

AMST 334
Urban America
ROGER WILLIAMS UNIVERSITY
CAS 228
T, F, 3:30 - 4:50
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Week of February 5, 2008

Assuming that we are able to get groups sorted out on February 1,

I want to try a procedure this week, which, if it works, will become our regular procedure. One of the ways to keep groups on task with regard to researching their cities is to afford opportunities for each to update what they've been doing/finding on a regular basis. I'm going to try to program about 45 minutes every Friday for that task. In the beginning, I'll ask for volunteers...later, when we move into higher gear on this I'll ask each group be prepared to present something (five minutes or less) each weekm though I may not call on each group.

- I don't want formal presentations at this stage. I'm not going to evaluate them. I'm assuming that someone in a group will find something interesting...a picture, a local interest story, or a "factoid" as they now call the kind of tidbit of information one sees on CNN.
- I envision the groups getting together in person or by e-mail or by chat room, once that gets up and running, and deciding which is the most interesting and presenting that.
- I also envision this as another way to share some of the fruitful search tips or procedures people discover, and even a way to expose blind alleys so that other people can avoid going down them.
- One of the ways to integrate this into the general flow of the class is to look for illustrations of the points the readings make in the material you find about the city you study. What can you find out about sidewalks, parks, and neighborhoods in *your* city? I will also ask groups to locate some evidence of the factors Jacobs talks about in the city they're investigating. For example, if we were doing that *Friday the 1st*, persons would be looking for some visual evidence of a "good" sidewalk or a "bad" sidewalk.

I anticipate doing a "leftover" city myself, and I'll be participating in this as an "independent investigator".

For Tuesday, February 5

Read, in *Jacobs*,

4. *The Uses of Sidewalks: Assimilating Children* 74 - 88

Notes

Chapter 4. *The Uses of Sidewalks: Assimilating Children*

Jacobs argues here that children are safer on the streets than they are in the parks, though “common sense” planning believes otherwise. One doesn’t think of Jacobs as a feminist, particularly, but you will note in this chapter some observations of gender roles which fit in nicely with feminist theory. Sidewalks of the type Jacobs advocates socialize children into a world in which both men and women play important roles. Suburbs and traditional parks do not. Is she right? Some of the most elementary and ordinary features of cities turn out to be some of the most important.

- We remind ourselves that 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.

For Friday, February 8

Read, in *Jacobs*,

5. *The Uses of Neighborhood Parks*: 89 - 111

6. *The Uses of City Neighborhoods* 112 - 140

Notes

Chapter 5. *The Uses of Neighborhood Parks*

Jane Jacobs is not a particular fan of parks as theoretical solutions to urban problems. She is in favor of parks which work well. In this chapter she tries to separate good parks from bad parks. To do so, she looks at concrete examples in a number of American cities, some of which are the focus of group projects. Those of you studying places like Los Angeles or Philadelphia may want to try to Google some of the parks she mentions by name. In fact, all of you would benefit by doing this for some of the parks mentioned in New York and San Francisco. You must note that “park” carries a broad definition. If you have in your mind’s eye a vision of trees, grass, and the odd swing or two, you’ll need to broaden your horizons some.

Chapter 6. *The Uses of City Neighborhoods*

This chapter may be the most difficult of all in this assignment. This is not Jacobs' fault, particularly, but the fault of our own preconceptions about neighborhoods and what it means to be someone's neighbor. We're going to have to move to different sorts of definitions here. Jacobs wants us to understand **three levels of "neighborhood,"** all of which have to function simultaneously if a city is to function well. If this is the case, simple geography can't be the entire definer of neighborhood or neighborliness.

The web version of this syllabus has additional materials on it, including links to some interesting photographs. Do leave yourself some browsing time. If you see anything which sparks your interest and sympathies, please send me a link to it and tell me why you found it particularly interesting or moving. I'll share these with the class. I think that I'll also start another discussion board area where you can post things like this as you find them.

Looking Ahead: Film Showing–

NEXT WEEK: Every so often on this campus I get nearly run over by a student on a skateboard. I'm rather amazed at what can be done. Last summer, I came across an interesting documentary film: [*Dogtown and Zboys*](#). At 97 minutes, I'm not sure I have the time to show it all, but I think I'm going to want to show considerable portions of it. I don't know if any class members are (or were) skateboarders, but skateboarding is, as I hope you will see, a phenomenon created by urban kids in urban environments. The film also demonstrates a number of the points Jacobs makes about rearing kids in urban environments. I hate dividing films in the middle, and I hate showing excerpts. So I'll ask you if you wouldn't mind staying an extra 17 minutes (to 5:07) assuming there's not a class in this room at 5:00.

I've accumulated a *lot* of other videos and films which would be very interesting. I'm not sure what the best way to deal with them might be. I cannot show a full length film every week within the normal class period. (well, I could, but I think the Dean would raise an eyebrow, or two). However, I could show some of these if, occasionally, people were willing to either come early or stay late, **OR** I could schedule some of these as part of the Penny Arcade series, **OR** I could arrange to show some of them on Wednesday afternoon when there are no classes. I have a variety of things in mind: classics like Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights*, an extended documentary on the feast in the Williamsburg area of New York City to light fluff like *Dick Tracy*. So if you're interested in using some of these things (anyone for *Batman?* *Spiderman??*) let me know what you think. I'll put up a place for comments under discussion boards.

Once you've decided on a city to investigate (whether for your personal investigation, your group investigation or both, you're going to want to keep up with what's going on. **All You Can Read** provides links to over 22,000 newspapers around the world, and to many magazines as well. It can be searched by city. See what you can find online, and once you've located a useful source or two, follow them regularly.