

AMST 334
Urban America
ROGER WILLIAMS UNIVERSITY
GHH 108
T, TH 11:00 -12:20
Spring, 2013

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Week of March 5, 2013

For *Tuesday, March 5*

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. 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. Google Earth now also has an enhanced model (i.e. you have to pay for it). I don't think you'll need that much Googleology.

Whatever Google does, Microsoft eventually does. Starting as Microsoft Live, it's now known as Bing. Don't ask me why.

Windows on Poverty, is a project of the Bruton Center. The data used is a bit out of date--the 2000 census, but the general picture hasn't changed to the extent that it is no longer useful. See if you can find and save parallel information from all three programs.

For *Tuesday, March 5*

READ:

In Jane Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities*,

1. Introduction: pp. 3 - 25

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. The cities in which you will "linger, listen, and think" will be the cities you've chosen.

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 page 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. Then apply those techniques to your own cities.

ALSO

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?

For *Thursday, March 7*

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)

There may be two printings of Jacobs in use in this class 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.

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.

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.

This type of hot dog stand shown on the website is gone, perhaps, but a contemporary version can be found in the downtown areas of many major cities. When the weather gets more springlike, you'll see Lemonade making a presence on Public Square in Downtown Providence.

Looking Ahead:

Spring Break starts Saturday, March 9. Could there be a better time to start reading a good old Victorian Novel like *The Rise of Silas Lapham*? Remember it is a freebie in several versions. You can download it free from [Amazon Books](#) or from [Project Gutenberg](#).

Surprise me and have it read by the end of break. It's a love story, a social class story, and a story of why some parts of Boston were "fashionable" and others "unfashionable". Can you move into high society just by having a ton of money and a good address?