Social Justice and the City

Course Description
From their very beginnings cities have been sights of social tension, exploitation and emancipatory movements. This remains the same today, with a host of contemporary processes giving rise to new questions of justice and, at the same time, resurrecting some age-old issues. Indeed, cities today face unprecedented challenges. Migration, rapid urbanization, growing inequality, authoritarian governments, racial tensions, terrorism, climate change, and the list goes on. These issues are also transformed by processes of globalization, whereby the connections and networks between cities separated by vast physical distances have intensified, leading to complex urban relationships that have required new theoretical understandings.

“Urban segregation is not a frozen status quo, but rather a ceaseless social war in which the state intervenes regularly in the name of “progress,” “beautification” and even “social justice for the poor” to redraw spatial boundaries to the advantage of landowners, foreign investors, elite homeowners, and middle-class commuters” (Mike Davis, 2006, p.98 – Planet of the Slums)

We are therefore faced with more questions of social justice than ever. However, in many arenas, discussions of justice, ethics and morality have been muted over the past twenty years. Philosopher Slavoj Zizek (1999, 198) argues that those ideas which have previously guided our efforts towards social justice have been “replaced by the collaboration of enlightened technocrats ... and liberal multiculturalists via the process of negotiation of interests”. His claim is that our ability to discuss ideas of social justice has been eroded over recent years. For some, it has therefore become paramount that we re-assemble our debates around social justice so that the collections of growing urban social problems can be dealt with.

“More radically, justice names the possibility – from the point of view of what brings into being as subject-effect – that what is non-law may serve as law” (Alain Badiou, 1982, p.176 - Théorie du sujet)

Faced with this challenge, this course examines the concept of social justice and explores its various relations to the city and urban development. The course seeks to introduce a variety of ways that we can think about and debate social justice. This draws from various traditions of work (e.g. feminist, libertarianism, Marxism, moral philosophy) and explores them using a geographical perspective. With these various dialogues on social justice sketched out, the course turns its attention to the ‘urban question’. It asks what is distinctive about the issue of social justice in an urban context and whether we need a more geographically-informed viewpoint from with to deploy our positions on social justice. We therefore seek not to develop absolute positions on the questions of justice or ethics, but rather open up debate and discussion on the antagonisms we find inherent in the city. In the final section of the course, a number of urban themes are examined and we attempt to bring our understandings of social justice to these themes.

Course Objectives
The purpose of this course is to introduce students to various geographically-informed conceptualisations of social justice in order that they are able to develop contextual understandings on a variety of urban social problems. It is intended that students will gain a competency in discussing urban social justice issues in order that they reflect on those facing them in their own lives. While engaging with a variety of disciplines, the course is rooted in the geographical literature.
By the end of the semester students should be able to:
- Define, describe and debate a number of key theories of social justice including those relating to ethics, morality, rights, membership, space, time and difference.
- Trace the development of social justice debate within the geographical literature
- Identify the ways in which urbanism has presented a number of particular social justice questions and discuss how these relate to theories of social justice
- Recognise the ways in which justice remains a central concern within the urban environment and how the operation of justice continue to shape urban development and how we live in the city
- Examine a set of varied urban processes and problems (including capitalist development, socialist city planning, gentrification, place-making, housing, gender, sexuality, race) from a social justice perspective
- Recognise the understandings of social justice currently being employed in examples of contemporary urban social movements

**Teaching Format**
The course will be delivered in both lecture and seminar formats. In the first sections of the course, lectures will be primarily be utilised in order that students be introduced to their readings relating to the course’s key concepts. In the latter sections of the course, seminars and class discussions will be utilised in order to develop debate around assigned readings and film presentations.

