

Sociology 7010/8802 CRN: 25883
The Future of Cities: Reinventing Detroit
Winter 2015
Mon 5:30-9:00
0217 State Hall

Professor David Fasenfest

COURSE SYLLABUS

This course is an exploration in urban development, with a focus on how we got to the present situation for cities built up during the expansion of capitalism, how we understand the pressures that led to their decline, and assess the potential and possibilities for their resurgence. This is a graduate seminar, and as such I make two important assumptions:

- 1) Student come to this course with a background in social science theory and analysis;
- 2) Students are prepared to undertake a research project—whether that is a critical review of existing literature, an exploration into possible future research topics, or a furthering of an existing research agenda

READINGS:

You will be expected to read the assigned material prior to the course meeting on the topic, as detailed in the calendar at the end of this syllabus. In addition to the books listed below (they should be available at the campus bookstore, but can be purchased online, and for each there is likely to be used copies available), there will be readings available as PDF downloads on our course Blackboard. All of the books are readily available, and there should be no excuse that you could not find or get the material in advance.

Books:

Susan S. Fainstein, 2011 *The Just City* (paperback, Cornell University Press)

David Harvey, 2009 *Social Justice and the City* (paperback revised edition, The University of California Press)

David Harvey, 2013 *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (paperback, Verso Press)

Peter Marcuse, et al, 2011 (eds) *Searching for the Just City: Debates in Urban Theory and Practice* (paperback, Routledge)

Thomas Sugrue, 2014 *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Post- War Detroit* (paperback, latest edition--Princeton University Press)

Additional readings: (available on Blackboard)

Peter Eisinger (2014) Is Detroit Dead? *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 36: 1: 1–12

Draft Chapters from: Michael Peter Smith and Lucas Owen Kirkpatrick (eds.), forthcoming, *Reinventing Detroit*, Volume 11, Comparative Urban and Community Research, Piscataway, NJ:Transaction Books

Part 1: Theoretical, Epistemological, and Pedagogical Frameworks

Reinventing Detroit: Karl Polanyi and the Politics of Possibility
L. Owen Kirkpatrick and Michael Peter Smith

The Spontaneous Sociology of Detroit's Hyper-Crisis
Mathieu Hikaru Desan and George Steinmetz

Learning from Detroit: How Research on a Declining City
Challenges Urban Theory
*Margaret Dewar, Matthew Weber, Eric Seymour, Meagan Elliott,
and Patrick Cooper-McCann*

Part 2: How We Got Here: Race, the State, and Markets

National Urban Policy and the Fate of Detroit
William K. Tabb

The Normalization of Market-fundamentalism in Detroit—The
Case of Land Abandonment
Jason Hackworth

Part 3: Where We Are: Fiscal Crisis, Local Democracy, and Neoliberal
Austerity

Detroit in Bankruptcy: It Didn't Have to Turn Out This Way
Reynolds Farley

Democracy vs. Efficiency in Detroit
John Gallagher

Sacrificial City: Redistribution and Ritual in De-democratized
Detroit
L. Owen Kirkpatrick

Framing Detroit
Jamie Peck

Part 4: Where We're Going: Pitfalls and Possibilities

A Community Wealth Building Vision for Detroit –And Beyond
Gar Alperowitz and Steve Dubb

The Cooperative City
David Fasenfest

Detroit Prospects: Why Recovery is Elusive
Peter Eisinger

Which Way, "Detroit"?
Peter Marcuse

Student Directed Reading: (will be available on Blackboard)

To be determined: An updated schedule and readings assigned will be posted

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

There are three dimensions to this course that will determine your course grade:

- 1) *Weekly reading assessments:* On Sunday evening, prior to each class meeting from 26 January to 9 March inclusive (7 weeks), you are expected to submit a maximum 2 page brief on that week's reading. This brief will be in the form of a book (or essay collection) review designed to inform others of its main points and possible shortcomings. The form will include: Title for your review, your name and date, a proper citation, and the body of your review (see example of a review appearing in *Critical Sociology* at the end of this syllabus).
- 2) *A paper proposal* (2-3 pages) for a 10-16 pages (2500-4000 words) final essay that specifies your research interest (it need not be original, but reflects a topic that relates to this course content...but can include a draft of an MA Essay or Thesis, or a PhD dissertation proposal). This proposal, due as an email attachment to me by February 1st by 6pm, must include a tentative bibliography of representative readings, as well as PDFs of at least 4 items that will be assigned for class reading. I am willing to discuss your ideas prior to your submitting the proposal, but once accepted this must be the basis for your presentation of a (very?) preliminary draft of your paper in class (either March 30 or April 13).
- 3) *Your final paper* (due May 1st), which should reflect the comments from our class discussions of the readings you assigned (March 23 or April 6 respectively),

