



History 344

The American City

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Spring 2020

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Course Description and Objectives

America is an urban nation – approximately 80% of U.S. residents live in a city or metropolitan region, and cities have been central to the nation’s life since its earliest incarnations, serving as centers of industry, commerce, cultural growth, political innovation, ethnic diversity - and also locations of crime, poverty, inequality, conflict, and corruption.

This course will explore the history of American cities from the colonial period through the present day, with particular emphasis on the era from the mid-19th through the 20th century. My primary objective in this course is very simple: to historically frame our experiences with contemporary American cities, and to help us understand the deep historical roots of political and social issues facing American cities – and broader society – today. Special attention will be given to the ways in which cities evolved in response to new technologies, the development of urban cultures, questions of race, ethnicity and immigration, and the spatial aspects of social, political and economic power.

Beyond the content of the course, this class will also develop your skills in critical thinking and writing – essential skills for success in college and life! The course is based around questions which it will be *your* responsibility to help answer; therefore, you will have to think, rather than simply absorb “facts” and parrot them back on exams.

Required Readings

- Raymond Mohl & Roger Biles, eds. *The Making of Urban America* (3rd ed.) Rowman & Littlefield, 2011.
- Erik Larson, *The Devil in the White City*. Vintage Books, 2003.
- Thomas J. Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Articles and primary sources, posted to D2L for the appropriate week

The Making of Urban America will be our principal weekly text – it contains essays by historians that offer a variety of perspectives on the chosen topics. Pay close attention to the weekly schedule, as the readings are not always sequential, and not all essays will be assigned. **You are expected to come to class having completed all assigned readings and also prepared to discuss them.** Not only will readings be the basis of our discussions, but you will also be expected to utilize these readings on course assignments. Weekly reading quizzes (via D2L) will help you be assured you’ve understood the material.

Classroom Policies

Drafted by the class on the first day

Attendance Being in class is important; when you miss class, you learn less – and others cannot benefit from your learning, either. Students are allowed 3 absences without penalty to their grade (see “Grading” section below)

Classroom Etiquette

- Treat others as you would want to be treated. Don’t interrupt, or use sarcasm or other disrespectful forms of speech. Disagreement is welcome, but be sure you are critiquing *ideas* and not the person expressing them.
- If you are late to class, please enter quietly and minimize disruptions.
- Food or drink are permitted, as long as noises or odors are not disruptive to others’ learning.

Participation There is no official requirement for participation, but we agree as a class that we want to support a culture of mutual learning and dialogue, which entails participation by all members as much as possible.

Technology Use of laptops for notetaking is permitted. Please minimize the use of cell phones (a quick check of a notification is fine), keep them on silent, and do not allow your use of technology to be a distraction to yourself or others.

Student Expectations	Instructor Expectations
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be enthusiastic, engaged, and curious 2. Be willing to take risks. 3. Ask questions about anything you don’t understand 4. Be committed to learning new things 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be enthusiastic, engaged, and curious 2. Facilitate student learning by providing readings, lectures, assignments and other materials. 3. Be prepared for class and arrive on time. 4. Be available to students during office hours (and beyond as needed).
<p>Please remember, if you have any questions, concerns, or comments, to let me know right away. I welcome any feedback you’re willing to offer.</p>	

Communication I welcome student emails and do my best to reply promptly; however, I do not sit at my computer 24 hours a day, and I do not use university email on my phone. So please allow up to one day for a response, and perhaps longer on weekends, when I prioritize time with my family.

Accommodations If you require classroom accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act, you must register with the Office for Students with Disabilities, located in University Union. Phone is 738-4877. I am happy to provide all necessary accommodations; please schedule a meeting with me during the first week of classes to discuss your needs.

Additionally, if there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or that form barriers to your inclusion,

please let me know as soon as possible. Together we'll develop strategies that can enable you to succeed. Any student who faces challenges securing food or housing is urged to contact the Student Success office for support. (724-738-2136 or student.success@sru.edu). Furthermore, please notify me if you are comfortable doing so - telling me will enable me to provide any resources that I may possess.

Assignments

Reading Quizzes Brief multiple choice/short answer quizzes over the week's assigned reading will be given, usually on Mondays – but follow the class schedule for any exceptions.

