

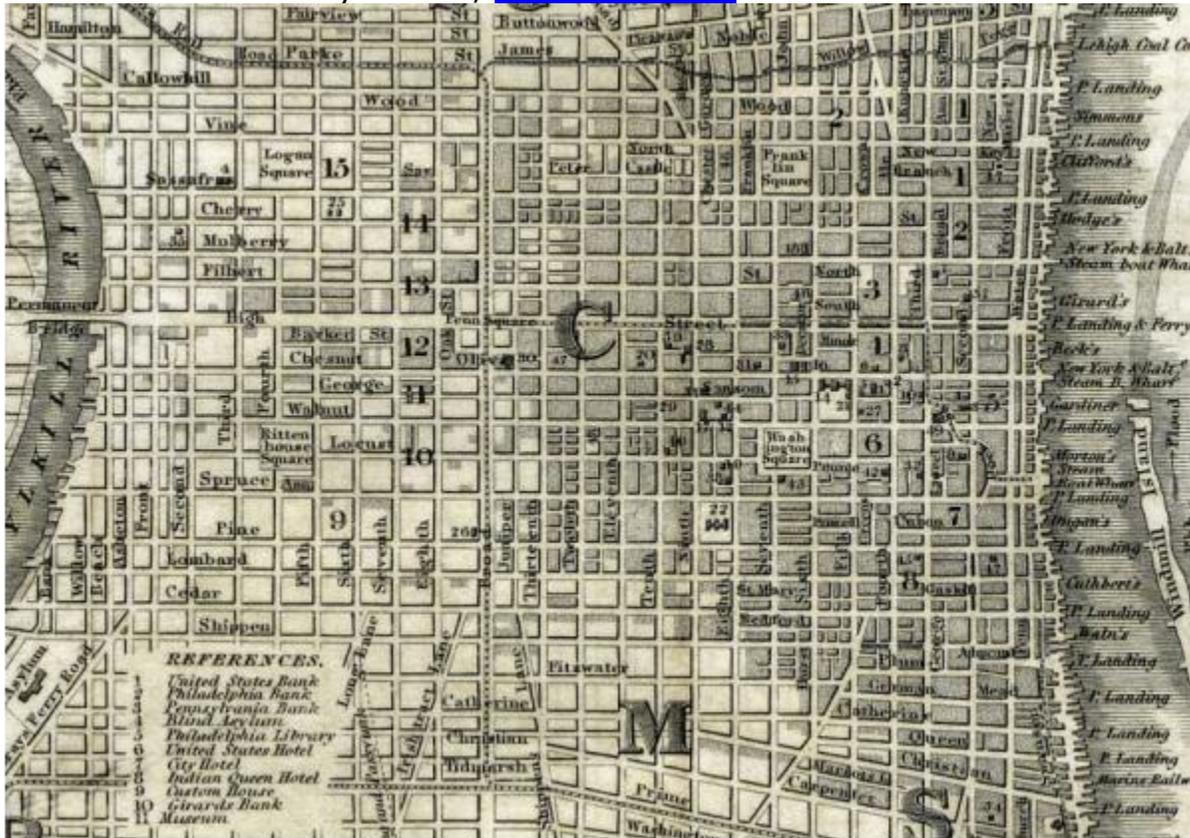
AMST 334
Urban America
ROGER WILLIAMS UNIVERSITY
GHH 108
M, Th 3:30 - 4:50
Spring, 2011

MICHAEL R. H. SWANSON Ph. D.
OFFICE: GHH 215
Hours: T, Th 9:00-10:30
M, W 1:00-2:00
PHONE: (254)-3230
Email: mswanson@rwu.edu

Fourteen ideas for your city investigations

I expect no two groups to investigate their cities the same way. In fact, I would be rather disappointed if the presentations look like clones of each other. If we've learned nothing else, we should have learned that each bit of Urban America has unique characteristics of its own. That, coupled with the fact that are groups vary considerably in size, should lead to considerable differences in presentations. Below are *some* ideas some of you might wish to pursue. The list is *not inclusive*. There are other things which some of you might choose to pursue. I'd like to have a mix of things for each city, variety is the spice of life. So here are a few ideas.

