

AMST 334
Urban America
ROGER WILLIAMS UNIVERSITY
CAS 228
T, F, 3:30 - 4:50
Spring, 2008

MICHAEL R. H. SWANSON Ph. D.
OFFICE: Feinstein College 110
Hours: T, 11:00-12:30
M, W, F, 1:00-2:00
PHONE: (254)-3230
E-mail: amst334_urban@msn.com

Week of March 4, 2008

You'll notice that there is a little less reading this week than there has been the last couple of weeks. This isn't because the text is harder to understand. The reason I'm not asking you to read as much is that I want you to spend a bit of time (a good bit actually) in integrating the work of Jacobs with your investigation of your several cities. I'd like the members of each group to locate *evidence* of the type of thing Jacobs talks about in the city it is investigating, using some of the tools I've been mentioning to you in e-mails and on previous weekly syllabi. For example, once you've found out what a "border vacuum" is, locate visual evidence of one of those "border vacuums" in your own city. In some cities this will be more of a challenge than the others, but there should be no city in which it is impossible to do. The same would be true for the other concepts in the other chapters.

I would like each group to present *at least* one example of each chapter concept. Decide among yourselves who does what. You can use the group tools (discussion boards, group e-mail, group chat, group file exchange) to sort out who does what. You may want to appoint an official "chairman". IF you do, let me know who you appoint and I'll see that person gets extra credit for the extra work.

Turn your examples into posts in your City Discoveries Area on Blackboard.

For Tuesday, March 4

Read, in *Jacobs*,

Part III. *Forces of Generation and Decline*

13. *The Self-destruction of Diversity* 241 - 256 (ML: 315 - 335)
14. *The Curse of Border Vacuums* 257 - 269 (ML: 336 - 352)
15. *Unslumming and Slumming* 270 - 290 (ML: - 353 - 379)

Notes on the Chapters

13. By now I think we get the idea that the only way to understand Cities is to recognize their dynamism. Cities are always changing, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse. To this point we've noticed that some of the worst things which happen to cities happen because good-intentioned people, acting from ignorance, do the wrong thing. Self-destruction of Diversity looks at ways "success" can lead to failure. The process Jacobs

identifies is “*sorting out.*” Make sure you understand what it is, how it works, and why it is ultimately harmful.

14. To understand border vacuums you’ll need to understand what borders are. Railroad tracks and interstate highways are obvious ones, and you need to look no further than the edges of Route 95 in Providence downtown in order to see the vacuums which Jacobs describes. Another good place to look is along route 195 near where it joins 95. There are other kinds of borders, too. These are more subtle, and you will need to understand what their characteristics are. Finally you’ll need to understand why Jacobs calls these vacuums “curses.”
15. Much of our civic energy is spent attacking the problem of slums. Jacobs understands perpetual slum areas as products of dynamic forces, what she calls a “vicious circle.” She then makes a rather astonishing claim that if the cycle can be broken, a slum will “unslum” itself, without massive public intervention. If that wasn’t radical enough, she goes on to suggest the factor which keeps a slum from unslumming is “too many people move out of it too fast—and in the meantime dream of getting out.” You will need to understand this claim. You will also need to distinguish between the idea of a “slum” and the idea of a “stable low-income area.” Finally, you will need to understand the ways slums spontaneously cure themselves by “unslumming.”

There is a special tool which can help most of you understand some of this better. Open Google Earth, and in the area entitled “layers” identify a file folder saying *Gallery* (Symbol is a star). Open that folder and scroll down until you locate a folder entitled *Google Earth Community* and locate the checkbox next to *Housing Projects*. Put a check in the box and a layer will be overlaid when you visit your city. The Housing Projects will be identified by the letter *I*. Where are they? Some of you will be able to see what they look like at ground level by Google Maps Street Level. Try that out. Does what you find suggest that what Jacobs says about traditional ways of treating slums is accurate or applicable in your city? (If your cities don’t have this available through google,...See if you can figure out an alternative way to uncover this or similar information).

For Friday, March 7

Read, in *Jacobs*,

16. *Gradual Money and Cataclysmic Money* 291 - 317 (ML : 380 - 414)

17. *Subsidizing Dwellings*, pp. 321-337 (ML 417-439)

Notes on the Chapters

16. Conservatives often accuse liberals of attempting to solve problems by “throwing money at them.” Jane Jacobs is no conservative, but she agrees in this one instance that what she calls “cataclysmic money” is harmful. Look at the examples she gives to understand what she means by “cataclysmic” money, and by “gradual” money as well.

Why is the former harmful and the latter beneficial, and why, granting the harm it does, does “cataclysmic” money seem easier to come by than “gradual” money does? Again, you should be able to find examples of the application of gradual or cataclysmic money.

17. This chapter should not provide too much difficulty. The argument Jacobs made when this book was published has pretty much been accepted by the population at large in the years since. Note how she separates the housing *needs* of people from the concept of housing *affordability*. Certain populations do have special needs, but the poor are not in that category simply because of their poverty. Note the key elements of her solution. Visit the website of your city to see how problems of affordable housing are handled there. Are they attempting anything like what Jacobs suggests?

An organization very active in providing low income housing now was not on the scene when Jacobs’ book was written. I’m referring to Habitat for Humanity, and I suggest you visit its website. There’s a link on the electronic version. Then locate the affiliates page, and see what, if any, houses have been built in your city. Are there other not-for-profits working there? Are they built according to Jacobs’ principles?