



POLS 491 CITIES, POWER, AND CINEMA
 Fall 2021 Seminar

Instructor. Michael Leo Owens, Ph.D. (he/him/his)¹

Email. [REDACTED]

Phone. [REDACTED] (leave voice mail - checked daily)

Student (Office) Hours. [REDACTED]

Synchronous Class Space. [REDACTED]
 Asynchronous Class Space. [REDACTED]
 Synchronous Class Days. [REDACTED]
 Synchronous Class Time. [REDACTED]

Our seminar examines the local politics of “reel” cities in relation to “real” cities and vice versa. Pairing films with readings, we’ll explore themes of power and powerlessness in cities. Our films, which we’ll watch asynchronously/independently and before each synchronous session, will visualize concepts concerning the acquisition, possession, use, and consequences of political power in cities.² Our synchronous discussions of the pairings of films and readings will permit us to debate the exercise of power, inclusive of how the “powerful” wield it and the “powerless” respond in a variety of political ways.

¹ Students may use Professor Owens, Dr. Owens, Dr. MiLO (“my-low”), or Professor MiLO, not “Michael,” “Mike,” or just “MiLO.” Also, I’m Associate Professor of Political Science at Emory University and a past “president” of the Urban Affairs Association. My interests/studies range from the politics of policing to racial representation in local government to public opinion about urban policies to public housing destruction.

² Several of the narrative films I’ve selected have R, NR, and MATURE ratings. They include dialogue with profanity, as well as racial, ethnic, sexist, or other slurs; violence; nudity and/or sexual situations; drug use; and/or other behaviors human beings may use. If they’ll disturb you in ways that prevent your learning from and engagement in the seminar, the deadline for dropping the course is Wednesday, September 1, 2021 and the deadline for a partial withdrawal (without penalty) is Friday, October 15, 2021.

The seminar meets once a week for informed discussion and critique, spread across three hours. During each seminar session a small set of students will perform the roles of “session co-leaders.” Performing the role well requires careful preparation of topics and “meaty” questions about the films and readings for in-class discussion. It also requires short pre-class discussions with Dr. MiLO. We’ll determine together the best days and times for the pre-class discussions.

GOALS. Our seminar has four broad goals:

1. Broaden and/or deepen understanding of political science concepts related to and about the local politics, racial and class politics, and political economy in cities;
2. Demonstrate how narrative films and documentary films provide visual (and aural) texts for analyzing a set of fictional and/or factual events and theoretical perspectives about the distribution and organization of power and politics in cities;
3. Learn to employ motion pictures to speak to theoretical and empirical issues while better seeing and comprehending the physical and filmic worlds of cities through scholarship; and
4. Provide opportunities for students to engage in critique, introspection, and reflection about how politics influences social relations and vice versa in cities.

MATERIALS. Generally, our seminar’s readings will be academic book chapters and academic journal articles. In other words, we’ll read nonfiction. We’ll assume, given the level of the course, we all know how to read nonfiction well (or reasonably well). If that assumption is incorrect for you, review Dr. MiLO guide, available from our Canvas site.

All readings are available from our Canvas site (Left Hand Column > Files > Course Readings).

- **Preparation of Our Readings.** Each class session has a set of readings. Preparation means we’ve read the readings - all of them - before class and that we’re ready to discuss them in the seminar. In the event that we don’t understand all that we’ve read, which is very likely, we need to come prepared to pose or ask questions, both about the readings.
- **Purpose of Our Readings.** Our readings will help us learn, discuss, reflect, and produce. But their purposes will vary. Some readings are intended to help students survey general ideas and facts. Such readings are intended for reading as a survey of main ideas, and it will be OK to skip portions of text without missing the larger ideas. Some readings are for deeper understanding, requiring us to comprehend the meaning of each sentence in order to grasp the larger ideas. And some readings are intended primarily to engage us, where we read to deliberately draw inferences, raise questions, and evaluate arguments and approaches to confirming them. Generally, I believe that our readings this semester fall largely into the first and third categories.
- **Difficulty of Our Readings** (combination of levels). Generally, the readings contain what I assume will be many new concepts for most readers in the course. Some readings will contain some new concepts, where readers will be unfamiliar with the meanings of some words and will not have enough background knowledge to immediately understand some of the ideas expressed. Other readings will contain many new concepts, where readers will be unfamiliar with the meanings of many words and will not have enough background knowledge to immediately understand most of the ideas expressed by the authors. The remainder will contain almost no new concepts and will be easy to digest by any reader.