**Learning Evaluation and Grading**
A variety of evaluation methods are used in the course. They include: (i) closed-book examinations in order that firm understandings of the course’s key concepts are established; (ii) participation grades in order that student effort is recognised in respect to discussion preparation and class participation; (iii) a photo-documentary research project that will ask students to narrate their own identified urban social justice issue in order that their ability to apply their classroom learning is indicated; and (iv) a final research paper that will gauge the strength of connections students have made been the conceptual and case study elements of the course:

Grades will be based upon four elements:
- Participation 20%
- Mid-Term 25%
- Photo-Documentary 25%
- Research Paper 30%

**Class Participation (20%)**
Attendance and participation is required. The class places significant emphasis upon the discussion of readings and debate. You should show evidence of reading and careful consideration of readings in your class participation. Before arriving at the indicated classes (see syllabus) you should prepare a summary of the readings and have prepared a set of discussion questions (the former are to be submitted). At the start of classes, I will randomly select students to introduce the set readings and initiate debate using their prepared questions.

**Mid-Term Exam (25%)**
In the seventh week of class there will be a 1 hour exam. The exam will consist of two questions that will ask you to discuss the issues examined in the first half of the class.

**Photographic Documentary (25%)**
At the end of the course you will present a photographic documentary of a research project of your choosing. The photographs should be used to document a research subject related to class material. Your
photographic materials should be accompanied by some textual or audio narration. You may use still and/or motion photography. You may use your own photographic material or that gathered from other sources (note: you must recognise the source of your materials).

**Research Paper (30%)**
The final research paper will give you the opportunity to take up either a theoretical or empirical aspect of the course. After the mid-term exam, a broad research question will be set. This will give you some guidance on the thematic content of the paper and a detailed set of instructions to help you decide on your particular research issue.

**Course etiquette**

**Attendance:** Students are expected to attend every class. If you miss a class ensure you ask a classmate for notes.

**Readings:** For many classes, students are expected to have read and understood the allocated readings. All readings that are required for class discussions will either be distributed to students in class or available at the library. In classes where lectures are given, students should read those readings indicated on the reading list. Lectures are not meant to provide you with complete knowledge of the research subject. They are design to give you an introduction to the taught material. Your after-class reading should therefore be used to reinforce and extend lecture material. A substantial supplementary reading list is provided at the end of the syllabus and you should utilise this both with respect to your class-related and assessment-related reading.

**Plagiarism:** Is not acceptable under any circumstances and is not tolerated. All cases will be immediately referred to the College Board (see: [http://www.clarku.edu/offices/aac/integrity.cfm](http://www.clarku.edu/offices/aac/integrity.cfm))

**Classroom behaviour:** Cell phones must be switched off in class. During class you should not use your laptop to surf the web.

**Email:** Students should treat email like postal mail. I only check my email once a day (usually in the mornings) and you should not expect that I will reply to your email straightaway unless it is an urgent matter. As a rule of thumb, please ask yourself if your question can: (a) wait until our next class meeting and (b) is already answered in the syllabus.

**Cicada Announcements:** I will use Cicada for all class-related announcements. You should check this regularly for updates etc.

**Learning Issues:** Students with learning, physical, or psychiatric disabilities enrolled in this course that may need disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to make an office appointment to see me before the end of the second week of the term. All discussions will remain confidential, although I may seek advice on matters with appropriate services within the university.

**Lateness and Excuses:** All assessments should be handed-in on time and in accordance with the requirements set out in assessment instructions. Absence from classes and late submission of coursework is only excused if you provide documented evidence explaining your absence/lateness (i.e.: for illness a doctor’s note). Absence and lateness will result in deductions from your final class grade. I realize that some students may wish to take part in religious observances that fall during the academic term. Should you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please come speak with me before the end of the second week of the term to discuss appropriate accommodations.
Office Hours: My office hours are indicated on the top of the syllabus. You are encouraged to come and discuss any aspects of the class with me during these hours. Please be advised that office hours can become busy periods, so our meeting may be limited in duration to ensure that all student inquiries get addressed. In the case of repeatedly busy office hours, a booking sheet will be placed on my office door where you will be able to reserve a specific meeting time during my office hours.

