Mark H. Rose
Department of History
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Monday, 7:00-10:00 p.m.
mrose@fau.edu

SEMINAR IN THE POLITICS OF GROWTH AND DECLINE IN US CITIES SINCE 1945

The focus of this course is on the politics of economic growth and decline in the American city since 1945. As one way to begin to think about the politics of growth and decline, let us imagine that we are seated in a room much like this one. The room, for our purposes, is potentially located in one of four places and one of four political and economic moments. The first place and moment is Detroit's City Hall in 1945, just as manufacturers such as GM and their thousands of employees have produced the weapons of victory. The second location and moment is St. Louis City Hall in the mid-1950s. Like Detroit a wartime manufacturing center, by the 1950s leaders of local firms threatened to depart the city. As part of the response to those threats, St. Louis political, labor, and business leaders initiated a massive program of urban renewal. As those renewal projects got underway, however, large numbers of low income persons (Black and White) arrived in St. Louis from the South. Still a third location is City Hall Philadelphia in 1978. By now, thousands of low income persons resided in Philadelphia, and an even larger number of the city's more affluent residents departed for the suburbs; and leaders of still more firms migrated as well, or shut down. Still our fourth location is Chicago early in 2006. Meat packers, steel makers, and their many employees left Chicago or quit operations long ago. At the same time, spectacular Condo towers were under construction throughout the Central Business District (CBD) (the "Loop," as Chicagoans call it) and developers built still more towers south and north of the Loop. Those handsome towers housed affluent, well-educated, and mostly-younger residents who shopped and worked downtown, and who socialized in "trendy" restaurants in and around the CBD. In recent Chicago, moreover, many poorer residents had become almost invisible, having relocated (we might speculate) to the first right of suburbs located south and west of the city.

Moving our weekly seminar to these new locations and moments in political-economic history offers a couple of advantages. First, each of these meetings takes place at a significant cross-roads of demographic, business, and political change. Second and equally important, by locating our meeting in these cities at those moments, we are alerted to the significance of context for the historically-oriented analysis of politics, geography, and economy. During the summer 2006, we want to replace these four moments with historically-grounded research that explains these remarkable processes of growth, decline, and change. I also want to recommend that we keep politicians and public policy front and center as we approach that research.

Discussions, readings, and research in this course will revolve around a single-scholarly theme–the significance of social, economic, and especially political factors in bringing about some portion of the vast urban changes highlighted in those four moments. For example, how did public policies such as federally-funded highways and deductible mortgage interest influence suburbanization? As well, should we explain the economic decline and racial antagonisms that characterized St. Louis and Philadelphia as the straight-forward outcomes of increased international competition and "inevitable"-technological change or as the result of public policies including, again, federally-funded highways, interest deductibility, preferential tariffs

awarded (foreign) Cold War supporters, region-wide electric rates, inexpensive trucking, and racial antagonisms given legitimacy by urban and suburban politicians? By the end of the term, we will want to specify a couple of over-arching ideas about political cause and social/geographic/ and economic consequence in the former heartland of American industrial development.

Assigned Reading: (available at the University Bookstore)

Howard Gillette, Jr., *Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005)

Subscribe to h-urban http://www.h-net.org/~urban/

Assignments:

We will want to focus each of the meetings of this class around three undertakings.

1. During Weeks 2-3 we will hear oral reviews of the assigned reading. The written version of these reviews should run approximately three pages, typed and double-spaced. Elements of a book review include a summary of the book; a critique of content, method, and sources; a statement about the relationship between the book and the body of literature to which it is addressed; and (ideally) an assessment of the state-of-the-art and probable directions of the sub-field of which this book is a part. In preparation of your review, look at earlier reviews in historical journals such as *Reviews in American History, The Journal of American History, The American Historical Review, The Journal of Urban History, Social Science History, The Journal of Interdisciplinary History, Business History Review, Enterprise & Society, or h-urban*. Because the Gillette book was published recently, reviews are only now beginning to appear. In order to gain an introduction to the scholarship to which Gillette is speaking, see reviews of Robert O. Self, *American Babylon* and Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*. (See also the attached summary of Sugrue, *Origins*.

