mar. 25) The City as Real Estate

Topic: A proposed definition of the modern city: a settlement shaped by the needs of the real estate industry.

Readings:

Carol Willis, *Form Follows Finance*, selections TBA

You-Tien Hsing, *The Great Urban Transformation: Politics of Land and Property in China*, selections TBA

Questions: How have the location, size, and shape of architecture in your city been determined by municipal or state regulation? How have they been determined by the real estate market? How were the two related?

*additional topic: Real estate bubbles and how urban real estate markets sustain capitalism

***additional viewing:** David Harvey interview on real estate bubbles; news reports on youtube about Chinese ghost cities.

Session 11 (Apr. 1) Tourism and Urban Branding

Topic: Some scholars have called tourism the largest industry in the world today, but it is difficult to define precisely what constitutes the modern tourism industry. In fact, there is a problem of historical definition as well: what distinguishes tourism from other, older, forms of travel, such as pilgrimage? And a related issue that has emerged since the late twentieth century: what shapes the image of a city in the global markets of travel and investment?

Readings:

Liping Wang, "Tourism and Spatial Change in Hangzhou, 1911-1927"

Takashi Machimura, "Symbolic Use of Globalization in Urban Politics in Tokyo."

Dennis Judd, "Commentary: Tracing the Commodity Chain of Global Tourism" plus Anne-Marie d'Hautesserre, "A Response to 'Tracing the Commodity Chain of Global Tourism' by Dennis Judd"

Questions: In what circumstances did facilities and entertainments for travelers first appear in your city? When did people begin to come to your city just to look at it, or at some particular place in it (if they ever did)? How has tourism affected the cityscape or local economy?

Urban branding exercise: Find advertisements for your city as a place to invest or advertisements that use your city as a backdrop. What is the city's "brand" or image in the global investment market?

Session 12 (Apr. 8) City Narratives: Urban Oral History and Ethnography

Topic: The city in the words of its occupants. Methods and issues in interview-based urban research. Marginal occupants and stories of displacement.

Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, selections TBA

Erik Harms, *Luxury and Rubble*, 183-209

Mori Mayumi and Jordan Sand, "The People Evicted for the 2020 Olympics"

Exercise: Interview a long-time resident of your city. Ask them to tell their life story, with a focus on the places they have lived. Or: analyze a memoir or work of film or fiction that narrates life in your city.

Session 13 (Apr. 15): The City as Data: Populations, Disease and Governance

Topic: The survey and the map. A proposed definition of the modern city: a city whose people are known to authorities through social statistics. Beginning in the 18th century, governments began to manage whole populations through statistical study of all aspects of everyday life. This new mode of what Michel Foucault calls "biopolitics" began in cities, with studies of factory workers' health, and mapping of mortality, crime, and suicide. To almost every branch of government today, the city is first a population and a space with measurable traits. The origins of social statistics. Edwin Chadwick and the first cholera map.

Reading:

Bulmer, Bales and Sklar, "The Social Survey in Historical Perspective"

James Hanley, "Edwin Chadwick and the Poverty of Statistics"

Further reading TBA

Questions: When did authorities begin collecting quantitative data about the population of your city? What did they measure? Can you find an example of an early survey of some social phenomenon? What does it tell us about population and governance?

Session 14 (Apr. 22) Urban Comparisons, Wrap Up, Discussion of Final Papers

Assignment: get together with one or two classmates and draw up one or more tables or charts comparing some key issues and data about your cities. Be sure that your material is historically consistent. Or: compare visual representations of your city in art, photography or another medium. Again, try to be consistent and explain why the comparison is meaningful.

FINAL PAPERS DUE FIRST DAY OF EXAMS