

American Urban History



(Afro Samurai, 2007)

N. D. B. Connolly
Tuesday/Thursday 9am-12:15pm

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Office Hours: Monday 10am-12pm

Syllabus

Through primary documents, comics, and film, this class will explore the development of cities in the United States. Paying special attention to crime, racism, politics, and popular culture, students will consider how cities combine national and international concerns, and how urban issues shape aspirations and conflicts for immigrants, indigenous people, and native born Americans.

Books:

Ta-Nehisi Coates and Brian Stelfreeze, *The Black Panther: A Nation Under Our Feet*, Book 1 (Marvel Comics, 2016)

David M. P. Freund, ed., *The Modern American Metropolis: A Document Reader* (Wiley, 2015)

Evaluation:

Participation

In class contributions, attendance, and online discussion threads 40%

Mid-Term Paper #1

3-page position paper exploring one theme from the readings, Weeks. 1-3 20%

Film Review

Critical Reflection linking one of the term's films to course readings 30%

Final Exam

10%

Calendar:

WEEK 1: UNMAKING THE FRONTIER

Tuesday – May 30

“Cyrus McCormick Markets the Virginia Reaper to the Nation’s Farmers, 1850 and 1851” (Freund, 36-39)

“Texans Appeal for the Removal of Native Peoples, 1858–1859” (Freund, 40-44)

“Hunt’s Merchants’ Magazine Discusses the Value of Slave Labor, 1855–1858” (Freund, 45-49)

Thursday – June 1

“An Irish Immigrant Writes Home about Life in the United States, 1850” (Freund, 50-52)

“Frederick Law Olmsted Compares Northern and Southern Cities along the Atlantic Seaboard, 1856” (Freund, 53-59)

“New York City Retailers Organize to Protect a Fifth Avenue Shopping District, 1916,” (Freund, 87-89)

“A Polish Immigrant Describes Life and Work in New York City, 1902” (Freund, 90-95)

“George Washington Plunkitt Defends Patronage Politics in New York City, 1905” (Freund, 135-138)

“Alfred Kazin Recalls New York City’s Ethnic Boundaries Before World War II (Freund, 170-174)

“Urban Imagery, 1889–1913” (Freund, 118-122)

WEEK 2: RACE AND REAL ESTATE: AN INTRODUCTION

Tuesday – June 6

Christopher Silver, “The Racial Origins of Zoning in American Cities,” in Thomas and Ritzdorf, ed. *Urban Planning and the African American Community* pp. 23-42.

“Black Southerners Write the *Chicago Defender* for Information about Employment, 1916–1918” (Freund, 110-117)

“Langston Hughes Remembers Rent Parties in Harlem” (Freund, 187-189)

“*Ebony* Discusses Homeownership and Domestic Life for a Steelworker’s Family in Gary, Indiana, 1957” (Freund, 223-225)

“Catherine Marshall Defends a Woman’s Right to Work, 1954” (Freund, 226-228)

Thursday – June 8

Film: *A Raisin in the Sun* (Daniel Petrie, dir., 1961)

WEEK 3: CITIES AS CAPITALISM

Tuesday – June 13

Film: *Roger and Me* (Michael Moore, dir., 1989)

Thursday – June 15

“Dallas City Commissioner Advocates Running a City Like a Business, 1909” (Freund, 139-140)

“Veterans Line Up for Homes in Long Island, 1949” (Freund, 217-218)

“U.S. News and World Report Warns of Contaminated Suburban Water Supplies, 1963” (Freund 240-243)

“U.S. Steel Demolishes Its Plant in Youngstown, Ohio, 1983” (Freund, 271-272)

WEEK 4: THE URBAN IMAGINARY, INTERNATIONAL

Tuesday – June 20

Film: *Coming to America* (John Landis, dir., 1988)

Thursday – June 22

Film: *Afro Samurai* (Takashi Okazaki, dir., 2007)

Ta-Nehisi Coates and Brian Stelfreeze, *The Black Panther: A Nation Under Our Feet*, Book 1 (Marvel Comics, 2016)

WEEK 5: THE SUBURBAN CRISIS

Tuesday – June 27

“The Federal Housing Administration Defines Value in Single-Family Suburban Housing” (Freund 229-231)

“Sunset Magazine Markets a Suburban Way of Living, 1946 and 1958” (Freund 219-222)

“Developers in Los Angeles County Spark a Twenty-First-Century Debate over City Building and Environmental Protection, 2009” (Freund, 305-312)

Thursday – June 29

Film: *The Lost Children of Rockdale County* (PBS Frontline, 1999)