Our seminar’s required films are streaming on the web. Although two streaming films require student rentals (totaling approximately \$15.00), all other films are available for free from the Woodruff Library’s Course Reserves. Here are our films and the order we’ll watch them:

1. Gangs of New York (narrative)
2. Gook (narrative)
3. The Hate U Give (narrative)
4. Anytown, U.S.A. (documentary)

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|--------------------------------------|---|
| 5. Mary 4 Mayor (narrative) | 10. The Last Black Man in San Francisco (narrative) |
| 6. Street Fight (documentary) | 11. Let the Fire Burn (documentary) |
| 7. Little Pink House (narrative) | 12. Georgio Moroder Presents Metropolis (narrative) |
| 8. Battle for Brooklyn (documentary) | 13. Blade Runner: The Final Cut (narrative) |
| 9. Nowhere to Grow (documentary) | |

Aside from the trailers for films, you may learn more about movies we'll watch this semester by visiting [Internet Movie Data Base](#) (IMDB), [Rotten Tomatoes](#), and [Roger Ebert](#).

Additionally, complete the paired readings BEFORE watching the films. We want to use scholarship—facts, theories, hypotheses, findings—to help us better understand the conflicts and contents, as well as the POV (point of view), of the films. We want to use the films to illustrate or illuminate the scholarship for us.

SCHEDULE OF SEMINAR SESSIONS

August 23. Introduction to the Seminar and Films

September 2. Preparing to Watch Films about Cities and Power

- James Clapp, “The American City in the Cinema: An Introduction” from *The American City in the Cinema* (2013), pp. 1–11 (that means pages 18–28 of the PDF)
- Douglas Muzzio, “Decent People Shouldn’t Live Here: The American City in Cinema,” *Journal of Urban Affairs* (1996), pp. 189–215
- Thomas Halper and Douglas Muzzio, “Hobbes in the City: Urban Dystopias in American Movies,” *Journal of American Culture* (2007), pp. 379–390
- Terry Christensen and Peter Haas, “Setting the Scene: A Theory of Film and Politics” from *Projecting Politics: Political Messages in American Films*, pp. 3–17
- Timothy Corrigan, “Writing About Movies” and “Beginning to Think, Preparing to Watch, and Starting to Write” from *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, pp. 1–15 and 17–34
- Jack Ellis, “What Is a Documentary?” from *The Documentary Idea: A Critical History of English-Language Documentary Film and Video* (1989), pp. 1–9

Module 1. Ethnic & Racial Conflict

September 9. Origins and Vestiges

Film: Gangs of New York (Course Reserves)

- Amy Bridges, excerpts from *A City in the Republic: Antebellum New York and the Origin of Machine Politics*, pp. 1–16, 29–45, 70–77
- David Roediger, excerpts from *Working Towards Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White*, pp. 14–21, 35–54, 57–69
- Jacob Riis, “The Color Line in New York” from *How the Other Half Lives*, pp. 112–119
- Andrew White, “City Affairs Are Not Political [The Government of American Cities],” *Forum* (1890), pp. 1–4 [213–216]
- Sean Mattie, “Blood, Justice, and American Citizenship: An Interpretation of Gangs of New York.” *Perspectives on Political Science* (2003), pp. 215–220

September 16. Competition and Cooperation

Film: Gook (Course Reserves)

- Claire Jean Kim and Taeku Lee, “Interracial Politics: Asian Americans and Other Communities of Color,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* (2001), pp. 631–637
- Jennifer Lee, “From Civil Relations to Racial Conflict: Merchant–Customer Interactions in Urban America,” *American Sociological Review* (2002), pp. 77–98
- Fernando Guerra, Brianne Gilbert, and Alex Kempler. *Race Relations: 2017 Los Angeles Public Opinion Survey* (2017)
- Valerie Martinez–Ebers, Brian Robert Calfano, and Regina Branton. “Bringing People Together: Improving Intergroup Relations via Group Identity Cues,” *Urban Affairs Review* (2021), pp. 104–127

