

AMST 334
Urban America
ROGER WILLIAMS UNIVERSITY
GHH 108
M, Th 3:30 - 4:50
Spring, 2011

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Week of January 31, 2011

For **Monday, January 31**

Five Useful Tools

On the internet version of this syllabus are icons leading to five 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 in each case brings you to the appropriate website. Of the five, **Google Earth** (Above, left) 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 (now transformed into **BING**) is Microsoft's answer to Google Maps. I'll leave you to decide whether it is as useful. Update News! Windows Local Live has added an experimental 3D capability.

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 four programs.

American Factfinder is the public face of the Census Bureau. By the end of January, 2011, we should be able to access the latest data.

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 four 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 (I just can't

bring myself to call it BING) and Windows on Poverty, see if you can find and save parallel information from all three programs.

READ:

In Jane Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities*,
1. Introduction: pp. 3 - 25

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?

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.

Taking a clue from the quotation with which I begin this exercise, as you read this book use your new tools to find illustrations of the places she mentions. Begin by seeing if you can identify places like *Upper Broadway, East Harlem, the Lower East Side*. What do they look like? Look to ways to bookmark the things you find. We'll do some group looking in class today. On the internet version is an illustration of Morningside Heights which I located in the years before these new tools became available. You should be able to find better

ones. Clicking on it brings you to Morningside Heights Net. I'll let you discover what THAT is, yourselves.

For **Thursday, February 3**

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**)

The last time I taught this class, there were two printings of Jacobs being sold in the bookstore. 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. If I find out all or most all of you have one version, I'll save myself the labor of typing both sets of pages. The chapter titles are the same and you're all bright, so it shouldn't make any difference, anyhow.

- 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.

I hope you can see by now how much less is possible with a paper syllabus than is possible with the Internet Version. I'm going to stop providing paper copies with the provision of this week's update. I will try to keep one available for you to download. You'll find it under the date bar at the top of the week's work.