Displacement:
A History of U.S. Cities from
Urban Renewal to Gentrification

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Bulldozer in Mill Creek neighborhood, St. Louis, Mo. From the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, March 15, 1959.
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Course Description:

Through the theme of “displacement” this course explores urban reforms and strategies over the twentieth century—ranging from slum clearance to community development—which have sought to improve housing conditions, strengthen neighborhoods, and improve public health in cities. Unfortunately, and sometimes inadvertently, such development schemes have often led to mass evictions or relocations and a concentration of many of the conditions, such as overcrowding or substandard housing, they were supposed to alleviate. Important questions this course will explore include: How are city neighborhoods constructed? Who should they serve and how? What have been the strategies of grassroots activists to avoid displacement and how successful have they been? How and to what extent have community development organizations responded to the legacy of racial discrimination in urban neighborhoods? As the final reading in our course asks, “Can a City Ever Have Major Redevelopment Without Displacement?”

We begin the course by exploring the theory of “gentrification.” Originally an academic term, “gentrification” became a part of popular U.S. vocabulary in the late seventies and early eighties, particularly as it was adopted by neighborhood activist groups. While some argue the proliferation of meanings for the term “gentrification” have rendered the term meaningless, activist usage has opened new ways to understand gentrification through more explicitly racial, global, and post-colonial frames.

Aside from the introductory theory week, the first portion of the class will focus primarily on Baltimore. The readings of the course are designed to consider multiple actors who have a role in the shaping neighborhoods and cities including: tenants, landlords, real estate agents, developers, homeowners, and activists. Baltimore was among the first cities to develop zoning, urban planning, and real estate practices which were later adopted on a national scale. These readings will consider the historical relationships between race and class segregation and the construction of property value. We will use these readings to help us to read and contextualize a collection of photographs and surveys held at the Baltimore City Archives. This archive is the result of a survey process the Housing Authority of Baltimore City undertook in neighborhoods where it was considering slum clearance. The first two written assignments will focus on reading these sources critically and developing a better understanding of the conditions in these communities before they were displaced.

The remainder of the course considers the role of industry and state policy, versus the tastes of individuals, in urban decline, “revitalization,” and uneven development. This unit also builds on the growing literature on mass incarceration as yet another form of displacement of urban residents, particularly black and brown youth, with detrimental implications for their families and urban neighborhoods. The final portion of the class explores our current moment, the post-2009 Housing Crisis, and future visions for more just cities.
Required Text:


The above books will also be available on reserve at the library. Additional course readings and primary sources will be made available through Electronic Reserves.

Recommended Texts


Elizabeth Fee, Linda Shopes, and Linda Zeidman, eds., *The Baltimore Book: New Views on Local History*


Academic Ethics

The strength of the University depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition.

Report any violations you witness to the instructor. You may consult the Associate Dean of Student Affairs and/or the Chairperson of the Ethics Board beforehand. See the guide on “Academic Ethics for Undergraduates” http://e-catalog.jhu.edu/undergrad-students/student-life-policies/#UAEF for complete information.
Accommodations

If you need any accommodations to be able to participate in this class and complete assignments, please contact the instructor privately as soon as possible.

Any student with a disability who may need accommodations in this class must obtain an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services, 385 Garland, (410) 516-4720, studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu. See also the website below:
http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/disabilities/

Preferred Names and Pronouns

The roster generated through our Student Information System (SIS) has a field for Preferred Names. If you prefer to be called by a name that is different from your legal name, please introduce yourself to me by that name so that I can adjust my records. I also suggest that you follow the below link and make sure that your Preferred Name is included in future SIS Rosters. In introducing yourself please also let me know your preferred pronouns. Please do not hesitate to correct me if I use an incorrect gender pronoun for you. Please see also the below guide on name changes and privacy in the university computer systems:

http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/lgbtq/trans-resources/name/
**Written assignments:**

**Weekly In-Class Writing Responses:** During each class, you will be asked to spend 5-10 minutes responding to a prompt drawn from the readings. These writing exercises should help you reflect on readings or explore a topic or theme to be shared in class discussion. **These are a part of your participation grade.** If you have an excused absence the instructor will work with you on a take-home version of this assignment.