September 23. Police Violence and “Disturbing the Peace”

Film: The Hate U Give (Course Reserves)

- Lynne Peeples, “What The Data Say About Police Brutality And Racial Bias—And Which Reforms Might Work,” *Nature* (2020), pp. 22–24.
- Gwen Prowse, Vesla M. Weaver, and Tracey L. Meares, “The State from Below: Distorted Responsiveness in Policed Communities,” *Urban Affairs Review* (2020), pp. 1423–1471
- Jennifer Chudy, Spencer Piston, and Joshua Shipper, “Guilt by Association: White Collective Guilt in American Politics,” *Journal of Politics* (2019), pp. 968–981
- Clarissa Rile Hayward, “Disruption: What Is It Good For?,” *Journal of Politics* (2020), pp. 448–459

Module 2. Elections & Representation

September 30. Partisanship, Money, and Representation

Film: Anytown U.S.A. (Vimeo \$3.99 rental/OR 3–hour loan of DVD from Woodruff Library)

- Maria Carreri and Julia Payson. “What Makes a Good Local Leader? Evidence from US Mayors and City Managers,” *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy* (2021), pp. 199–225
- Thomas Holbrook and Aaron C. Weinschenk. “Money, Candidates, and Mayoral Elections,” *Electoral Studies* (2014): 292–302
- Christopher Warshaw, “Local Elections and Representation in the United States,” *Annual Review of Political Science* (2019), pp. 461–479
- Adam Dynes, Michael T. Hartney, and Sam D. Hayes, “Off–Cycle and Off Center: Election Timing and Representation in Municipal Government,” *American Political Science Review* (2021), pp. 1–7

October 7. Women on the Ballot; Women in Municipal Office

Film: Mayor 4 Mayor (Amazon Prime Video, YouTube, or GooglePlay \$2.99)

- Jared McDonald and Melissa Deckman, “New Voters, New Attitudes: How Gen Z Americans Rate Candidates with Respect to Generation, Gender, and Race,” *Politics, Groups, and Identities* (2021), pp. 1–21
- Nichole M. Bauer, “Running Local: Gender Stereotyping and Female Candidates in Local Elections,” *Urban Affairs Review* (2020), pp. 96–123
- Mirya Holman, “Gender, Political Rhetoric, and Moral Metaphors in State of the City Addresses,” *Urban Affairs Review* (2016), pp. 501–530.
- Rebekah Herrick et al., “Physical Violence and Psychological Abuse Against Female and Male Mayors in the United States,” *Politics, Groups, and Identities* (2019), pp. 1–19

October 14. Corruption, Ambition, and Intragroup Conflict

Film: Street Fight (Course Reserves)

- Catherine De Vries and Hector Solaz, “The Electoral Consequences of Corruption.” *Annual Review of Political Science* (2017), pp. 391–408
- Andra Gillespie, “Losing and Winning: Cory Booker’s Ascent to Newark’s Mayoralty” from *Whose Black Politics: Cases in Post-Racial Black Leadership* (2009), pp. 67–84
- Katherine Levine Einstein et al., “Do Mayors Run for Higher Office? New Evidence on Progressive Ambition,” *American Politics Research* (2020): 197–221

Module 3. Property & Place

October 21. Public Takings and Political Interests

Film: Little Pink House (Course Reserves)

- Gilbert Estrada, “If You Build It, They Will Move: The Los Angeles Freeway System and the Displacement of Mexican East Los Angeles, 1944–197,” *Southern California Quarterly* (2005), pp. 287–315.
- Logan Strother, “Beyond Kelo: An Experimental Study of Public Opposition to Eminent Domain,” *Journal of Law and Courts* (2016): 339–376
- Cory Mann and Mildred Warner, “Power Asymmetries and Limits to Eminent Domain: The Case of Missoula Water’s Municipalisation,” *Water Alternatives* (2019), pp. 394–413
- Louis Sahagun, “L.A. Took Their Water and Land a Century Ago. Now The Owens Valley is Fighting Back,” *The Los Angeles Times*, July 13, 2017, read all of it

October 28. Fighting Growth Machines

Films: Battle for Brooklyn (Course Reserves) AND No Place to Grow (Course Reserves)

