

This syllabus from the late Professor Edward W. Soja is archived at the UCLA Luskin website. As a student of Soja, I have downloaded the syllabus and archived a copy at c1typlann3r.blog to create a stable, permanent backup of his course materials. ~JPB, 1 February 2026

UP 133/233

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF URBANIZATION

An Introduction to Critical Urban Studies

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The urbanization of the world has recently reached a new threshold. Today the majority of the world's population not only lives in cities but is increasingly concentrated in large metropolitan regions of more than one million inhabitants. This concentration of population in 450 or so sprawling *city regions*, as they are now called, has been accompanied over the past thirty years by many dramatic changes in the form and functioning of cities, in the ways the urban political economy is organized, in the cultural composition of the population, and in the very nature of urbanism as a way of life. These changes have, in turn, stimulated many new approaches to studying cities and the urbanization process.

This course will focus on these *new approaches to urban studies* and, in particular, on how urban scholars have been analyzing and interpreting the *restructuring of the modern metropolis* that has been taking place over the past three decades. Specific attention will be given to the "regional city" of Los Angeles and to the development of explicitly *spatial perspectives* in urban studies and in the theory and practice of urban planning. This strong spatial perspective distinguishes this course from other urban studies courses you may have taken. Reflecting the objectives of the UCLA Urban Planning Department, the objective of the course is not just to understand the contemporary city but to find ways to make urban life better.

This year, additional attention will be given to the resurgence of innovative coalitions of labor and community-based organizations in Los Angeles and their relations with the university and especially UCLA Urban Planning. These coalitions include the Bus Riders Union, Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), and the Right to the City Alliance. All involve to some degree a search for specifically spatial justice.

By the end of the course, students should be able to answer such questions as

- how did Los Angeles become the densest urbanized area in the US?
- why is LA such an excellent place to study urban restructuring?
- Is there actually an LA School of critical urban studies?
- what is postmodern urbanism?
- what is regional urbanization and how does it differ from metropolitan urbanization?
- is suburbia being urbanized today? Is Orange County urban or suburban?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: There are different requirements for undergraduate students (UP133) and graduate students (UP233).

Undergraduate students:

Undergraduates from all majors are welcome to take the course UP133 as a broad introduction to urban studies and planning. Preference will be given, however, to Geography students and those majoring/minoring in Urban and Regional Planning. Classroom attendance and participation will count for 10% of the final grade. In addition to the Required Readings, there will be three required papers and a take-home **Final Exam**.

---1. A 2-4 page paper on a topic to be announced, **due the 5th week of class**.

---2. A 1000-word critical essay on "The New American City" written in the style of a newspaper op-ed or Opinion article, **due the 7th week**.

---3. A 6-8 page seminar paper based on a topic of your choice, **due the last day of class**. A **short proposal** describing your topic must be submitted before the 7th week of classes.

---4. **Final Exam**

Graduate students:

UP 233 is one of three courses that satisfy the "Urbanization" requirement in the Urban Planning Masters core curriculum. Course requirements, in addition to attendance, classroom participation, and Required Readings, include:

---1. A 4-6 page paper on "Planning Perspectives on the Shift from Metropolitan to Regional Urbanization" **due the 6th week of class**.

---2. A 1000-word critical essay on "The New American City" written in the style of a newspaper op-ed or Opinion article, **due the 7th week**. (same as for undergraduates)

---3. Group papers: Students will be assigned to groups based on the six discourses discussed in weeks 4-8. Based on the lectures, the Required Readings, and the list of supplementary readings, the team will produce a 10 page paper discussing each of the discourses, how they relate to the others, and what the supplementary readings add to the discussion. The paper will conclude with some observations on how the discourses relate to specific planning and policy issues. **Due one week after the class discussions**. Students will also be expected to raise some interesting questions at the appropriate lectures. Presentations will take place in the last hour of class on the day of the lecture.

---4. Seeking Spatial Justice papers. The roughly 4-6 page papers will focus on one specific topic discussed or mentioned in *Seeking Spatial Justice* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010). Topics can range from an organization (LAANE, the Bus Riders Union) to an individual (Gilda Haas, Madeleine Janis) to a concept (right to the city, critical vs normative theory, justice as a mobilizing metaphor) to anything else you find interesting in reading the text, including how it might relate to the Occupy movement. The papers should "locate" the topic in the book but need not be complete reviews. The aim is to supplement what is discussed in the book by digging more deeply into a particular topic/issue/question. **Papers are due the Monday of finals week.** Class presentations: Students will present some of their findings in Week 10.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

Required readings are from **Edward Soja, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions* (Blackwell, 2000)**. Also recommended, especially for graduate students, is **Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities, and the Urban Condition* (Routledge, 2001)**. Both books are available on reserve at the library (YRL) and a limited number for sale in the Luvalle bookstore. For most weeks there is also a short list of supplementary readings on reserve at the YRL for those who wish to dig further into some of the issues discussed in class.