Discussion Preparation Assignments 1-page assignments that ask you to address questions for the assigned readings (text and documents) each week. They are intended to get you thinking before class so that you are prepared to raise issues for discussion in class. See assignment sheet on D2L for more details. These will be graded for a "good faith effort."

Short Reflections

You will write three short (approx. 750 words) essays in response to a prompt from me on:

- Larson's *Devil in the White City*
- Sugrue's *Origins of the Urban Crisis*
- Pittsburgh field experience

Research Project Choose a topic related to American urban history and complete a research project utilizing primary and secondary sources. This *can, but does not necessarily have to*, take the form of a traditional research paper. Topics and research questions must be submitted to me and approved beforehand. This will be followed by a brief presentation to the class near the end of the semester. Details and further requirements will be given in class.

Exams Three in-class exams over readings, class lecture and discussion material. These will be open-note (but not open-book). Exams are cumulative to that point in the semester.

Grading

Most of your work in this course will not be graded on a conventional A-F, 100-point scale. Using such a system is problematic because a) it focuses on extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivations for learning, and b) it is often subjective and arbitrary – what *really* separates an essay that earns 87% from one that earns 83%? And if we can't account for that 4% difference, why are we using numbers at all?

Furthermore, we all know that the greater the emphasis placed upon a letter or number grade, the more likely we, as imperfect humans, will shift our focus to that measurement as our primary end. When that happens, we stop learning and start gaming the system.¹

Instead, my goal in evaluating your work will be to provide extensive and helpful feedback to encourage deeper learning and critical engagement with the material. To that end, we will use a form of grading sometimes called specifications, or sometimes "contract," grading. In this system, as long as you meet the specifications below, you will receive the corresponding grade. The goal here is to reduce anxiety about final grades, reward hard work and sincere effort, and refocus us all on the learning, not the grade.

Of course, Slippery Rock University does require that I record a final class grade using a traditional A-F ranking. This will be determined based on the criteria below, as well as a holistic evaluation of your progression in learning over the term.

Criteria for final course grade

Requirements	C	B	A
Absences	4	3	3
Readings	All	All	All
Quizzes	Omit 2, 60% average	All, 60% average	All, 60% average
Short Responses	2	3	3
Research Project	--	Yes	Yes
Participation	A few times	Regular	Regular
Exams	70% average	70% average	70% average
Revisions	--	2	2
Learning Evaluation	Yes	Yes	Yes
Additional	--	--	Exceptional creativity, effort, critical thinking, engagement

Additional Notes

- In order to achieve a grade level, **all** the criteria in a given column must be met. For example, if a student submits the research project, but only submitted 2 short response essays, they cannot earn the B.
- To count, an assignment must simply meet the specifications of the assignment.
 - Example: if an assignment requires student to use three readings to support a thesis that answers a question. As long as the essay 1) has a thesis that addresses the question and 2) uses three readings to support that thesis, it meets the specifications.
- All assignments must be submitted on time; if you are unable to complete an assignment as thoroughly as you'd like by the due date, submit it and you may revise it after receiving feedback.
- Revisions must be submitted 1 week after receiving feedback; any written assignment (including exams) can be revised.
- Students failing to meet the criteria for "C" will generally receive a D; Fs will typically only be earned in cases in which students stop participating in the course and do not withdraw.

¹ For a review of the research on the negative impact of grades on learning, see Alfie Kohn, "The Case Against Grades" <https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/case-grades/>.

- in cases of severe illness or emergency that may require extended absence, please contact me and we can discuss the situation.
- Learning Evaluation assignment is a brief, online questionnaire that can be completed any time in the final week of class.

Statement on Academic Integrity

Violations of academic integrity – including cheating on exams and plagiarism – will not be tolerated in this course.