1 **Why is your city where it is**, and how did the location shape the history and culture of the city? Here, [historic maps](#) can be useful.



2. Public Art. Making Cities Beautiful

Who or What does your city choose to memorialize through its outdoor Public Art–Statues, murals and the like? (You might enjoy comparing public art from different periods).

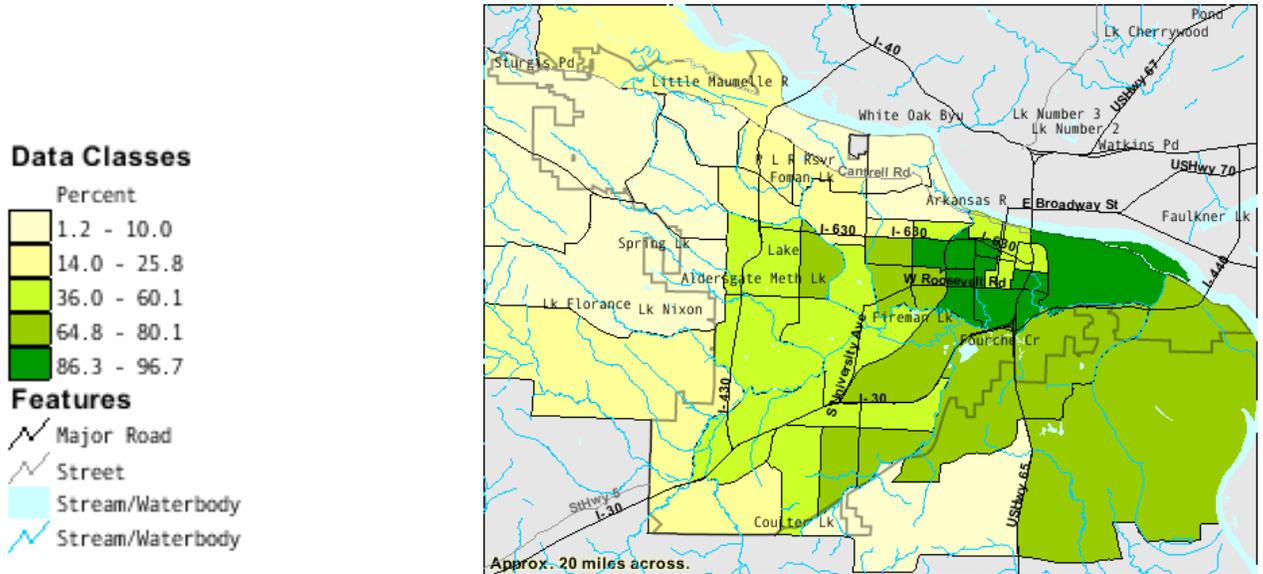




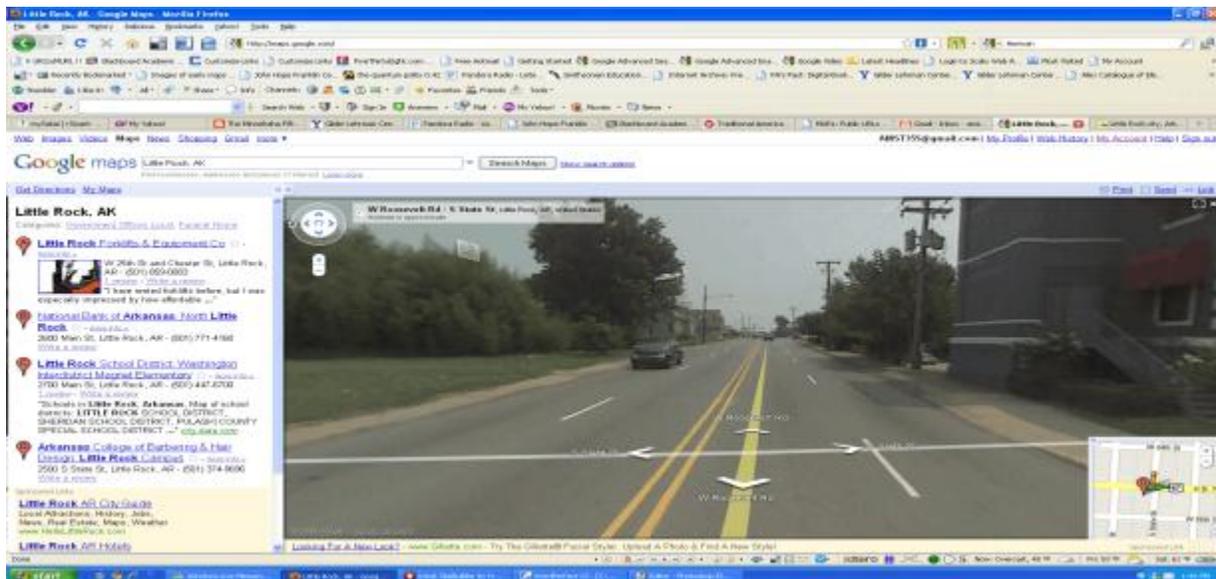
3. Who Lives Where? (And Why?)

There are several possibilities here, each of which could begin with a visit to **American Factfinder**.

TM-P004B. Percent of Persons Who Are Black or African American Alone: 2000 More information about this theme...



