

AMST 334
Urban America
ROGER WILLIAMS UNIVERSITY
CAS 228
T, F, 3:30 - 4:50
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Week of January 29, 2008

This week I want to introduce you to three useful tools. I don't want to tell you too much about each of these, except to say that each provides a unique window on urban America. Clicking on the Icon on the Web Syllabus in each case brings you to the appropriate website. Of the three, Google Earth requires downloading a program to your own computer. Google earth may be installed on some of the computers in the learning commons. Ask the library on duty. The free version is sufficient for this course. Those of you who become intrigued by it may want to purchase the \$20.00 upgrade for the enhanced capabilities it offers.

If **Google** does something, can **Microsoft** be far behind? Windows Local Live is Microsoft's answer to Google Earth. I'll leave you to decide whether it is as useful. **Update News!** Windows Local Live has added an experimental 3D capability. It requires a download to your computer.

Windows on Poverty is a project produced by the **Bruton Center** under the auspices of the University of Texas at Dallas. It provides some interesting interactive mapping possibilities which will complement the other two programs.

If you don't have it installed already, I'd like to have you Download and install Google Earth, and spend at least 1 hour "playing" with it and the other two programs as well. There is more to Google Earth than meets the eye. After you've played around with the more intuitive features of the program, visit the help page and explore it. As a starting point, see if you can discover how to save pictures and share data. ***As you explore Microsoft Live and Windows on Poverty, see if you can find and save parallel information from all three programs.***

For **Tuesday, January 29**

READ:

In Jane Jacobs, ***Death and Life of Great American Cities***,

1. *Introduction*: pp. 3 - 25

Jacobs begins her book with this statement about Illustrations: *The Scenes which illustrate this book are all about us. For illustrations, please look closely at real cities. While you are looking, you might as well also listen, linger, and think about what you see.*

This introduction does what all good introductions do. It explains what Jacobs sets out to do, and why. When the book first appeared, Jacobs was pretty much attacked by the Urban Planning community. She was looked upon as an untrained and unsophisticated meddler. Lewis Mumford, who was subject to her tongue in this book, responded with an article equally uncomplimentary, entitled Mother Jacobs' Home Remedies for Urban Cancer. Her book survived the onslaught to become a classic, continuously in print since its first publication in 1961. Jacobs argues that in order to "fix" cities one must first understand how they "work". So her book is less a set of rules and regulations than a set of careful observations of those parts of cities which function well compared to those which don't.

Download, Read, and Bring to Class:

Kotkin, Joel, *CITIES: Places Sacred, Safe, and Busy*,

Kotkin argues "Humankind's greatest creation has always been its cities. They represent the ultimate handiwork of our imagination as a species, compressing and unleashing the creative urges of humanity." Is he in agreement or disagreement with Jacobs? In what ways? How can you tell? The link to the article is on the class website for this week.

For Friday, February 1

I'd like to finish sorting out groups this class and, if possible, begin deciding on which cities will be the focus of our semester's activities. If you haven't introduced yourself or filled out the survey yet, please do so A.S.A.P.

Read, in *Jacobs*,

2. *The Uses of Sidewalks: Safety* 29 - 55 (ML: 37-71)
3. *The Uses of Sidewalks: Contact* 55 - 73 (ML: 72 - 97)

There are two printings of *Jacobs* in use in this class for the time being, I'll give page numbers for both. ML refers to the Modern Library Edition... The content is the same in both, the size of print accounts for the difference.

- The first five chapters constitute an analytical whole. Look at the table of contents before you start reading to get a sense of the conceptual framework. Before considering the content of these chapters individually, it is useful to consider the organization of them together. One of the most interesting things about *Jacobs*' work is her insistence on thinking about how things actually function. Some of the most elementary and ordinary features of cities turn out to be some of the most important.
- The lowly sidewalk is itself important enough to demand three chapters, and you will notice that each chapter interrelates with and builds upon the previous one: if sidewalks are not safe, they won't facilitate contact, and without contact, children cannot be assimilated. These chapters are especially crucial because many of you most likely live in sidewalk-less neighborhoods.
- You will notice, too, that each succeeding chapter treats an urban element larger in scale than the previous one. Neighborhood parks border upon or abut upon more than one street with its sidewalks, and neighborhoods incorporate both sidewalks and parks.

Notes on the Chapters:

Chapter 2. *The Uses of Sidewalks: Safety*

Understand, first of all, that *Jacobs* in talking about sidewalks is not considering just the concrete. A sidewalk includes destinations it connects and the various properties which it abuts. It is the nature of these which determines whether sidewalks are safe or not. Be aware of the way persons use sidewalks as something other than simply a way to get from one place to another on foot.

Chapter 3. *The Uses of Sidewalks: Contact*

Probably the most important thing to understand in this chapter is the idea of casual contact which "*implies no private commitments.*" The emphasis here is Jacobs'. Jacobs describes an intermediate level of contact somewhere between "togetherness" and total anonymity. Certain types of people and institutions foster it, and we'll try to understand what these are. Because most of us have never lived in the type of community Jacobs describes we're going to have to work hard to imagine what life in it would be like.