History 392: The Urban Crisis  
Spring 2005, Moravian College

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Office Hours: Monday 10-12, Wednesdays 10-12, or by appointment.  
Classroom: Collier Hall Room 200  
Class meets: Thursday 2:20-4:00

Course overview:

The United States, it seems, is in a perpetual state of urban crisis. In the nineteenth century, Americans might have understood the “urban crisis” to include rampant epidemics of yellow fever and cholera, social conflicts surrounding the arrival of immigrants, violent confrontations between workers and their employers, and the “tramp menace” posed by unemployed workers. In the early twentieth century, the crisis may have referred to slum housing conditions for immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, husbands’ desertion of wives and children, epidemics of tuberculosis, the persistent presence of alcohol and prostitutes, and traffic jams of horses, trolleys and later, automobiles.

What, if anything, distinguishes the urban crisis of the last 50 years? What is it? What caused it? And what, if anything, can be done about it? This course will help you formulate some answers to these questions. We will survey the development of U.S. cities from World War II to the present. Drawing on primary and secondary documents, print and visual media and a variety of interdisciplinary sources, we will seek to understand the forces that have shaped the cities we live in today.

This course on the Urban Crisis is also designed as a writing intensive seminar in which we explore and work through the various aspects of upper level college writing. Central to this class are a series of writing assignments designed to connect us to the central theme of the modern U.S. metropolis, while strengthening writing skills. The major project will be a 20 page seminar paper that examines an important urban issue from a historical or sociological stand-point. Through this semester, this class will function as a kind of writing workshop where our collective efforts will be geared toward aiding each other in this process.
Required texts:


Selected readings on reserve.

Course Requirements:

First paper. (15%) Students will write a 3-5 page paper analyzing a recent news or editorial item of their choosing from either the Philadelphia Inquirer or New York Times. You should start reading these papers immediately and begin looking for items that you might choose for the assignment. The assignment is due in class February 17. (Please note that I have a policy on late papers: for each day late, papers are downgraded one letter grade.)

Class participation. (25%) As a writing seminar, this class will place emphasis on the interaction between peers in helping strengthen the quality of written work. At different points during the semester, we will hold peer review sessions where groups of students will meet to discuss and critique one another’s work. Your evaluation in this important part of the class will be based on the thoroughness of your written and oral critiques, your ability to accept critiques of your own work, and attendance. Please note that, especially as a seminar class, your attendance is expected at every meeting.

Final Paper. (30%) A 20 page research paper will be the central project this semester. Please follow standard format for History papers.

Presentation: (10%) In the final class meeting, we will dedicate the class to 10-15 minute oral presentations of our final research project.

Paper Overview: (5%) In this initial exercise, you will be asked to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of a paper you have written for a previous class. As part of this assignment, you will write a commentary on your previous experiences as a writer, and some of the specific goals you have for improving your writing this semester.

Reflections: (10%) Through the semester, students will select three writings from the assigned readings and write a 2-3 page commentary critiquing the writing and making connections to other issues raised in the course.

Teacher Conferences: (5%) Each student will meet with the professor at least two times to discuss the progress of the final paper.
Topics, Activities and Readings (Tentative)

January 13: Class Introduction—cities in the U.S. and international context

Readings: The Origins of the Urban Crisis, Introduction, Chapters 1, 4, 5

January 27: Deindustrialization Continued.
Screening of film: Roger and Me.

February 3: Spatial Transformations: Segregation and Suburbanization.
Readings: Sugrue, Origin of the Urban Crisis, Chapter 2-3 7-9, Place Matters, Chapter 4.

February 10: Peer Review
Please bring your drafts of the newspaper project to class for review.

February 17: Demographic Transformations: Race, Nationality, Family Structure.
Reading: Davis, Magical Urbanism

Paper due in class

Readings: Edward C. Banfield, “Rioting Mainly for Fun and Profit,” and Robert M. Fogelson, “Violence as Protest” and “Liberalism at an Impasse.” Readings on Reserve in Reeves Library

March 3: Suburban Sprawl and its Consequences

March 10. Spring Break
March 17: The *Urban Drug Epidemic and its Consequences*.


Viewing of *Boyz N’ the Hood*.

Please note that this film is 112 minutes long. Please schedule to be in class that day those 10 extra minutes.

March 24: *The Urban Education Crisis*

Reading: Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities*.

March 31: *Homelessness in the Post-Industrial City*


April 7: *Urban Flight, Suburbanization and the Rise of Environmentalism*

Reading: Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*.

April 14 *What is to be Done?*

Reading: Dreier, *Place Matters*, Chapters 6-8

April 21: Peer Review

April 28: Final Presentations