**Housing Survey analysis:** 4-6 page paper—Using the map provided on BlackBoard or through the finding aid here [http://guide.mdsa.net/pages/series.aspx?ID=BRG48-39](http://guide.mdsa.net/pages/series.aspx?ID=BRG48-39) examine a block of housing surveys. Drawing from at least three surveys and the information on the website Mapping Inequality [https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/](https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/) craft an essay that examines housing conditions on the block you are assigned and thinks critically about city plans for urban renewal. Your essay should also compare the HOLC area descriptions to the city surveys—what types of logic do they employ? How do they describe value? This paper will be due at the end of Week 4.

**Biography paper:** 4-6 page paper. For this paper you will choose a displaced business, family, property-owner, tenant, or other actor to follow through the historic archive. Using sources available at the Baltimore City Archives, *Baltimore Sun, Afro-American*, US census, online databases, and class texts, develop a short biography of displaced actor(s) or business. What can you say about the changes they might have experienced on their block in the years before demolition? How often did they move? What might their social world have looked like? **The completed biography is due at the end of Week 8.**

**Exhibit text:** 1-2 pages contextualizing an image. Based on your previous two assignments, provide a description that explains the context of a photo from the archive that you would like to share. These will be added to an online exhibit about displaced Baltimore neighborhoods in collaboration with the Baltimore City Archives. This will be drafted several times, including through in-class activities. **First draft is due in Week 9. The final draft will be due on our assigned exam day.**

**Core Project:** 10-12 page paper. During the weeks allotted for this course we can only begin to develop the many important themes bound up in property rights, displacement, and gentrification. These issues could also be explored at various geographical scales and in different cities. You could continue developing your existing research on Baltimore or you may choose to work on another city in a comparative frame. This longer assignment provides an opportunity for you to develop your own intervention by exploring a historical problem related to the course material, but which we have not been able to fully develop through the syllabus readings. Your paper might locate a neighborhood case study that is not addressed in any of our readings, and develop a paper in light of material studied in the course. Alternatively, you might be interested in a category of analysis, such as gender or immigration status, which is underexplored in the course readings. Please also feel free to base your project around the recommended readings listed above, since we will not be able to cover all of this material as a class. **You will need to submit a topic to be approved by the instructor by the end of Week 7. A full rough draft of**
this assignment will be due by the end of Week 12. The final revised copy of this paper will be due at the end of reading period.

**Evaluation:**

- Participation: 25%
- Housing Survey Analysis: 15%
- Biography Paper: 15%
- Exhibit Text: 20%
- Topic Proposal for Final Paper: 5%
- Core Project: 20%
Course Readings

Week 1: September 7

Introduction to the Baltimore City Archives materials we will be using in class.

To read in-class:


Capital Moves

Week 2: September 14


Whose Public Health?

Week 3: September 21


Week 4: September 28

Week 5: October 5

The class will meet in the Electronic Resource Center, level M, in the Milton S. Eisenhower Library.

No reading. In place of reading please work on your written assignments. During the class, we will meet with the History Librarian. This will be a hands-on session built around your second assignment. We will also be working with the History Librarian on developing the online exhibit for the class.

First Writing Assignment Due
Field Trip to Milton S. Eisenhower Library to learn about researching for historical papers.

(Sub)Urban Renewal
Week 6: October 12


Chapter 4: Andrew R. Highsmith, Demolition Means Progress: Flint, Michigan, and the Fate of the American Metropolis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. 103-120 (17 pages)

Note: October 15 is the last day to drop courses.

Week 7: October 19
In place of assigned reading, please investigate sources relevant to your final research topic.

Topic for the final paper is due.

Fall break is Oct 20 to Oct 22

Gentrification as Response to Urban Renewal
Week 8: October 26


Second Writing Assignment Due
“The Literature of Gentrification”

Week 9: November 2


*First draft of exhibit text is due.*

East Baltimore

Week 10: November 9

*Chapter 2 “East Baltimore’s Community Rebuilding History: Abandonment and Displacement” and Chapter 7 “Who Benefits and Suffers from Rebuilding Abandoned Communities?”* Gomez, Marisela B., *Race, Class, Power, and Organizing In East Baltimore: Rebuilding Abandoned Communities In America.*

Tour of East Baltimore

The War on Poverty and the Rise of Mass Incarceration

Week 11: November 16


*NOTE: Nov 17 is last day to withdraw or change to S/U option*

Thanksgiving Vacation: November 20 to November 26

Evictions and the Housing Crisis

Week 12: November 30


Explore the following interactive maps:


Rough draft of final paper is due.

**Baltimore and the Future**

**Final Week 13: December 7**


Exam period December 13 to December 22

Final Paper due on Exam Date