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URBST 103 Urban Diversity Syllabus

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Queens College
URBST 103 Urban Diversity
Asynchronous Online
Instructor: Padmini Biswas
Office Hours: By appointment
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COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course introduces the study of urban diversity in the United States. It explores the different forms of identity, community and cultural belonging that dot the urban landscape, and analyzes the historical, social, political, and economic forces that shape the everyday lives of diverse urban populations. The course analyzes debates over migration, assimilation, pluralism, multiculturalism, and interlocking oppressions and introduces students to urban studies' multidisciplinary approaches to the study of diversity and inequality.

This class uses open educational resources or zero-textbook-cost materials. There are no required textbooks for purchase. All materials are freely available or will be provided by the instructor. Funded in part by the CUNY OER Initiative.

This course fills the Pathways requirement: U.S. Experience in Its Diversity.

Course Objectives:

- To acquire basic knowledge of racial, ethnic, national, gender, and other forms of diversity in urban areas using the fundamental concepts and methods of urban studies, and to place urban communities and neighborhoods in their historical, political and economic context.
- To observe and analyze the impact of residential changes on urban form and city life and upon individuals within society.
- To master basic theoretical frameworks for analyzing migration, pluralism, assimilation, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitanism in US cities, and to be able to apply these frameworks, in written and oral form, to contemporary racial, ethnic, national, and class change as it affects individuals within the society.

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COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This class is graded out of 100 percentage points. Your grade is comprised of a combination of weekly multiple choice quizzes, a midterm assignment, and a final assignment. Details will be provided on Brightspace.

COURSE POLICIES

Respectful participation: Please note that people come to this class with different kinds of academic expertise, different life experiences, and different customs (both individual and cultural). These differences can, and hopefully will, contribute positively to the substance and quality of class discussion. However, because these differences are often related to social inequalities, they can also be a source of misunderstanding and frustration. It is thus important to keep in mind that active, respectful class participation is as much about listening to and engaging in the ideas of others as it is about speaking one's own mind.

Incompletes: Incompletes will be given only on the rarest occasions, under the most pressing circumstances.

Email Policy: Please put the name of your course in the subject line along with the topic of your email. I will respond to your email within one business day.

Brightspace: The syllabus, any readings, instructions, and grades will be posted to our course web page on Brightspace. It is YOUR responsibility to check Brightspace regularly for all course materials. Information on Brightspace is available online:

• Log in: https://www.cuny.edu/academics/brightspace-transition/

• Getting started guide: https://www.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/media-assets/Student-Brightspace-Guide.pdf

Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism: Queens College takes cheating and plagiarism very seriously; if caught you may fail the course and/or be suspended from college. Do not copy other people's work. This means that you should not take the words or ideas of another person and submit them without acknowledging the original author. Examples of plagiarism include copying from another student's homework assignment or taking phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or statistical findings from a variety of sources and piecing them together without citing them. Taking phrases, paragraphs, or papers from course readings, the internet, generative artificial

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intelligence, or other students and representing them as your own falls under this category. For further information regarding CUNY's academic integrity policies, see https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/legal-affairs/policies-resources/academic-integrity-policy/

SYLLABUS

Unit 1: Contextualizing Urban Diversity

Week 1: Observing the Urban

- Read: Mumford, L. (1937) "What is a city?" Architectural Record. (see Brightspace)
- Read: Jacobs, J. (1961) Introduction. In The Death and Life of Great American Cities, New York: Vintage Books. (see Brightspace)
- Watch: Jacob Riis, How the Other Half Lives and NYC Tenement Housing

We begin our study of urban diversity by asking not just "what is a city?" but also, "who are cities for?" These questions define urban planning and politics.

Week 2: The Idea of America

- Read: Hannah-Jones, N. (2019) "The Idea of America." The 1619 Project/ The New York Times Magazine, August 14.
- Listen: The Fight for a True Democracy (podcast by Nikole Hannah-Jones)

Nikole Hannah-Jones writes about the historic struggle for civil rights that has made the American Dream possible for people of every color, including birthright citizenship, the right to own property, and the right to fair labor conditions. If you had to pick just one, what civil right would you *never* give up?

Week 3: Capitalism

- Read: Desmond, M. (2019) "Capitalism." The 1619 Project/ The New York Times Magazine, August 14
- Listen: The Economy that Slavery Built (podcast, Matthew Desmond in conversation with Nikole Hannah-Jones)

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Everyone knows that the road to achieving the American Dream is a long one. But does it have to be ..... so hard, all the time? Matthew Desmond describes the development and persistence of what he calls "low road capitalism" in the U.S.

Week 4: Segregation by Design, Poverty by Purpose

- Read: Kruse, K. (2019) "Traffic." The 1619 Project/ The New York Times Magazine, August 14.
- Explore: Inequality in NYC: A Legacy of Redlining
- Read: Lee, T. (2019) "The Wealth Gap." The 1619 Project/ The New York Times Magazine, August 14
- Watch: Black Wall Street in 1921 Tulsa

New York City is simultaneously very ethnically diverse and extremely racially segregated, with the density of poverty tied to non-white urban populations. Most all other American cities are that way too. Why?