2. We will hear preliminary reports of term projects along with critiques of those projects. Preliminary reports should state the major theme(s) around which you are conducting research and outline the primary and secondary sources at which you have looked and plan to look. Critics are responsible for highlighting themes not pursued (given the evidence potentially available) and for calling attention to primary and secondary sources deserving of greater and reduced attention in the final paper.* Again, reports should be made available by email to critics at least four days in advance of our meeting. Final papers should run approximately fifteen to twenty pages in length including notes and should be typed, double-spaced, and printed in 12 point font (and one inch margins). Papers are due during the final exam period. (Topics for term projects will be discussed in class).

3. Finally, we will want to devote a portion of our meeting to a discussion of the state-of-our-understanding of "change." Occasionally, I will present a short lecture focused on a dimension of change and on the evolution of the literature that surrounds that topic.

Grades: The final grade will be determined on the basis of book reviews, the term project, your work as a critic, and classroom contributions.

Schedule:

Weeks 1-2: Class organization. What do historians mean by political history, by political "construction," or by the idea of bringing the state back in? Discussion of book reviews; selection of research topics and commentators; reports on reference materials in print and available electronically; continue our discussion of the idea of political construction of historical scholarship and other ideas about how history is "done."

Week 3: Presentation and critiques of Gillette, Camden After the Fall

Weeks 4-12: Presentations of drafts of research projects, including critiques. I will distribute a list of authors and their projects by the third week of class. During weeks 1-2, members of the seminar should prepare likely topics.** Remember that 1.Topics for historical research and even the "logic" of research itself are to a great extent constrained by the type of materials that are available locally; 2. You want to select topics that allow you to build on themes contained in Gillette; and 3. You will want to select topics that allow you to "go"national in the sense that historians located in cities such as Seattle, New York, Columbus, and St. Louis would find your topic and your treatment of that topic "interesting."

* Although the job of critics is to be, well, critical, one must also maintain a sense of proportion. As a rule of thumb, a critic will want to find at least two or three items judged "positive" about book reviews and the results of term projects.

**Likely topics include

1. The politics of deindustrialization in a large city such as Chicago, Detroit, Baltimore, St. Louis, and Philadelphia
2. The politics of suburban growth around a large city such as, again, Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, Baltimore, or Philadelphia–who were the key developers, and how did they assemble the political and financial assets that were prerequisite to "renewal" or "growth."
3. Community organizing in one of these large cities aimed at coping with decline, or, somehow, fostering a modest prosperity
4. Developers and construction of malls and in town new towns.
5. The consequences of uniform electric/gas rates/airports/Interstate Highways for urban

deconcentration.
6. The consequences of railroad abandonment/mobile truckers for decentralization of retail, wholesale, and residential activities
7. A particular mayor, as for instance Richard M. Daley in Chicago and David Lawrence in Pittsburgh and the politics of economic growth and decline
8. The significance of urban “growth coalitions” such as members of Chicago’s Central Area Committee for economic development; and as well, who provided ideas regarding development to members of these groups—academics? Other business and political leaders? In brief, who were the agents of diffusion for ideas about “growth,” “blight,” and “renewal”
9. The development of urban experts (especially economists, political scientists, sociologists, geographers, and even historians who advised urban political leaders on the politics of growth
10. The politics by which neighborhood residents attempted to block development projects endorsed by leaders of the “growth coalition;” and what about the poor and near poor? Where do they reside and what do they do to earn a living?

