Poverty and the New American City  
SOC 3350  
TU/TH 10:00-11:30AM  
106 Seigle Hall

Instructor: John N. Robinson III  
Email Address: jnrobinson@wustl.edu  
Office Hours: 9:30-10:30am Thurs (My office in Soc Dept)

Teaching Assistant: Irene Bronsvoort  
Email Address: irene.bronsvoort@student.uva.nl  
Office Hours: 2:00-400pm Thurs (Conference area in Soc Dept)

**REMINDER: SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE**

Course Description

We will explore the structural changes that are transforming the American urban landscape, especially for low-income populations. We begin with a review of classic theories of urban poverty and consider their relevance in the modern context. We then analyze key political, economic, demographic and geographic shifts in how urban poverty is organized and reproduced, including gentrification, immigration, social policy reform and the credit crisis. Special attention will be devoted to exploring the social and political implications of changing urban policy approaches, as well as the “suburbanization” of poverty. We will conclude by discussing how urban poverty interfaces with broader social structures, including law, markets and the state. Prerequisite: An introductory course in sociology or consent of the instructor.

Readings
All reading material for this course will be provided on Blackboard. Students are generally responsible for reading one scholarly article and one newspaper selection for each class period. I encourage you to bring printed out readings to class with you.

**Evaluation**

Grades will be based on a written midterm exam (worth 20%), a final presentation (20%), 8 reflection papers of 2 pages each (6.25% each/50% total), and attendance/class participation (10%). The instructor will may provide extra credit opportunities.

**Reflection Papers**

1. Select an establishment or landmark to visit in downtown Clayton. Write about what made you choose that particular site. Describe the people you saw, the conversations you overheard, the other establishments in the area, the appearance of the street as a whole, etc. What did your visit convey to you about Clayton as a downtown area? Is “downtown” an accurate term to describe it? How is the area being branded as a destination? (Due 9/6)

2. Write about a time when you felt empowered or powerless as a tenant. For example, think of a time when you wanted to do something to or within your home unit (e.g. hang up wall art, bring in a microwave, change the locks, knock down a wall, have an overnight guest, host a party, etc)—were you able to do it? Why or why not? Go back to the leasing document and look for the provisions related to the situation you write about—how do these legal provisions correspond to your experience? (Due 9/13)

3. Think about and select a social setting on or off campus (it can be one that you frequent on a routine basis). Act or behave in a way that violates the (unwritten/informal) expectations of that setting (but don’t break any laws!). Write about the experience. Describe the setting and its expectations in detail, and discuss why you chose to deviate from the norm in the specific way that you did. How did other people react? How did you feel? What did the experience teach you about the meanings that people attach to that setting more broadly? (9/22)

4. This week we read about the connection between poorly-planned urban spaces and a specific genre of music: hip hop. Select a song or video (doesn’t have to be hip hop) that seems to capture/evoke/illustrate a particular culture/social experience in American society. The connection doesn’t have to be explicit; feel free to speculate and offer conjecture based on what you see/hear in the music. Write about both the genre and the specific song/video. How do issues of economic inequality factor into the culture/social experience that you describe? (10/13)
5. Find three separate homeowners (if you must explain to them why you need homeowners, tell them that you are broadly interested in talking to middle-class citizens which homeowners tend to be). Ask them what are their views generally on welfare? What welfare programs are they aware of (i.e. have them name actual programs)? Do they personally receive help from government? If so, do they defines that governmental help as “welfare”? Write about the different responses you receive and what you make of them. (10/25)

6. Write up a proposal for your final presentation. Discuss what topic you will explore, what geographic area you will select, and what material from the course you find relevant. Broadly, your presentation should explore an episode that shaped the development of a specific (urban or suburban) place. Focus on the place’s capacity to provide decent and livable homes for low-income population, and how that capacity has changed or is likely to change (either negative or positively) because of the episode that you discuss. “Episodes” include but are not limited to: redevelopment plans, cases of litigation, the making or implementation of new policies, the rise of new forms of action or behavior by citizens or officials, social movements, new forms of investment or commercial activity, etc. Push yourself to come up with an actual question worth answering. (11/3)

7. Tell me about a suburb you lived in or were familiar with growing up. What “type” of suburb is it, according to the typology created by Murphy? Provide evidence from your own experience as to why you would categorize the suburb in one way or another. Can you think of any processes or characteristics not mentioned by Murphy that may be relevant to the way these places handle the challenge of poverty? Are there any other “types” of suburbs that Murphy may have missed? (11/10)

8. Return to your presentation topic proposal. In this write-up you will extend your proposal in two different ways. First, discuss the history of that topic, both in broad terms and in terms of the specific place that you are studying. How does that history tie in to the theoretical frameworks that you intend to use? You might consult with a campus librarian to find out how to access historical evidence on your topic via some of the online databases managed by WUSTL’s library system. Second, discuss what forms of evidence you are using and/or plan to use. Discuss how these forms of evidence are well-suited to examining the topic you chose to study. Also speak on the credibility of these sources to give a sense that you have thought deeply about evidence upon which your presentation will rest. (11/17)

**Calculating Grades**
The final grades will be computed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>84-86</td>
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</table>
Other Course Policies

- I have a No Laptop Policy during the class. Research on WUSTL students shows that in-class laptop use can have a distracting effect on the classroom (see https://teachingcenter.wustl.edu/2015/08/laptop-use-effects-learning-attention/)

- Of course, if there are no laptops, that means no cell phone use either.