Unit 2: Encountering Migration

Week 6: Indigenous Erasure

- Read: Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (2010) Manahatta to Manhattan. [Brochure]
  Read: Levitt, Z. et al (2023) "War Against the Children: Native American Boarding Schools," New York Times, August 30.
- Watch: Unseen Tears
- Explore: Treaties Still Matter: the Dakota Access Pipeline

The blueprint for exclusion in America was crafted when European colonizers met the indigenous peoples of North America. These processes of systemic marginalization and community erasure continue today.

Week 7: U.S. Immigration Law Begins: The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882

- Read: Lin, J. (1998) 'From Bachelor Society to Immigrant Enclave," in Lin, J. (1998) *Reconstructing Chinatown: Ethnic Enclave, Global Change*, University of Minnesota Press. (see Brightspace)
- Watch: What was the impact of the Chinese Exclusion Act?

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- Read: Hum, T. (2021). Black dispossession and the making of Downtown Flushing. *Progressive City: Radical Alternatives*.

Immigration to the U.S. was a free for all until 1882 when the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed. Ever since, who can be here "legally" depends on the law.

Week 8: European American Histories

- Read: Foner, N. (2000) "Who they are and why have they come," Chapter 1 in *From Ellis Island to JFK: New York's Two Great Waves of Immigration* Princeton: Princeton University Press. (see Brightspace)
- Watch: The Rise of Eugenics in America
- Watch: U.S. Immigration Policy and the Experiences of Jewish Refugees During the Holocaust (focus on clip #6, the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924)
- Read: Chishti, M. and Gelatt, J. (2024) "A Century Later, Restrictive 1924 U.S. Immigration Law Has Reverberations in Immigration Debate." Migration Information Source/Migration Policy Institute.

Were immigrants ever welcome in this "nation of immigrants"? Learn how views on immigration in 2024 echo sentiments prevalent in the U.S. in 1924.

Week 9: Diversity and Urban Disinvestment

- Watch: Decade of Fire directed by Vivian Irizarry
- Read: Meyerson, H. (2015) "How the Bronx Came Back, but Didn't Bring Everyone Along," The American Prospect, October 12.
- Explore: Our Bronx

Although immigration was essentially banned in 1924, the next 40 years saw New York City diversify with new groups of U.S. citizens: Black Americans migrating north from the southern states, and Puerto Ricans migrating from the Caribbean. How policy makers responded to this population shift in the 1970s is a sobering lesson in the continuing imbrication of race with place in the U.S.

Week 10: Post-1965 Immigration Policies

- Read: Orchowski, M.S. (2015) "Making the law that changed the face of America: The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965," Chapter 3 in Orchowski, M.S. (2015) *The Law that Changed the Face of America: The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965* New York: Rowman and Littlefield. (see Brightspace)

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- Explore: Lai, R. and Medina, J. (2023) "An American Puzzle: Fitting Race in a Box," The New York Times October 16.
- Read: Chishti, M., et al (2015) "Fifty Years On, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act Continues to Reshape the United States." Migration Information Source/Migration Policy Institute.

The U.S. is projected to become a majority-minority (less than half non-Hispanic white) country by 2045. Learn about the laws that make this a reality.

Unit 3: Rights in the Diverse City

Week 11: Feminist City

- Read: Kern, L. (2020) "City of Men," and "City of Moms," in Kern, L. (2020) *Feminist City: Claiming Space in a Man-made World,* New York: Verso. (see Brightspace)
- Read: Chin, J., et al (2019) Illicit Massage Parlors in L.A. County and NYC
- Watch: Fly in Power

Can a city itself be sexist? Design, law, and culture make this true.

Week 12: Queer Justice

- Read: Ghaziani, A. (2010) There Goes the Gayborhood? Contexts Vol.9, No. 4, pp.64-66.
  Explore: Behind the Bushes: the Gay History of the Highline
  LGBTQ+ History in Central Park
- Watch: Pier Kids
- Watch: Day's End

What does it mean for a city to be safe for queer people, and why is this important to all of us?

Week 13: Abilities as Community

- Watch: Crip Camp, a Disability Revolution
- Read: Carmel, J. (2020) Before the ADA, There was 504. New York Times July 22.
  Read: Blair-Goldensohn, S. (2017) New York Has a Great Subway, If You're Not in a Wheelchair. New York Times March 29.

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The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 was initiated and fought for by disabled people themselves, with much work still left to be done to ensure accessibility for all.

Week 14: Urban Biodiversity

- Read: Myers, J. (2023) "Community Gardens: Spaces of Resistance," in *Growing Gardens, Building Power: Food Justice and Urban Agriculture in Brooklyn* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press (see Brightspace)
- Watch: Trying to Eat Healthy in a Food Desert
- Watch: Poaching Wildlife in New York City

Everyone needs to eat to stay alive. But hunger is shaped by social inequalities that are already built into our city. How do we create systems that sustain healthier ways to live, not just survive?

Week 15: Final Assignment Due

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