Having located an area statistically interesting, visit it with streetfinder.



6. Our Town, Then and Now.

The more historically inclined might enjoy prowling around a number of sources of historical photographs—looking to see what was there at one time, and what, if anything, still survives. In some cases, you might be able to find [local collections of historical photographs](#). In other cases, you'll be able to find **national collections** with interesting pictures in them.



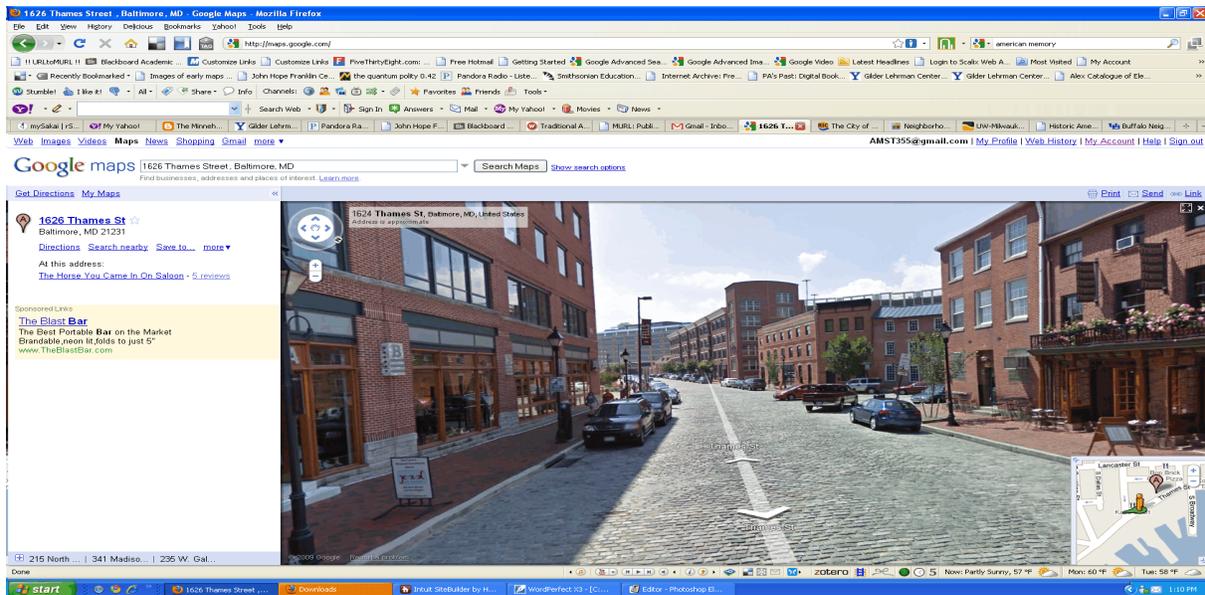
The beer brewed here made this city famous, or so the advertisements would have you believe. What's the building's use now?