Plagiarism is defined as:

1. Submitting another's published or unpublished work, *in whole, in part, or in paraphrase*, as one's own without fully and properly crediting the author with footnotes, citations or bibliographical reference.
2. Borrowing extensively from a source material's language, even with proper citation, without indicating the use of said language with quotation marks.
3. Submitting as one's work, material that has been produced through collaboration with others without acknowledgement and release in writing from collaborators

In short, don't claim the ideas or words of someone else as your own. Do use the ideas and words of others to help develop your own. Do have friends read and comment on drafts of your papers. Always give explicit credit when you use anyone's exact thoughts or language, whether paraphrasing or quoting them. Giving an acknowledgment to someone who has helped you is being both courteous and truthful. Intellectual work is about developing and sharing your ideas, and it's about taking note of and praising other people who have shared good ones with you.

Students committing any form of academic dishonesty will receive a failing grade for the assignment, and will also be reported to the university for further judicial action. This is a blanket, no exceptions policy.

Please see me if you have ANY question about what constitutes plagiarism, or anything else related to this issue.

Addenda

- The instructor reserves the right to make any necessary changes to this syllabus, including changes in assignments, grading formula, due dates or readings if circumstances so require. Students will always be notified of any changes at least 24 hours in advance, and any changes in due dates will always result in extensions, not contractions, of deadlines.
- The State System's Office of Chief Counsel requires that the paragraph below must appear in all course syllabi as part of Title IX obligations for all faculty:
 - Slippery Rock University and its faculty are committed to assuring a safe and productive educational environment for all students. In order to meet this commitment and to comply with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and guidance from the Office for Civil Rights, the University requires faculty members to report incidents of sexual violence shared by students to the University's Title IX Coordinator. The only exceptions to the faculty member's reporting obligation are when incidents of sexual violence are communicated by a student during a classroom discussion, in a writing assignment for a class, or as part of a University-approved research project. Faculty members are obligated to report sexual violence or any other abuse of a student who was, or is, a child (a person under 18 years of age) when the abuse allegedly occurred to the person designated in the University protection of minors policy. Information regarding the reporting of sexual violence and the resources that are available to victims of sexual violence is set forth at: <http://www.sru.edu/offices/diversity-and-equal-opportunity/sexual-misconduct-and-victim-resources>.

History 344: American City
 Spring 2020
 Reading Schedule, Weeks 1-5

Date	Topic & Reading Assignment ²	Assignments/important info
Week 1: Introductions		
Wednesday, 1/24	Course Introduction	
Friday, 1/26	Early Urban America <u>READ:</u> Primary source documents (in class)	
Week 2: Urban Growth & Social Change in the 19th Century		
Monday, 1/27	<u>READ:</u> <i>Making of Urban America</i> (hereafter <i>MUA</i>), Part I Intro and Chapter 2 (3-16, 39-58)	Reading Quiz ³
Wednesday, 1/29	Changing Work and Social Roles <u>READ:</u> <i>MUA</i> Chapter 3 (59-82)	Reading Quiz
Friday, 1/31	Urban Workers & the Struggle for Autonomy <u>READ:</u> D2L documents	Discussion Preparation Assignment (hereafter DPA)
Week 3: Dirt, Disease, and Disorder		
Monday, 2/3	Sanitation & the Urban Environment <u>READ:</u> <i>MUA</i> , Part II Introduction	Reading Quiz
Wednesday 2/5	The Urban Middle Class and Early Suburbs	
Friday, 2/7	The Immigrant & Urban Nativism <u>READ:</u> D2L documents	DPA
Week 4: Class Conflict & Urban Reform		
Monday, 2/10	Politics and Social Space in Urban Communities <u>READ:</u> <i>MUA</i> , Chapter 4 & 5	Reading Quiz
Wednesday, 2/12	Urban Problems & the Search for Solutions	
Friday, 2/14	Reformers & the Struggle for Power in the Gilded Age City <u>READ:</u> D2L documents	DPA
Week 5: Urban Reform, continued		
Monday, 2/17	Reforming the Industrial City <u>READ:</u> <i>MUA</i> , Part II Intro & Ch. 4, 5 (review)	Reading Quiz
Wednesday, 2/19	African-American Urban Communities After the Civil War	
Friday, 2/21	First Exam	

² Selections from the textbook are identified with *MUA* and the Part or Chapter number. Note that the readings are not necessarily sequential. "D2L documents" indicates that you should read all documents for that week's folder on D2L (under Content->Readings->Documents)

³ All reading quizzes are available through D2L and are due by class time on the day they are listed.