

AMST 334  
Urban America  
ROGER WILLIAMS UNIVERSITY  
GHH 105  
T, TH 12:30 - 1:50  
Fall, 2009

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For *Tuesday, September 8*

Read, in *Jacobs*,

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

#### Notes

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 *Thursday, September 10*

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 who might be 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.

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 year, 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, and hold the remainder over to the next class period. 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. But this time I may have no alternatives, as there is a class in this room immediately following this one. One alternative would be to show them evenings as part of the Penny Arcade series. I'll poll people about that.

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'm going to include a general discussion blog to receive suggestions about this sort of thing.

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