Overview: The city is one of humanity’s most profound and unwieldy inventions. This course surveys the culture of cities, exploring their historical development and their current dynamism. Our perspective will encompass the great global cities as well as major urban areas in the United States. We will frame the urban experience from a number of perspectives, examining the distinctive forms of expressive culture, ethnic and racial conflict, and political or economic activity that cities generate. Students will gain an understanding of the profound impact of new technologies, immigration, and gentrification on how cities grow and decline. We will consider each of these dimensions of urban experience from a cultural perspective, which focuses on how people create meaningful lives.

Dynamics: Through lectures, readings, and films, students will acquire an informed perspective on urbanism and be introduced to the methods and theories that anthropologists rely upon in analyzing urban settings. Lectures will frame the numerous dimensions that inform city life, while presenting students with a means of thinking synthetically about these complex interrelations. The readings feature a range of disciplinary perspectives on the culture of cities, but we will also develop a sustained attention to the work of urban ethnographers. Daily films will offer vivid, engaging depictions of particular dynamics related to city life. Two in-class exams will test your comprehension of basic dynamics, key concepts, and critical historical developments related to urbanism. Daily writing assignments allow you to respond thoughtfully to the topics examined in the readings and lectures. Discussions will be geared towards clarifying texts and grappling with the insights and issues raised in readings and films—attendance is a requirement of this course. Attendance is required and more than 3 unexcused absences will result in at least one letter-grade reduction. WARNING: This syllabus is not a contract; reading assignments and topics are subject to change, reflecting the general pace of student/instructor progress in this class.

Grading and Course Requirements:
1) One exam = 40%
2) One ethnographic project (10-12 pages) = 40%
3) Daily writing (paragraph summaries of films and topics selected from the readings) and class participation (showing up and engaging in class discussions of the readings and films) = 20%

Required Texts:
Rethinking Urban Parks: Public Space and Cultural Diversity, Setha Low et al.
Triumph of the City, Edward Glaeser
Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the Neoliberal City, Arlene Davila.
Class Schedule:

WEEK ONE: The Origin and Design of Cities.
July 15: Introduction.
Film: Barcelona Blueprint.
July 16: Glimpsing the texture of cities:
Readings: On the Plaza, Chps 1 & 2; The Triumph, Introduction and Chp 1. [optional: “Anthropology Inc.”]
Film: The Nature of Cities.
July 17: Origins of Cities
Readings: “Death and Life of Chicago,” and “Serenade for the Public Plaza,”
Film: Rome: Impact of an Idea.
July 18: Urban Design, pt. 1: Grids and plazas
Readings: On the Plaza, chp.4-5
Film: City Living.

WEEK TWO: The Industrial and Post-Industrial City.
July 22: Industrial City, pt. 1: European origins
Film: Material World.
July 23: Industrial City, pt. 2 Segregation and the inner city
Film: Requiem for Detroit.
July 24: The Post Industrial City
Readings: The Triumph, Chp. 6-7; Harvey, “Time-Space Compression and the Postmodern Condition”; “LA as Postmodern,” Dear & Flusty.
Film: Paris Ring and Cities on Speed: Mumbai—traffic.
July 25: Urban Ethnography
Film: The Wire.

WEEK THREE: Code and Performance.

July 29: EXAM.
July 30: Spatializing Culture: Discussion of ethnographic sites.
Readings: Rethinking Urban Parks Chapters 1-3; Triumph, Chp 8; Lipsitz, “White Spatial Imaginary.”
Film: The Garden.
July 31: Representing the City: Discussion of research sources.
Readings: Rethinking Urban Parks Chapters 4-7; Stevenson, “Imagining the City: Movies, Maps, and Cyberspace,”Film: Liquid City.
August 1: Reading the Urban: Discussion of research questions.
Readings: Rethinking Urban Parks Chapter 8, “Meaning and Memory: Reading the Urban Text.” Film: Living the hiplife.
WEEK FOUR: Consuming Cities.

August 5: Symbolic Economy.
Readings: *Culture of Cities*, Chp.1 & 2
Film: *The Gods of Times Square*.

August 6: Disneyfication of Cities.
Readings: *Triumph of Cities*, Chp 5, and *Culture of Cities*, Chp. 5 & 6
Film: *Malls R Us*.

August 7: Gentrification.
Film: *Flag Wars*

August 8: Contesting Public Culture
Film: *To Be Seen*.

WEEK FIVE: The Future of Cities.

August 12: Home Owner Associations and Governing Cities
Readings: *Barrio Dreams*, Chps 5-6;
Film: *The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill*.

Film: *Unnatural Causes*.

August 14: Ethnographic Presentations.
August 15: Ethnographic Presentations.

Identifying an Ethnographic Site:

After reading chapters from One the Plaza, spend some time in a public place. The objective is simply to try out her perspective on the production of social space. By observing how different people occupy a similar locale, Low tries to recognize social relations and social practices in space, as well as to demonstrate how public space becomes meaningful to users. She considers how differences in the use of space define social groups, and she examines the types of boundaries these users construct. This is what Low means by the “social construction of space”: “the actual transformation of space—through peoples’ social exchanges, memories, images, and daily use of the material setting—into scenes and actions that convey meaning.”

So pick a place and observe it. Consider its design features and pay attention to patterns of usage. Then try to articulate what kinds of meanings are attached to or contested in this place. Can you picture yourself developing an ethnographic perspective on this place?