- Harvey Molotch, “The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place,” *American Journal of Sociology* (1976), pp. 309–332
- Kirk Harris, “Because We Can Doesn’t Mean We Should and If We Do: Urban Communities, Social And Economic Justice, And Local Economic–Development–Driven Eminent Domain Practices.” *Economic Development Quarterly* (2015), pp. 245–261
- Eleonora Pasotti, “Explaining Protest Against Urban Development” from *Resisting Redevelopment: Protest in Aspiring Global Cities* (2020), pp. 20–48

November 4. Gentrification and Its Displacements

Film: The Last Black Man in San Francisco (Course Reserves)

- Mark Bailey, “The Neoliberal City as Utopia of Exclusion,” *Globalizations* (2020), pp. 31–44
- Karen Chapple, “Income Inequality and Urban Displacement: The New Gentrification,” *New Labor Forum* (2017), pp. 84–93
- Jamila Michener and Diane Wong, “Gentrification, Demobilization, and Participatory Possibilities” from *Neighborhood Change and Neighborhood Action: The Struggle To Create Neighborhoods that Serve Human Needs* (2018), pp. 123–46.
- Manissa M. Maharawal, “Infrastructural Activism: Google Bus Blockades, Affective Politics, and Environmental Gentrification in San Francisco,” *Antipode* (2021), pp. 1–25

November 11. Countercultural Challenges

Film: *Let the Fire Burn – Tragedy in Philadelphia* (Course Reserves)

- Timothy Lombardo, “Introduction” and “Chapter 8. Post-Rizzo Philadelphia” from *Blue-Collar Conservatism: Frank Rizzo’s Philadelphia and Populist Politics*, pp. 1–17 and pp. 217–241
- Morgan Shipley and Jack Taylor, “Life as Eutopia: MOVE’s Natural Revolution as a Response to America’s Dystopian Reality,” *Utopian Studies* (2019), pp. 25–44.
- Georgia Persons, “The Philadelphia MOVE Incident as an Anomaly in Models of Mayoral Leadership,” *Phylon* (1987), pp. 249–260
- Kimberly Sanders and Judson Jeffries, “Framing MOVE: A Press’ Complicity in the Murder of Women and Children in the City of (Un) Brotherly Love,” *Journal of African American Studies* (2013), pp. 566–586

Module 4. Speculative Cities and Futuristic Power

November 18. Elites and the Masses

Film: *Giorgio Moroder Presents Metropolis* (Course Reserves)

- Guy Standing, “The Precariat: From Denizens to Citizens?,” *Polity* (2012), pp. 588–608
- Stephen Graham, “Skyscraper: Vanity and Violence” and “Housing: Luxefied Skies” from *Vertical: The City from Satellites to Bunkers*, pp. 149–219
- Benjamin I. Page, Larry M. Bartels, and Jason Seawright, “Democracy and the Policy Preferences of Wealthy Americans,” *Perspectives on Politics* (2013), pp. 51–68
- Sirianne Dahlum, Carl Henrik Knutsen, and Tore Wig, “Who Revolts? Empirically Revisiting the Social Origins of Democracy,” *Journal of Politics* (2019), pp. 1494–1499

November 25. Thanksgiving (Indeed!)

December 2. Artificial Intelligence and Its Discontents

Film: *Blade Runner*, *The Final Cut* (HBOMax free w subscription/AppleTV, Google Play, Amazon Prime or YouTube \$3.99/3-hour loan of DVD from Woodruff Library)

- Joanna Bryson, “Robots Should Be Slaves” from *Close Engagements with Artificial Companions: Key Social, Psychological, Ethical and Design Issues* (2009), pp. 1–13
- Sarah Song, “Democracy and Noncitizen Voting Rights,” *Citizenship Studies* (2009), 607–620
- Mark Purcell, “Excavating Lefebvre: The Right to the City and Its Urban Politics of the Inhabitant,” *GeoJournal* (2002), pp. 101–105

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

We'll use the "1000 Point Grading System." This will allow all students to easily calculate where they stand on the grading scale at any point throughout the semester. All it requires is adding up points earned. If we know how much the outstanding activities are worth in points, we can figure out how many points any student needs to earn to get the grade they seek or need.

