

The City in American History

Last Updated: Fri, 01/02/2026

Course prefix: HTS

Course number: 3011

Section: A

CRN (you may add up to five):
31656

Instructor First Name: Daniel

Instructor Last Name: Amsterdam

Semester: Spring

Academic year: 2026

Course description:

Through a combination of lectures, readings, and discussion, this course examines the nature of urban life throughout U.S. history, especially since the late nineteenth century. It explores how cities have arisen, declined, and changed over time due to economic, demographic, cultural, and political developments as well as shifts in ideas about how to manage urban and later metropolitan affairs. It also examines how cities have served as engines of cultural and artistic production and why cities have been a perennial source of political controversy. Above all, it contends that the struggle to make cities livable and sustainable remains one of the most pressing issues of our time and that understanding the past is indispensable for moving toward a better urban future.

Course learning outcomes:

In addition to gaining opportunities to hone their writing, discussion, and critical reading skills, students will leave this course demonstrating a firm understanding of the main political, economic, social, and cultural dynamics that have shaped urban and later metropolitan life in the United States primarily (but not exclusively) from the late nineteenth century through today. Ideally, students will also leave the course with a strengthened appreciation of history as a tool for making sense of the present.

Required course materials:

Assorted articles, book chapters, and other readings posted on Canvas or accessible electronically through the GT Library. You do not need to purchase any books for this course.

Grading policy:

Grades in this course are based on:

- 1) Brief Reading Quizzes (10% of final grade) -- Classes that include discussion of an assigned reading will begin with a brief quiz consisting of basic questions related to that reading. The purpose of the quiz is simply to confirm that you have done the reading well.
- 2) Participation in Class Discussions (15% of final grade) -- evaluation criteria will be distributed on the first day of class.
- 3) Brief Research/Reading Project (15% of final grade)
- 4) Mid-Term I (20% of final grade)
- 5) Mid-Term II (20% of final grade)
- 6) Final Exam (20% of final grade)

Exams in this course are essay-based and take place in class. They are designed to be tools to help you review and synthesize the material discussed during the term and to show the instructor your mastery over the topics at hand.

Scale for Final Course Grades:

90-100 – A

80-89.99 – B

70-79.99 – C

60-69.99 – D

59.99 and Below – F

Attendance policy:

Students may miss up to two classes that are solely discussion-based during the semester without impacting their class participation grade. Any absence thereafter, no matter the reason, will lower student's grades in a manner described in the evaluation criteria for class participation that will be distributed on the first day of class. Exceptions will only be made for documented illnesses and family emergencies. The instructor does not keep track of attendance on days that are primarily lecture-based, but attending lectures is essential for succeeding in the course.

Academic honesty/integrity statement:

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. All work submitted must be original and properly cited. Plagiarism, cheating, or any form of academic dishonesty will result in immediate consequences as outlined in the university's academic integrity policy.

Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Social Sciences area.

Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help master course content and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question: How do I understand human experiences and connections?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome:
Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social, or geographic relationships develop, persist, or change.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Intercultural Competence
- Perspective-Taking
- Persuasion