Week 1 -- Putting Space First: An Introduction to Contemporary Urban Studies

- new developments in spatial theory and critical studies of cities and regions*
- cityspace and the stimulus of urban agglomeration*
- the postmetropolitan transition: from metropolitan to regional urbanization*
- a first look at Seeking Spatial Justice*

Readings: E. Soja, Postmetropolis (2000), Preface and Introduction to Part I
S. Graham and S. Marvin, Splintering Urbanism (2001) Prologue
and Introduction
Paper on Regional Urbanization—To be distributed

Week 2 -- Rethinking the Geohistory of Urbanization

- new views on the origins and development of cities*
- three urban revolutions: from Çatalhöyük to Ur to Manchester*
- the urban foundations of agriculture, state and empire, and industrialization*

Readings: Postmetropolis, chapters 1-3

-Jane Jacobs, The Economy of Cities. New York: Random House 1969

Week 3 -- The Evolution of Urban Studies

- Engels and Manchester*
- the Chicago School and urban ecology*
- Marxism and the new urban political economy*
- critical urban studies and the “LA school”?*

Readings: Postmetropolis, chapters 4 and 5
Splintering Urbanism, chapter 2

-David Harvey, Social Justice and the City (1973), especially chapter 2
-Manuel Castells, The Urban Question (1977), especially chapters 5-7
-Michael Dear, The Postmodern Urban Condition (2000).
-Edward Soja, “From Crisis-Generated Restructuring to Restructuring-Generated Crisis,” chapter 14
in Scott and Soja eds, The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the 20th Century
(1996)

Week 4 -- Industrial Restructuring and the New Geopolitical Economy

- the discourse on industrial urbanism*
- postfordism and flexible accumulation*
- deindustrialization/reindustrialization and the New Economy*
- city regions and the rise of regional urbanization*

Readings: Postmetropolis, Introduction to Part II and chapter 6
Splintering Urbanism, chapters 3 and 4

- David Harvey and Allen Scott, "The Practice of Human Geography: Theory and Empirical Specificity in the Transition from Fordism to Flexible Specialization," in B. Macmillan ed., Remodelling Geography (1989)
- Allen Scott, Metropolis: From the Division of Labor to Urban Form (1988)
- Bennett Harrison, The Great U-Turn: Corporate Restructuring and the Polarizing of America (1988)
- Michael Storper, The Regional World: Territorial Development in a Global Economy (1997)
- Allen Scott, Regions and the World Economy (1998)

Week 5 -- *Globalization and World City Formation*

- *metropolis unbound—the urbanization of the world*
- *the globality of production and the production of globality*
- *understanding 'glocalization'*
- *deterritorialization/reterritorialization*
- *a new cosmopolitanism?*

Readings: Postmetropolis, chapter 7
Splintering Urbanism, chapter 7

- John Friedmann, "Where We Stand: A Decade of World City Research" and "The World City Hypothesis," in Knox and Taylor eds., World Cities in a World System (1995)
- Saskia Sassen, The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo (latest edition)
- E. Soja and Miguel Kanai "The Urbanization of the World," in Ricky Burdett and Dayan Sudjic, The Endless City. New York and London, Phaidon, 2008: 54-69.

Week 6 -- *Exopolis: The Restructuring of Urban Form*

- *edge cities, exopolis, and the urbanization of suburbia*
- *pathologies of postsuburbia*
- *regional urbanization processes*

Readings: Postmetropolis, chapter 8
Splintering Urbanism, chapter 4

- Edward Soja. "Inside Exopolis: Everyday Life in a Postmodern World," in Soja, Thirdspace (1996)
- Joel Garreau, Edge Cities: Life on the New Frontier (1991)
- Paul Knox, Metroburbia USA, Rutgers University Press (2008)

Week 7 -- *The Fractal City and the Surge of Inequalities*

- *widening gaps and new polarities*
- *immigration, multiculturalism, and public policy*
- *the restructured social mosaic*

Readings: Postmetropolis, chapter 9
Splintering Cities, chapter 5

- Mike Davis, Planet of Slums, Verso (2006)
- M. Pastor, C. Benner, and M. Matsuoka, This Could Be the Start of Something Big: How New Social Movements for Regional Equity are Reshaping Metropolitan America (2009)

Week 8 – PART I - *The Carceral Archipelago: Privatizing Public Space*

--surveillance, security, and the rise of fortress cities

--security-obsessed urbanism

--the new enclosures: gated communities and privatopias

Readings: Postmetropolis, chapter 10

Splintering Cities, chapter 6

-Mike Davis, City of Quartz (1990)

-Edward Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States (1997)

-Evan McKenzie, Privatopia: Homeowner Associations and the Rise of Residential Private Government (1994) and Beyond Privatopia: Rethinking Residential Private Government (2011)

-Setha Low, Behind the Gates: Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America (2003)

-- PART II - *Simcities: Restructuring the Urban Imaginary*

--the hyperreality of everyday life

--theme-parking the city

--cybercities: the electronic generation of hyperreality

--SIMcities, SIMgovernment, and SIMplanning: spin doctoring reality

Readings: Postmetropolis, chapters 11-13

-M. Christine Boyer, Cybercities: Visual Perception in the Age of Electronic Communication (1996)

-Michael Sorkin ed., Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space (1992)

-Celeste Olalquiaga, Megalopolis: Contemporary Cultural Sensibilities (1992)

Week 9 -- *Seeking Spatial Justice and the Right to the City*

Readings: Postmetropolis, chapter 14

Splintering Urbanism, chapter 8 and Postscript

Edward Soja, Seeking Spatial Justice, University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Week 10 – GRADUATE STUDENT PRESENTATIONS