- Please review information on academic integrity at https://wustl.edu/about/compliance-policies/academic-policies/undergraduate-student-academic-integrity-policy/. All forms of academic dishonesty – copying from a neighbor, cutting and pasting from websites without attribution, using other people’s ideas/papers from the internet – will be immediately reported to the Dean’s Office.

- All late papers will be downgraded one step (e.g., A- to B+, B to B-, etc). I do not grant extensions for any reason other than serious illness or a family emergency.

- Accessibility at WUSTL: Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with Cornerstone (cornerstone@wustl.edu; 314-935-5970) and provide me with an accommodation notification, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.

Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 30:</td>
<td>Introduction to the Course</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**PART 1: MARKETS, POVERTY AND CITIES IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

September 1: Urbanization and Urbanism
- **Wirth**: “Urbanism as a Way of Life”
- **Atlas Obscura**: “The Nineteenth Century Soil Men”
- **Atlantic City Lab**: “When Gentrification Meant…”

September 6: Making Downtown America
- **Schwarzer**: “Downtown: A Short History of American…”
- **Isenberg**: “City Beautiful or Beautiful Mess…”

**Assignment #1 DUE**

September 8: Cities and the Rise of Industry
- **Rosenzweig**: “Middle-Class Parks and Working-Class Play…”
- **PBS NewsHour**: “Manufacturing Declines in St Louis…”

September 13: Housing the Industrial Workforce
- **Hodkinson**: “The Return of the Housing Question”
- **The Washington Post**: “Kenilworth-Parkside and the Politics…”

**Assignment #2 DUE**

**PART 2: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF URBAN POVERTY**

September 15: Cities and Capitalist Society
- **Harvey**: “Class-Monopoly Rent, Finance Capital…”
- **The Nation**: “Food Truck Vendors Are Getting Kicked…”

September 20: The Production of Urban Space
- **McCann**: “Race, Protest and Public Space”
- **Lexington Herald Leader**: “Remembering Tony Sullivan”

**Assignment #3 DUE**

September 22: Governing Urban Affairs
- **Stone**: “Industry and Community Power Structure…”
- **Atlanta Magazine**: “Bill Campbell: He Could Have Been the One”
September 27: The Politics of Urban Growth  
**Molotch:** “The City as Growth Machine”  
**Chicago Reader:** “The Shadow Budget”

September 29: Culture and Neighborhood Change  
**Zukin:** “The City that Lost its Soul”  
**Zukin:** “Whose Culture? Whose City?”

October 4: 
---MID-TERM EXAM---

**PART 3: URBAN POVERTY IN THE POSTINDUSTRIAL AGE**

October 6: The Deindustrializing City  
**The New York Times:** “Anatomy of Detroit’s Decline”

October 11: The Politics of Housing Policy, Part 1  
**Massey/Denton:** “The Construction of the Ghetto”  
**Fader:** “How Bad Urban Planning Led to the Birth…”  
**Video:** “The Pruitt Igoe Myth”

**Assignment #4 DUE**

October 13: The Old “New” Urban Poverty  
**Wilson:** “When Work Disappears” Chapters 1 & 2  
**Chicago Tribune:** “Blue Collar Dream Skews City Policy”

October 18: NO CLASS  
NO CLASS  
NO CLASS

October 20: The Politics of Housing Policy, Part 2  
**Jackson:** “Federal Subsidy and the Suburban Dream”  
**The New York Times:** “Supreme Court Rulings Awaited on…”
PART 4: HOUSING THE POOR IN THE PRIVATIZED CITY

October 25: Privatizing Public Housing, Part 1  
**Pattillo:** “The Case Against Public Housing”

October 27: Privatizing Public Housing, Part 2  
**Pattillo:** “The Case for Public Housing”

November 1: Surviving the Private Market  
**Desmond:** “Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City”
**The Atlantic:** “The Power of Landlords”

**Assignment #6 DUE**

November 3: Policing the Privatized City  
**Lara-Millan:** “Public Emergency Room Overcrowding…”
**Priceonomics:** “The Fining of Black America”

November 8: The Suburbanization of Poverty  
**Murphy:** “The Symbolic Dilemmas of Suburban Poverty…”
**The Christian Science Monitor:** “Faces of US Poverty…”

**Assignment #7 DUE**

PART 5: THE “FINANCIALIZATION” OF URBAN POVERTY

November 10: The Subprime Mortgage Crisis, Part 1  
**Video:** “The Big Short” 1/2

November 15: The Subprime Mortgage Crisis, Part 2  
**Video:** “The Big Short” 2/2
**Assignment #8 DUE**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 17</td>
<td>The Subprime Mortgage Crisis, Part 3</td>
<td>Saegert et al: “Deflating the Dream”</td>
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<td>November 22</td>
<td>NO CLASS</td>
<td>NO CLASS</td>
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<td>The Atlantic: “The Economics of Ferguson…”</td>
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<td>November 29</td>
<td>Credit Ratings Agencies and the City</td>
<td>Hackworth: Excerpt from “The Neoliberal City”</td>
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<td>Chicago Tribune: “If CPS Falls Short, Property Tax Jumps”</td>
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<td>December 1</td>
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<td>FINAL PRESENTATIONS</td>
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<td>December 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 8</td>
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