And where might this have been?

What's gone? What's Still there?



7. **What's on the Community's Mind?**

The [Internet Public Library](#) is a good place to check up on the local news. Concentrate on the local stuff, and don't forget to look at editorials and at letters to the editor. There are other sites online with large collections of Newspapers, including, [ABYZ Newslinks](#). You want the second listing on the linked pages. Here, you'll find all sorts of media.

8. **Public Safety—is there any?**

For those with an interest in cops and robbers, keeping tabs on crime in your communities is an option. A bit ago, this would have been more difficult, but evidently there are enough crime fans to support a commercial website devoted to just that. So if you want to [Spot Crime](#), be my guest. Which areas of your city are comparatively safe? Which less so. Look around the neighborhoods for evidence related to Jacobs' ideas about this. Look back to the [American Factfinder](#) demographics to see if you see any particular correlations, and look at the local press to see how it does (or does not) treat certain kinds of crime.

9. **The Lively Arts.**

What's going on in the art world in your city? You might begin investigating with the [National Endowment for the Arts](#). You may also be successful search for (your city)+ Arts Council. Many cities have them. Look in the local newspapers to see what's going on, and then look to streetview to see where the venues for the arts are in your city.

10. **Festivals and Celebrations**

New York has the Thanksgiving Parade, Philadelphia, the Mummers Parade, Minneapolis, the Aquatennial, and St. Paul the Winter Carnival. Does your city have a local festival. IF there's not a city-wide festival, are there neighborhood festivals or celebrations associated with specific ethnic or church communities? What can you find out about them. [Festivals.Com](#) has a database for this. I haven't given it a thorough workout. But it looks to be worth a look.

11. What works and What Doesn't.

What would count the greatest success in your city? What the greatest failure? What parts of your city work, and which parts don't. If your city suffered a [great disaster](#) (Not all of them as famous as the San Francisco Earthquake or the Chicago Fire, how did it respond)?

12. My Neighborhood is better than Your Neighborhood.

This probably works best with two members of a group. Each take a neighborhood and argue why and in what ways it is a better asset to the city as a whole.

tips for Pittsburghers send a postcard the press room

search this site Clusty

MEET THE NEIGHBORHOODS

- Bloomfield >
- Lawrenceville >
- Mount Washington >
- North Side >
- Oakland >
- South Side >
- Strip District >

home get more info >

Pittsburgh Neighborhood Tours

view map (pdf) print

Most cities have some web location designed to promote the neighborhoods which constitute them. The [Pittsburgh neighborhood tours](#) website is a good example of this sort of thing. So is Mount Washington better than the Strip District? In what way? Fight it out, Mounties and Strippers. (Use as many of the tools as we've been learning to use during the semester).

13. Aspects of Religious Life in my community.

You will have noticed that both Google Maps and Google Earth identify the locations of Churches, Mosques, Temples, Synagogues, and the like with



symbols. An investigator could choose a number of these, visit them with Streetfinder, and see what one can tell about the relationship of the institution to the community. In nearly every community you'll find a range of buildings from storefront churches to grand structures seating hundreds if not thousands. [Some of them have websites](#). Locate these and visit them to find out what the organization wants the world to know about itself. What kind of social services (they may call them ministries) are sponsored through them?



14 School Days, School Days

Those of you thinking about a career in education might want to investigate aspects of the school system in your city. You can generally find school information linked to the City Government page—including announcements of school board meetings and the like. [City-Data.Com](#) has information about selected elementary and secondary schools, both public and private. Go to the city page first, and then scroll down. You'll find a lot of information, especially about the public schools.