Points-Grades Conversion Chart

| Points | Letter Grade | Grade Point Value |
|----------|--------------|-------------------|
| 940-1000 | A | 4.0 |
| 900-939 | A- | 3.7 |
| 870-899 | B+ | 3.3 |
| 840-869 | B | 3.0 |
| 800-839 | B- | 2.7 |
| 770-799 | C+ | 2.3 |
| 740-769 | C | 2.0 |
| 700-739 | C- | 1.7 |
| 670-699 | D+ | 1.3 |
| 640-669 | D | 1.0 |
| 0-639 | F | 0 |

We'll assess student learning in the seminar by the quality of (a) engagement and (b) written assignments.

Engagement (450 points). The course is a seminar. It requires and expects active engagement and high-quality participation. Participation involves asking pertinent questions (inside and outside of class), answering questions voluntarily, sharing relevant insights, and contributing to the general learning of peers. High-quality participation demands that we watch and read closely, take notes on the films and readings, think critically about each assigned film and reading, and do it all before coming to seminar.

- **Co-Leadership (250 Points).** Students will formally co-lead the discussion of four seminar sessions, chosen sort of randomly. Effective co-leadership will require students to (a) prepare well in advance (e.g., watching the films, reading the materials, identifying themes for discussion and questions for deliberation, etc.), (b) co-guide with Dr. MiLO group discussions of the movies and readings, and (c) encourage collective consideration and critique of the materials by their peers. To encourage "co-leaders" to prepare well for and contribute well to the weekly sessions, all students will complete brief peer evaluations, which Dr. MiLO will take into consideration with his own observations. Note: Co-leaders are encouraged but not required to chat with Dr. MiLO before the sessions they co-lead, preferably by Zoom, seeking input or feedback on ideas, points, questions they intend to raise for the class.
- **Contributions to Discussion (200 Points).** Contributions to discussions take many forms. Here are eight forms Dr. MiLO commonly uses when he participates in seminars and to assess contributions of others discussion:
 1. **Asking** questions that encourage another to clarify or elaborate on a comment and/or asking questions that relate to the topic at hand or seek examples and/or illustrations of it

2. Explicitly **relating or linking** observations and comments to central themes and main topics.
3. **Making** comments that link two people's prior contributions.
4. **Explaining** why you found another person's ideas interesting or useful.
5. **Building** on someone else's comments, while being explicit about how you're extending their thoughts.
6. **Summarizing** several people's contributions, taking into account a recurring theme in the discussion.
7. **Disagreeing** with others in respectful and constructive ways. (Note: You might reflect the comment back to the speaker to indicate that you have listened well. If possible, point out what is interesting or compelling in someone's comment before explaining why and how you disagree.)
8. **Expressing** appreciation for the insights of others, especially by being clear how they helped you understand something better

Written Assignments (550 points). While students will routinely demonstrate their degree of learning and knowledge during the seminar's discussions, they'll also do it by writing. Although this is NOT a continuing writing course, we'll have high expectations for our writing.

- **Weekly Film Reviews (100 Points).** The seminar requires students to watch and discuss seven narrative films, along with five documentary films. To help them prepare for discuss of the films, students will write and submit via Canvas weekly film reviews (1 page, single-space) before the start of each class. The reviews will mainly be opinion-based, allowing students to share their reactions (positive or negative) to the films. Details are available from our Canvas site under "Assignments."
- **Synthetic Essays (300 Points).** The course is divided into four modules. To further explore the readings and films, as well as demonstrate comprehension of the materials, all students will write synthetic essays at the conclusion of each module. Synthetic essays will draw from across the contents of each module, emphasizing the readings. The essays will give students an opportunity to use the readings and films to make and sustain an argument related to the topics of the modules. The essays will also allow students to argue for why the films are important to our understanding and thoughts about power and powerlessness in cities. Details are available on the Canvas site under "Assignments."
- **Film Pitch (150 Points).** All students will independently watch one additional film of their choice but selected from Dr. MiLO's pre-approved list (available from Canvas). The primary purpose is to develop a pitch, where you try to persuade Dr. MiLO to add the film to the syllabus the next time he offers the seminar. Students may be as creative as their minds allow, as long as they address all elements of the assignment. Details are available on the Canvas site under "Assignments."