comments received from other students during your class presentation (each paper will have a student assigned as a discussant for that presentation on March 30 and April 13), and comments from me on your final draft of your seminar paper submitted on April 18, as well as during our meeting April 20th.

Grading Criteria:

My grading scheme is necessarily subjective, and as such I am always willing to listen to an appeal (but it is, in the end, my decision). Your final grade is essentially cumulative, but is heavily based on your final seminar paper.

“A” level work consists of cogent, well-articulated, and well-developed written and oral presentation, demonstrating insight, originality, and complexity in both form (e.g., language, expression, organization) and substance (e.g., logical argumentation, factual accuracy, and appropriate examples); critical thinking skills are amply demonstrated; sociological imagination is highly active; tasks are completed on time and according to the guidelines, often going “above and beyond”. “A” level work is considered excellent.

“A-/B+” level work is thoughtful and developed, but may not be original, particularly insightful, or precise. While ideas might be clear, focused, and organized, they are less likely to be comprehensive or dialectical. Critical thinking skills are satisfactory; sociological imagination is active. “A-” level work is considered good and shows some originality. “B+” work is still good, but only goes a little beyond the most basic grasp of concepts and ideas, though with satisfactory levels of communication. These are my most common grades.

“B” level work is reasonably competent, yet may be unclear, inconsistent, and minimally inadequate in form and/or content. Critical thinking skills are minimal; sociological imagination is weak. “B” level work is considered mediocre and barely adequate. Keep in mind that you must get at least a “B” in any one graduate course for a passing grade, and your overall average has to be better than a “B,” implying offsetting “A” grades. This grade will reflect my concern about your overall grasp of the material and/or your ability to convey what you know effectively.

“B-” level work is not competent, appropriate, relevant, complete, and/or adequate in form and/or content, thereby not fully meeting the minimum requirements for graduate level work. Critical thinking skills are largely absent; and one’s sociological imagination is lacking. “B-” level work is not passing at the graduate level, and will require you to retake this course if you want the credit to count. I have yet to give a “B-“ grade, nor do I give a lower grade.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES and ASSIGNMENTS

DATE	THEME	READING
Jan 12	Introduction to the course	Eisinger, <i>Is Detroit Dead?</i>
Jan 26	Detroit in Historical Context	Sugrue, <i>Origins</i>
Feb 1	A 2-page problem statement for your course paper, including a tentative bibliography that specifies at least 4 representative articles you would want everyone to read	
Feb 2	Reinventing Detroit	Smith and Kirkpatrick, Parts 1 and 2
Feb 9	Urban Social Justice – New Imaginaries	Harvey, <i>Social Justice</i>
Feb 16	The Just City - Possibilities	Fainstein, <i>Just City</i>
Feb 23	The Just City - Realities	Marcuse, <i>Searching for the Just City</i>
Mar 2	Directions for Urban Social Change	Harvey, <i>Rebel Cities</i>
Mar 9	Reinventing Detroit	Smith and Kirkpatrick, Parts 3 and 4
Mar 23	Student Assigned Readings	TBD
Mar 30	Presentations (first half of class):	
Apr 6	Student Assigned Readings	TBD
Apr 13	Presentations (second half of class):	
Apr 20	Individual meetings: discuss draft papers	Draft papers dues April 18
Apr 27	Writing—no class meeting	
May 1	Final Papers due	

Review of: *Democracy in Modern Iran*, by Ali Mirsepassi. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2010, 219 pp. \$42.00 (hard). ISBN: 9780814795644.

