Fall 2015

ANTH 4775

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University of New Orleans

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Urban Anthropology
Culture, Economics, and Politics in New Orleans, 10 Years after the Floods

ANTH 4775 Section 1, Fall 2015
T/Th 2-3:15pm MH 264
Office: MH 334
Office Hours: T/Th 11am-12 and 1pm-2pm, W 10am-2pm,
or by appointment.

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In the wake of Katrina, New Orleans seemed doomed to remain a social and ecological disaster zone. Has the city now become a landscape of hope? New Orleans and the surrounding region were devastated in ways that seemed almost unimaginable. The process of rebuilding and repopulating the city has not been smooth. The BP oil spew added a potentially devastating dimension to the region’s difficulties. Many of the institutions and structures that might have played a key role have not lived up to expectations and much remains to be done. At the same time, imaginative use of resources by local groups and determined organization at the grassroots level—along with city, state, and federal help—has resulted in unexpected development in some areas. Is this a result of the city’s unique culture? What can we learn about cities and culture from the failures of institutions and the flourishing of “civil society” in the new New Orleans? In this class, we will use urban social theory and ethnographic research to approach this question. We live in an urban age, one in which the majority of people in most countries live in or near cities. Yet we also live in an age in which the very idea of urban life provokes images of alienation and danger. We will look at the social processes and practices that make urban life distinct, as well as the ideologies that shape the way people think about cities.

Even before the storm, New Orleans was something of a disaster, with high rates of poverty, crime, racism and despair. These problems are not unique to New Orleans, but the disaster and recovery have made them more evident here than elsewhere. Can we make this a better city than it was? We will examine urban research from around the world, putting New Orleans in a comparative context. We will learn how anthropologists have explored the meaning of community in Tokyo and Barcelona, the lives of the urban poor in Moscow and Paris, or recovery from war and disaster in Berlin and Kobe. We will draw on our readings in urban social theory to develop our own research projects in New Orleans. Students in this class will learn—from both theory and practice—how ethnographic research methods can provide unique insights into urban life. We will draw on those experiences in order to make sense of—and contribute to—the rebuilding of New Orleans.

In this class, you will learn to analyze and evaluate claims about authenticity and culture in urban environments. You will be able to discuss, explain, and debate theories of urban poverty, crime, and policing. You will learn to evaluate claims made about development and arguments surrounding gentrification. You will discuss the role of immigration, ethnicity, and race in shaping urban life. You will learn to use ethnographic research methods. Above all, you will learn to ask critical questions that should enhance your ability to participate in the ongoing development of this city, a decade after the floods.

Course Requirements

The course is organized in a seminar format with weekly discussions based on the readings, research exercises and projects. Each reading assignment should be completed before the first class meeting of the week it is to be discussed (see below).

You will be graded on:

• Class participation (attendance, participation in discussions), worth 10% of your grade.
• 10 reading briefs (250-300 words), worth 20% of your grade.
• A two part field research project, the first part worth 10% of your grade, the second worth 20%.
• 1 midterm exam, worth 20% of your grade.
• 1 final examination, worth 20% of your grade.

**Attendance is mandatory.** Except for severe emergencies, each absence beyond the first 2 will reduce your grade by one full grade. Because this is a seminar, this class cannot succeed without the full participation of all students. If you cannot commit to regular attendance, please do not take the class.

**Grades**

Standards for each assignment will be specified with those assignments. Generally, your participation grade will reflect both regular attendance (but see the policy above) and the extent to which you participate in class discussions. Briefings will be graded on a pass/fail basis. The midterm, and final exam essays will be graded for the extent to which they respond to the specific assignment. Essays that reflect a basic understanding of materials will generally receive a C, while those that show a thorough understanding of the materials—readings, lectures and class discussions—will receive a B, and work that shows some critical insight into the material will receive an A. *The key thing to keep in mind is that your objective in most assignments is to demonstrate your engagement with the course material, including readings, lectures, and discussions.* Work that does not do that at all will receive a D (for work that somewhat attempts to respond to the assignment) or F (for work that fails completely to address the assignment). The two part field research project grading will be explained when the assignment is distributed in class.

**Academic Integrity**

Honesty and respect for your work and for the work of others are essential to your success in this course and in university life in general. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. This includes cheating and plagiarism. Proper social science citation methods will be required on essays. For further details on academic integrity, see the UNO Office of Student Affairs web site, at [http://www.uno.edu/studentaffairs/](http://www.uno.edu/studentaffairs/).

**Disabilities**

I will do my best to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities. Please feel free to contact me about your needs. If you have a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services to register and follow their procedures. They can be reached at 504-280-6222 or through their web site, [http://ods.uno.edu/](http://ods.uno.edu/).

**Texts**

The following books are available for purchase in the UNO bookstore as well as through on-line bookstores. All other listed readings will be available on the course Moodle site or through UNO’s library databases. *(The ISBN listed here is for the paper format of each book. Electronic formats may have a different ISBN.)*

**Required Texts**


**Recommended Text**


**The Program**

*Except for the books listed above, all articles will be available on-line, under course documents on the course Moodle site or through UNO’s library databases. Readings are subject to change!*

**Introduction: Imagining the City/Imagining New Orleans**

*8/20, 8/25-8/27*


**Theories and Dilemmas of Urban Research**

*9/1-9/3*


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Cities, Modern and Postmodern

9/8-9/10

Ferguson, chapters 1-3.


9/15-9/17

Ferguson, chapter 4 - postscript.


The City and the Market

9/22 - 9/24

Truitt, Introduction, chapters 1-3.


9/29-10/1

Field Project part 1 due, 10/1.

Truitt, chapters 4-6, epilogue.


Urban Legends: Culture, Poverty, Fear and Disorder

10/6-10/8

Mid-Term Exam distributed, 10/6.

Goffman, prologue, preface, chapters 1-4.


10/13

**Mid-Term Exam Essay due, 10/13.**

Goffman, chapters 5-7, conclusion, epilogue, appendix.


**Making Do, Making Community**

10/20-10/22

Caldwell, Preface, chapters 1-3.


10/27-10/29

Caldwell, chapters 4-7, epilogue.


Cultural Politics and Urban Space

11/3-11/5


11/10-11/12


James, Jason. 2006. Undoing Trauma: Reconstructing the Church of Our Lady in Dresden. Ethos. 34(2):244-272.


Recommended: Davila, chapters 5-7, conclusion.

The Authentic City?

11/17-11/19

Zukin, preface, introduction, chapters 1-3.


11/24

Zukin, chapters 4-6, conclusion.


**Urban Futures/New Orleans Future?**

12/1 - 12/3

*Field Analysis part 2, due 12/1.*


*Final Exam distributed 12/3.*

*Final Exam due, 12/10.*