P.S. I will be purchasing pizza/diet soda for the class during our 2d and final meetings

A historian dissects Detroit's trouble

1. *Thomas Sugrue, native Detroiter, historian and author of "The Origins of the Urban Crisis," has spent 20 years in major cities in the United Sates and in London. He came to the Free Press in the summer of 1998 to talk about the conditions that created present-day Detroit, and the implications for journalists. These are excerpts from his talk.*

Anyone who has spent time in cities like Detroit in America's former industrial heartland can't help but be struck by the eerily apocalyptic landscapes that are so common as one passes through these places.

I asked a simple, but very difficult question: "Why?"

After digging around in the papers of unions and business, civil rights organizations, census data, city records and countless newspaper articles, I arrived at the conclusion that follows: Detroit's woes began, not in the 1960s with the riot, not with the election of Coleman Young as mayor, not with the rise of international competition and the auto industry's globalization, they began amid the steaming prosperity and consensus of the 1950s, and in an era about which we have very little to go on apart from hoary shibboleths and cliches.

A THREE-PART STORY

Three sweeping changes transformed the city. These three things, occurring simultaneously and interacting, dramatically reshaped the metropolis of Detroit and other metropolises like it. First was deindustrialization, the flight of jobs away from the city, something that began unnoticed and unheralded in the 1950s.

Next was persistent racial discrimination in labor markets. Racial discrimination remained a very persistent problem despite decades of civil rights activism and some improvement in attitudes and beliefs.

Finally was intense residential segregation, a division of the metropolitan area into two metropolitan areas: one black and one white.

Any one of these forces would have been devastating, but the fact that all three of them occurred simultaneously and interacted with each other proved to have devastating consequences.

WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

World War II was a great moment of opportunity for working-class Detroiters, black and white alike. The city was a magnet for workers coming from other parts of the country. African-Americans had been pretty much closed out of the industries that provided skilled jobs, but that pretty much ended during World War II.

Only 3 percent of auto workers in Detroit were black in 1940. By 1945, 15 percent of the city's auto workers were African American. Detroit, then, became a magnet for black migrants who heard about these great opportunities. But the reality for black workers, even in this window of opportunities, was a great deal more complicated and harsher and more frustrating than those statistics would lead us to believe.

DEINDUSTRIALIZATION

One of the supreme ironies of post-war Detroit is that, just as discrimination was under siege, just as blacks found a small window of opportunity in the city's labor market, that job base began to fall away.

First, beginning in the late '40, and especially in the 1950s, began a process that has continued right up to the present. Jobs began to move out of places like Detroit to low-wage regions in other parts of the United States and the world. Companies in Detroit began picking up and moving their production to rural Indiana and Ohio, increasingly to the South and, by the 1970s and beyond, increasingly to the Third World -- places where wages and other standards were lower than they were in Detroit.

At the same time, industry in Detroit was changing from within. There was introduction of automation, of new, labor-saving technology within the factories. The consequence was a dramatic decline in the number of manufacturing jobs, solid, blue-collar jobs, the jobs that made Detroit the city that it was.

Between 1947 and 1963, a period of unprecedented national economic prosperity, Detroit lost 134,000 manufacturing jobs. This is not the '70s. This is not when there is any competition from Germany and Japan and Korea for automobiles. These are jobs that were picking up and moving to other parts of the country, or these were jobs that were being replaced by machines.

Workers who had come to Detroit during World War II, seeking opportunities, found their choices seriously constrained. The workers who suffered the worst were African Americans, and

they suffered because of seniority. African Americans, because they didn't get their foot into thedoor until the 1940s, were the first to be fired. So, when companies began moving out of Detroit, the burden was borne disproportionately by black Detroiters.

So, in the midst of the 1950s, 15.9 percent of blacks were unemployed, but only 6 percent of whites were unemployed, so we're talking about black unemployment two and a half times the rate of white unemployment.

RESIDENTIAL DISCRIMINATION

The third and, indeed, probably the most pernicious force was residential discrimination by race. The city was divided into districts by race, divided by invisible lines.