Brigitte U. Neary
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Ali Mirsepassi's thesis appears to be twofold: one, he argues for a sociology that assumes divergent developmental trajectories between countries; and two, he maintains that democracy in Iran is possible. To him, both proposals require reconciling the "false contradictions" that regard religion and secularism as binary opposites instead of placing them along a continuum. Mirsepassi convincingly demonstrates he is a scholar of both the history of social thought and of Iran. But the organization of his work makes it a difficult read. *Democracy in Modern Iran* would have been more accessible if Mirsepassi had first explicitly laid out the conceptual frameworks he challenges, then the one he proposes, and then used Iran as a case example for his claim. That might have required a different title. In its current structure, for the first several chapters, the book puzzles the reader regarding the relationship between title and content.

Mirsepassi establishes a connection between the Enlightenment paradigm and the prevailing modernization model and challenges both as Eurocentric, totalizing perspectives. While Western scholars have introduced and perpetuated these totalizing arguments, they are not the only ones who embrace them. Because of the self-appointed and taken-for-granted, elevated status of Western paradigms, secular Iranian intellectuals are among the non-Western thinkers who have historically also adhered to them. Consequently, they have applied the progressive modernity perspective as a lens for Iranian democratization, involving secularization without foreign domination. According to Said Arjomand (*The Turban and the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran*), during the 1979 revolution the intellectuals lost out to the hard-line clerics with whom they shared their anti-foreign intervention stance, but not the vision of "theocratic absolutism" the clerics and their followers installed at the end (1988: 89). Mirsepassi seems to suggest this outcome reflects the false contradiction between religion and secularism of Western models imposed on Iran from without and within.

In contrast to the convergence model, rooted in the Enlightenment paradigm, that universally places countries along a similar trajectory to democracy based on a Western template, Ali Mirsepassi proposes a more localized approach. To my mind, he renovates the "embeddedness" thesis Mark Granovetter proposed in "Economic Action and Social Structure" (1985). Whereas Granovetter argued that economic action varies between countries because it is contingent on local institutions, Mirsepassi stresses divergence of democratization rooted in local institutional arrangements. He presents Iran as his working example. His approach necessitates "employing a sociological lens grounded in historical specificity" and opposing "the tendency to interpret historical and political developments through an abstract or philosophical lens that makes 'global' claims..." (p. 24).

In spite of his criticism of Western models, Mirsepassi relies on US pragmatism, sociology, and philosophy in his attempt to outline his vision of democratization for Iran. He praises John Dewey, Robert Bellah, and Richard Rorty for their pragmatically grounded ideas on social change, democracy, and social justice, and successfully bridging the academy and society. Mirsepassi finds their scholarly contributions appealing because they are accessible to general audiences, written in clear language, devoid of academic jargon. Had he adopted their styles, his own work would have benefited greatly. In particular, Robert Bellah's, *The Good Society* (1992), appeals to Mirsepassi. *The Good Society* connects religion and political action as it contends that religion sensitizes us to moral issues, including social injustices. Mirsepassi seems comfortable with this approach as long as religion operates in the private sphere and latently informs social change in the public sphere for the "common good" instead of overtly shaping the social and political agendas.

In some of its clearer passages, *Democracy in Modern Iran* presents informative interviews Mirsepassi conducted with religious intellectuals committed to Iran's reform process of the past two decades. Abbas Abdi, Alireza Alavia-Tabar, Hadi Khaniki, Mustafa Tajzadeh, and Reza Tehrani were among the prominent figures Mirsepassi consulted. Based on their accounts he concludes that Iran's intellectual transformation that gave rise to the Green Movement manifests the intellectual transformation of figures such as these. Their disillusionment with the outcome of the 1979 revolution initiated serious self-reflection and reconsideration of their own political positions. These intellectuals began to embrace the vision of a good society and to take seriously democracy and the common good.

After some promise to the contrary, since the 1990s, empirical evidence challenged Granovetter's embeddedness thesis and showed that the most strident form of capitalism, the US version, co-opts local institutions and interferes with real divergence of economic action between countries. One hopes Mirsepassi's vision for Iran's democratization does not meet with a similar fate. Besides, he has not addressed historically rooted structural conditions in Iran that tie religion to economic interests through land-ownership and may militate against the good society from within. *Democracy in Modern Iran* reflects diligent research and insiders' insights. Its convoluted style notwithstanding, it is informative and thought provoking. Any scholar of social change, the Middle East, or of Iran will benefit from reading it.

References

Arjomand S (1988) *The Turban and the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bellah R (1992) *The Good Society*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Granovetter M (1985) Economic action and social structure. *American Journal of Sociology* 91(3): 481-511.