Schedule
Week One – Introduction
Week Two – Social Justice: Concept and Theory
Week Three – Ethics/Discussion
Week Four – Urbanism and Social Justice / Policing
Week Five – Protest / Prison
Week Six – Power / Public Space
Week Seven – Review / Exam
Week Eight – Spring Break [photo documentary]
Week Nine – Segregation / Film
Week Ten – Capitalist City
Week Eleven – [Post-]Socialist City
Week Twelve – Gentrification
Week Thirteen – Housing [no class]
Week Fourteen – Diversity
Week Fifteen – Social Movements / Review
Course Outline

Recommended Books

Highly Recommended:

Recommended:

Part One – An Introduction to Social Justice
Setting out a conceptual basis for our later geographical discussions, in this section of the course we examine a variety of perspectives on social justice. In doing so, we cover debates from disciplines including geography, political philosophy and economics. To begin our discussions of social justice, the various possible elements of it are introduced. Following this, we trace out a number of positions on social justice, including feminist, libertarian and Marxist perspectives.

The Concept of Social Justice

Required Reading

Note: There are many good book-length treatments of the concept of social justice. Indeed, the concept itself merits a whole semester course. However, you should use your reading to supplement our introductory lectures and become familiar with the various mainstream approaches to social justice.

Recommended Reading

Exploring Theoretical Approaches to Social Justice

Required Reading
Recommended Reading
- Simpson, E. (1976) Socialist Justice, Ethics, 87(1) 1-17 P

Underpinning Social Justice
Required Reading

Recommended Reading

Part Two - Urban Questions: Policing, Protest, Prison, Power, Public Space
In the second part of the course we turn our attention to the city and ask how the urban context generates new social justice questions. We examine how urban thinking has given rise to various social justice perspectives within geography, particularly focusing on the work of David Harvey and Henri Lefebvre. Follow this we examine a number of social justice issues that are inherently connected to urbanism: policing, protest, prison, power and public space. For each, we will examine the how an understanding of social justice is necessary.

The Peculiarities of Urban Justice Questions
Required Reading

Recommended Reading

**Policing**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**Protest**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**Prison**

Required Reading


Recommended Reading


**Power and Cities**

Required Reading


Recommended Reading


**Public Space**

**Required Reading**

**Recommended Reading**

**Part Three - Case Studies**
In this part of the class, we examine a number of pressing, contemporary urban social problems and investigate each as a social justice issue. We will utilise lectures, discussions and film viewings to frame each problem/issue as a social justice concern.

**Segregation and the Fight for Justice**

**Required Reading**

**Recommended Reading**

**The Capitalist City and (In)Justice**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**The (Post)Socialist City and (In)Justice**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**Gentrification and the Fight for Place**

*Required Reading*

Davidson, M (2009) Displacement, Space/Place and Dwelling: placing gentrification debate, *Ethics, Place and Environment*, 12(2), 219-234


*Recommended Reading*


**Contemporary Housing Questions?**

*Required Reading*


Recommended Reading

- Engels, F. (1872) *The Housing Question* [available online]

**Emancipatory City: Redistribution and Recognition**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


**Part Four – Movements for Justice**

In the final part of the class we survey those current urban social movements that are embracing a social justice agenda. We ask what understanding of social justice they are mobilizing and the benefits/limitations of them.

**Required Reading**

Marcuse, P. (2009) From critical urban theory to the right to the city, *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 13(2), 185-197

• Gilbert M (2001) From the "walk for adequate welfare" to the 'march for our lives": Welfare rights organizing in the 1960s and 1990s, Urban Geography, 22(5), 440-456
• Pinder, D. (2000) 'Old Paris is no more': Geographies of spectacle and anti-spectacle, Antipode, 32(4), 357-386
• Purcell M (2003) Citizenship and the right to the global city: Reimagining the capitalist world order, International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 27(3), 564-
• Schmelzkopf K (2002) Incommensurability, land use, and the right to space: Community gardens in New York City, Urban Geography, 23(4), 323-343
• Smith S (1997) Beyond geography's visible worlds: a cultural politics of music, Progress in Human Geography, 21(4), 502-529