URBN 3150

James Amdal

University of New Orleans

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Department of Planning and Urban Studies  
University of New Orleans

URBN 3150 – Suburbs and the Car Culture  

Syllabus

Fall 2015  
Tuesday – Thursday  
2:00 – 3:15 PM MH 318  

Instructor – James R. Amdal, 372 Milneburg Hall  
jamdal@uno.edu  
Office Hours: W 1 – 3 PM & by apt.

Course Description and Content

This course will examine one of the most prominent forces behind the contemporary American urban and suburban cityscape: suburbs and the car culture along with the history of the development of the interstate highway system. It will feature prominent planners (William E. Borah), neighborhood activists (Dr. Jack Stewart) as well as UNOTI Director, Dr. John Renne. Hopefully, Dr. Jose Calderon, a local psychiatrist and public health advocate will be able to join us to discuss suburbia, the car culture and its impact on wellness or the lack thereof. Each will lend his unique experience and perspective to this topic.

We will examine the history, development, finance, politics and public policy that shaped this contemporary phenomenon with a concentration on Federal State and the New Orleans. We will give particular attention to the renowned Second Battle of New Orleans, the eventual revocation of federal funding for the proposed and funded Riverfront Expressway: a victory for neighborhood activists, preservationists and the “little old ladies in tennis shoes” who beat the forces of progress: the Chamber of Commerce, business leaders, civic as well as city leaders. Bill Borah, along with his colleague Richard Baumbach, Jr., led this charge and both documented the tale in the celebrated “The Second Battle of New Orleans: A History of the Vieux Carre Expressway Controversy”. This fight is significant in the context of both federal and local public policy, historic preservation, economic development and the “highway lobby”.

We will also explore related topics like suburbanization and its impact on public health. I will invite Dr. Jose Calderon, a local psychiatrist who specializes in mindfulness, who has written on the car culture, suburbanization and in particular on the fast food industry which has proliferated in the strip commercial centers fostered by the suburbs and the car culture. We will also discuss tangential public health issues: lack of physical activity (walking in particular), reliance on the single family car for most transportation trips and related issues.
Dr. Jack Stewart, an well known CBD neighborhood activist, President of the Bring Our Streetcars Home Committee, and President of the Lafayette Square Association which represents one of the most significant historic districts within the CBD. He will bring his perspective on the role of neighborhood organizations in the transportation arena. Dr. Stewart was pivotal in the development of grass roots support for various streetcar initiatives within New Orleans including the Riverfront Streetcar, the rebirth of the Canal Streetcar line, the vehicle rebuild program for the St. Charles Avenue Streetcars and most recently as a watchdog for the Loyola Streetcar and the N. Rampart / St. Claude Avenue Streetcar project currently under construction.

Dr. Renne will present his recent research findings on creating Transit Oriented Development in a suburban context. This will be a major challenge in the 21st Century. What will become apparent in the course of this class is the interrelationship between seemingly unrelated aspects of all the issues related to suburbs and the car culture.

This course will be reading “heavy” with special attention given to recent books written on the topic: “Interstate Highway Politics and Policy since 1939 (Third Edition)”; “Car Country: An Environmental History”; “Changing Lanes: Visions and Histories of Urban Freeways”. We will augment our readings with selected videos (reference to MJ’s suggestion) and other topical presentations on this fascinating topic.

**Learning Goals and Objectives**

Upon completion of this course each student should have a cumulative knowledge of this urban and suburban (shape-making multi-decade $500B investment) force that continues to this day. You will also understand the unique relationship between “Car Culture”, the suburban landscape, real estate development, pro-suburban federal public policy and the unique role New Orleans has played as a city and as a region in the evolution of Interstate system. Interesting facts will also be revealed as it relates to original intent versus built reality; battles won and lost; and current trends to deconstruct particular sections of the interstate system: the Embarcadaro Expressway in San Francisco; the Alaskan Way in Seattle; the Claiborne Expressway in New Orleans; et al.

**Course Texts and Readings**

Reading assignments will be given every class from a variety of sources including the books previously mentioned. More recent journal articles, news reports, etc. will be announced in class. You can also start your personal research by creating a Google Alert for Interstate System, Car Culture, Crabgrass Nation; Suburbia; etc.
Course Requirements

Readings: Students are expected to come to class familiar with reading materials to review, critique and ask questions. A thorough understanding of the reading assignments is necessary to effectively participate in class and complete course assignments. Ten percent of your grade will be based on your participation and contribution in class.

Mid-term exam: This exam will be an in-class test consisting of both short answer, multiple choice, true - false and definitions. The exam will cover class readings and class discussions up to that point.

Final Exam: This will be a cumulative exam covering the assigned readings, class discussions and lectures given by visiting speakers. It is meant to demonstrate the student’s grasp of this very complex and complicated set of issues, topics, and histories.

Research Paper: Each student will be responsible for completing a brief 8 – 10 page paper on an assigned topic. It will be based on journal articles or parts or specific chapters of selected books.

Additional Writing Assignments: Each student will be required to write a brief paper summarizing a particular aspect of the Interstate System, Suburbia, et al. This should be brief and to the point. A maximum of 3 pages is the limit.

Class attendance and participation: Students are required to attend all classes. Absent students are responsible for all materials discussed or presented. Attendance at guest lectures is mandatory. Attendance and class participation represents 10% of your grade.

Missing 4 classes without documented medical excuse will result in a maximum “B” grade achievement score. Each additional unexcused absence will result in one additional drop in letter grade.

Sleeping in class or the use of a cell phone is prohibited and will count for ½ of an absence. In addition to regular and timely attendance students are expected to actively participate in class discussions.

Late assignments and Incompletes: All assignments are due at the start of class. Late work will not be accepted except under highly unusual situations (serious illness, family emergency).
Grading:

1. Mid-term Exam  30%
2. Final Exam  30%
3. Individual Paper  20%
   (Research)
4. Book Summary  10%
5. Class Participation  10%

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is fundamental to the process of learning and evaluating academic performance. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, plagiarism, tampering with academic records and examinations, falsifying identity, and being an accessory to acts of academic dishonesty. Refer to the Student Code of Conduct for further information. The Code is available online at http://www.studentaffairs.uno.edu.

Accommodations

It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services as well as their instructors to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. For more information, please go to http://www.ods.uno.edu.

Verification for Online Students

To ensure academic integrity, all students enrolled in distance learning courses at the University of New Orleans may be required to verify their identity when completing exams or other high-stakes assignments. At the discretion of the faculty member teaching the course, verification may include on-campus proctored examinations, off-site or online proctored examinations, or other reasonable measures to ensure student identity. If students cannot attend an on-campus proctored exam, UNO partners with ProctorU, a live, online proctoring service that allows students to complete exams from any location using a computer, webcam, and reliable internet connection. Verification measures for this course are identified below and any fees associated are the responsibility of the student.
Selected Readings:


