Expos 229 and 230
Class, Race, and Space in Boston and Cambridge

This course explores the interplay between the physical spaces of American cities and the class and racial identities of urban residents. Focusing on Boston’s and Cambridge’s history from the 1960s to the present, we ask how spaces (from sidewalks to university campuses) shape residents’ images of themselves and their neighbors. Course readings and assignments emphasize the contested nature of decision making processes, focusing on debates among politicians, courts, university officials, and neighborhood groups to determine residential and educational policies.
We begin the course by examining a pioneering work in the field of urban studies: Jane Jacobs’s *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). Jacobs vehemently critiqued programs for urban renewal and instead celebrated the vitality of social spaces found in older urban neighborhoods such as Boston’s North End and New York’s Greenwich Village. For the first essay, students focus on the skill of closely examining a single text by assessing her claims about the importance of sidewalks and other public spaces in promoting public safety and social cohesion. As a class, we visit the West End Museum, which commemorates a neighborhood in Boston demolished as part of the urban renewal critiqued by Jacobs.

We then turn to one of the most tumultuous times in Boston’s history as we investigate the protests surrounding the implementation of forced busing to integrate the Boston Public Schools in the 1970s. This period continues to be the subject of considerable debate, with scholars offering conflicting accounts of the role of racial, ethnic, class, and gender identities among opponents of busing. For the second essay, students develop the ability to assess and respond to a scholarly debate, evaluating and comparing conflicting accounts.

We build on the skills developed in the first two assignments in a final research paper that considers Harvard’s own history of class, race, and space. Students first read scholarship on “town gown” relations more generally and then conduct original research regarding a key episode in Harvard’s interactions with neighboring residents in Boston or Cambridge. We meet with librarians and archivists, learning about a variety of approaches to research in urban history. At the end of the semester, *students, working in small groups, present their work at a public panel*, discussing the ways that lessons from Harvard’s past might inform current plans to develop Harvard’s campus in Allston. These presentations provide students with an opportunity to practice the skill of presenting academic research to wider audiences and to engage in conversations with community members about Harvard’s past, present, and future.

These three assignments introduce first-year students to the fundamental elements of academic writing in preparation for their future courses at Harvard. They teach students how to:

- pose an analytical question or problem that will make a paper’s argument necessary;
- craft a thesis that is arguable, not self-evident or descriptive;
- substantiate the thesis with thoughtfully analyzed evidence;
- anticipate and respond to objections to an argument;
- structure an argument logically;
- use primary and secondary sources responsibly, including how to avoid plagiarizing.
- locate and evaluate sources in both the physical and online resources of Harvard’s libraries;
- understand the roles that their sources will play in their papers;
- integrate and properly cite their sources.¹

**Required Texts:**

- Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* available for at the COOP.
- Course pack available at Gnomon Copy.

¹ For more information on the goals of Expos, see http://writingprogram.fas.harvard.edu/pages/expos-20-0.
Synopsis of Major Assignments:

*Essay One: Jane Jacobs and The Death and Life of Great American Cities
Close Reading Analysis (5-6 pages; 1500-1900 words)*

**Assignment:**

Explore the connection between a short passage in Jane Jacobs’s *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* and the larger argument of the book. Explain the importance of this passage in understanding that larger argument. Your own evidence should derive directly the text, and your analysis should be based on your close reading of key passages.

**Readings:**


*Essay Two: Conflicting Accounts of Boston and Busing
Intervene in a Debate (6-8 pages; 1800-2500 words)*

**Assignment:**

The role of racial, ethnic, class, and gender identities in the opposition to the use of busing to integrate the Boston Public Schools continues to be a subject of historical debate. For this assignment, you will read four interpretations of this topic. Your assignment is to “identify, compare, and evaluate” the arguments of two to four of these interpretations.

**Readings:**

Essay Three: Harvard’s “Town Gown” Relations
Multi-Source Research Essay Analyzing Primary Sources (8-10 pages; 2,400 to 3,100 words)

Assignment:

Offer an interpretive argument about an important episode in Harvard’s relations with residents of Boston and/or Cambridge. Support that argument with an examination and comparison of accounts in primary sources, considering the perspective of each source and noting discrepancies and/or points of agreement.

Explanation of Assignment:

We will begin this assignment with a few core readings that will help you frame the larger questions that motivate your research. These readings raise fundamental questions regarding urban universities and their relations with neighboring communities. A view of universities as worlds apart, detached from the influences of society, has long been in tension with an opposing view of universities as deeply imbedded in their communities, interconnected and interdependent with their neighbors. For this assignment, you will investigate the ways that different groups, from university officials to students to neighborhood associations, have viewed the appropriate relationship between Harvard and the cities it inhabits.

After these initial readings, we will meet with librarians and archivists at Harvard and Cambridge. Working together, we will develop a list of potential topics. Broadly conceived, potential topics include (but are not limited to):

- Buildings and expansion: the physical spaces of Harvard’s campus
- Harvard’s role as a landlord
- Harvard’s relations with local residents on and off campus (i.e. protestors, the homeless)
- Community outreach programs (i.e. through PBHA, the Extension School)

You will have a large amount of freedom to select a topic of genuine interest to you. There are many ways to investigate class/race/space. To write a successful paper, however, you need to select a single episode or event. Eight to ten pages is not enough to discuss longer-term topics.

Readings