These invisible lines were drawn in a whole bunch of different ways by different groups. The federal government subsidized housing development for whites through the Federal Housing Administration and Home Owners Loan Corporation. But federal policies prohibited making loans to risky properties, and risky properties, according to federal standards, meant homes in old or homes in racially or ethnically heterogeneous neighborhoods. It meant that, if you were a black trying to build your own home or trying to get a loan to purchase a home, you had many obstacles to face, whereas if you were a white it was really quite easy.

Real estate investors reinforced these invisible racial lines by steering black home buyers to certain neighborhoods and white home buyers to certain other neighborhoods, and stirring up racial anxiety when neighborhoods were along that invisible boundary.

In one west-side neighborhood, in the late 1950s, there were more than 50 real estate agents working a several-block area trying to persuade panicked whites to sell now and sell fast because "they're moving in." Real estate agents even went so far as to pay African-American women to walk their children through all-white streets to encourage panic among white home owners.

Also reinforcing these invisible boundaries were the actions of ordinary people. There were more than 200 violent racial incidents that accompanied the first blacks who moved into formerly white neighborhoods in Detroit.

If you were the first black to move into a formerly all-white block, you could expect, certainly, for your house to be pelted with rocks and stones. In one case, a tree stump went through a window.

Regularly, vandals would break 20, 30 -- every window in a house. Arson was another popular tactic.

As newspaper reporters, if such an incident were happening today, you can be sure that you would be covering it, but until 1956, there was not a mention of any of these incidents in Detroit's daily newspapers. They were off the radar of the major dailies.

This process of housing discrimination set into motion a chain reaction.

Blacks were poorer than whites and they had to pay more for housing. They had a harder time getting loans. Hence, they spent more of their income on the purchase of real estate. They were,

by and large, confined to the oldest houses in the city, houses that needed lots of repair work. Many of their houses deteriorated as a consequence of them being older, not being able to get loans and folks not having all that much money in their pockets. City officials looked out onto the poor housing stock in poor neighborhoods and said, "we should tear this down."

Moreover, the fact that housing stock was old and in many cases deteriorating in black neighborhoods provided seemingly irrefutable evidence to whites that blacks were irresponsible. "We kept up our property, why aren't they keeping up their property?

Finally, this neighborhood deterioration seemed to lenders definitive proof that blacks were a poor credit risk and justified disinvestment.

CONCLUSION

To talk about Detroit's problems beginning in 1967, or beginning with the election of Coleman Young, or beginning with the globalization of the 1970s is to miss the boat.

The pattern of workplace discrimination, of the massive loss of jobs, of the residential balkanization of the city into black and white -- this was already well established by 1967. It wasn't Coleman Young that led to the harsh racial divisions between blacks and whites in metropolitan Detroit. It was there, and had been festering for a long time.

It wasn't the riot that led to disinvestment from the city of Detroit. Disinvestment had been going on very significantly for years.

And it wasn't globalization that led to the loss of jobs. That loss of jobs was going on when the auto industry was at its very peak.

IMPLICATIONS

We focus on changing the attitudes and motivations of individual workers, rather than challenging larger discriminatory practices.

We have a policy mismatch, a gap between the reality that I have described and the policy recommendations to try to address those problems.

The premise of welfare reform is to put welfare recipients to work. The problem is that the areas with the greatest job growth in the metropolitan area tend to be the farthest away from where the poorest folk live, in the outer suburbs largely inaccessible by public transportation. So there's a gap between the reality of jobs and job loss and a policy solution.

Another major one,is downtown revitalization and tourism: "Build casinos and they will come. You need to deal with the deeply rooted problems I've described: job flight, racial segregation, discrimination.

We need to think about providing poor people with access to secure, well-paying jobs, wherever those jobs might be.

We need to begin thinking more creatively than we have with the real problem of racial division in our city and in our nation. Conversations on race are not enough. We need to deal with the reality of economic and residential division.