

FALL 2020

POLS 262: Grassroots Economies: Creating Livelihoods in an Age of Urban Inequality

Professor Craig Borowiak

Office Hours: virtual by appointment (don't be bashful about scheduling a meeting)

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We live in age of intensifying economic inequality, the consequences of which are reflected in the landscapes of many modern cities. In Philadelphia, for example, decades of deindustrialization and urban flight have left the city pockmarked with abandoned lots, deep poverty, and segregated neighborhoods while new capitalist developments have led to concentrated wealth in the city center and gentrifying outward pressures on nearby neighborhoods. For many city dwellers, the mainstream economy is a source of alienation and disempowerment. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated such divides, as COVID-19 cases and deaths have disproportionately hit poor communities of color. When that economy fails to provide, what options remain?

The aim of the course would be to examine the political and economic constraints generated by poverty and racial and class segregation in contemporary urban environments and how grassroots economic initiatives rooted in mutual aid often fill the gaps and provide alternative ways to meet needs and generate supportive community. Examples of such initiatives range from guerrilla gardens and artist collectives to worker cooperatives and informal revolving loan funds. Many of these initiatives are informal. Some are legal, others less so. Many also fall under the radar of mainstream studies, which instead focus on capitalist markets, government welfare, and nonprofit philanthropy. Though many grassroots economic initiatives take place on a relatively small scale, they have a much larger footprint and impact when they are looked at together. The course will engage with them both theoretically and with numerous concrete examples and interactive experiences with practitioners. We will also examine various efforts in different cities to cultivate solidarity-based economic alternatives through public-private partnerships and grassroots coalitions. Case studies will be drawn from a variety of countries, though the focus will be on U.S. cities, with a particular emphasis on Philadelphia.

Key themes will include: capitalism and post-capitalism, diverse economies, gentrification, public vs. private, geographies of inequality, mapping economic alternatives, informal moral economies, community gardens, DIY, and cooperatives.

Assignments

o General Participation

Your participation in class discussions is as important as your written work. Attendance is required. You are expected to come to class having done the reading and prepared to make quality, considered contributions. The quality of this course will depend on the effort **each** of us

puts into it. If you tend to speak a lot, this may mean holding back. If you tend to remain quiet, this may mean speaking up. Be respectful of other students, but understand that critique can also be a sign of respect. Do not be afraid to challenge other students and the professor.

- **Discussion Essay**

Each student will sign up to circulate a short essay (3pg max) responding to the assigned material for one class period during the course of the semester. The essay might focus on a single reading or on a collection of course material. These should be written to stimulate discussion and should be submitted via Moodle by 5pm the night before class and preferably by the Friday before class. They should take a stance on the material and be more than just a summary. They should conclude with a set of questions or provocations for discussion. On the day of their essay, students will also be **responsible for orally recapping the previous class period and orally offering their key points for that day's discussion**. These should be limited to 5 minutes.

- **Mutual Aid Presentation**

Each student will sign up for a class period to write, circulate, and orally present a short essay (1-3 pages) describing/analyzing one or more mutual aid initiative(s) or other way in which people are sustaining themselves under the hardships caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Efforts should be made to make connections to course materials and discussions. These should be submitted to Moodle no later than 5pm the night before class, and preferably by the Friday before class. In-class presentations should be limited to 5 minutes. (If you would prefer to use a medium other than a written essay to represent the initiative, let me know)

- **Slack Contributions**

To encourage mutual learning and discussion, we will be using the Slack app for this course. If you do not have a slack account, please open one up. Students are expected to make regular (preferably weekly) contributions to the Slack channel over the course of the semester. These can range from comments on the readings to brief reflections on current events or on things encountered in or out of class. Postings needn't be long, and they can include audio, images, and videos, as well as text.

- **MapJam**

This assignment will have you work in a group of two or more people (you may choose to work with classmates or people outside of the course) to map diverse, grassroots economies in one or more aspect(s) of your life. You might, for example, map the diverse arts economies on your campus, or the economies of waste in your dormitory, or the household economies of your family, or childcare economies in the larger community.

- **Community Gardens Interviews**

This project has been designed in lieu of a community gardens tour in the city. I am making special arrangements with several community gardens and urban farms across the city. They will provide video tours of their gardens for us all to see. For this project, I will have you work in pairs to interview community gardeners about their gardens. You will be responsible for turning your interview into a presentation of one sort or another (textual, audio, visual, tactile).

- **Final Project**

To conclude the course, you will need to submit a final project. The aim of the project is to allow you to pursue topics from the course that most inspire you and to do so in a way that best

harnesses your energy and enthusiasm. This might take a variety of forms and can include multimedia. The most straightforward option is to write a 12-15 page paper based on prompts I can provide. Alternatively, you might choose to design your own approach (e.g., vlog, podcast, collaborative combination of essay and video) to representing your research. You should plan commit to a final project by early December.

Evaluation (approximate):

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| • General Participation & Slack contributions | 15% |
| • Discussion & Mutual Aid Essays/Presentations | 15% |
| • MapJam | 10% |
| • Community Gardens Interview | 25% |
| • Final project | 35% |

Classroom Etiquette and Protocols:

- Be respectful of other students, but understand that critique can also be a sign of respect.
- Any student who misses more than three weeks of class may face dismissal from the course
- All assignments must be completed to pass the course
- The classroom experience for everyone depends mightily on the level of energy we as individuals bring to it. Within the knowledge economy of the course, we are all contributors. When a member doesn't participate, it is a loss for the entire class. *For this reason, if you are unable to attend a class period, please try to find another way to contribute knowledge to the class.*
- Because this course is being taught during a pandemic, we'll all need to be more flexible and patient with one another, giving more of ourselves in some instances, and asking for greater latitude and support in others. *Let's try to bring our best energies so this course can be a source of inspiration in challenging times.*

Books

There are two assigned books for this course. Both are available at the bookstore and online through the library.

- J.K. Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron, and Stephen Healy, *Take Back the Economy: An Ethical Guide for Transforming Our Communities* (University of Minnesota, 2013)
- Kimberly Kinder, *DIY Detroit: Making do in a City Without Services* (University of Minnesota, 2016)

NOTE: *Haverford College is committed to providing equal access to students with a disability. If you have (or think you have) a learning difference or disability – including mental health, medical, or physical impairment - please contact the Office of Access and Disability Services (ADS) at hc-ads@haverford.edu. The Director will confidentially discuss the process to establish reasonable accommodations.*

*Students who have already been approved to receive academic accommodations and want to use their accommodations in this course should share their verification letter with me and also make arrangements to meet with me as soon as possible to discuss their specific accommodations. Please note that accommodations are **not retroactive** and require advance notice to implement.*

It is a state law in Pennsylvania that individuals must be given advance notice if they are to be recorded. Therefore, any student who has a disability-related need to audio record this class must first be approved for this accommodation from the Director of Access and Disability Services and then must speak with me. Other class members will need to be aware that this class may be recorded.

COURSE SCHEDULE

(Changes Likely)

W 9 Sept

Introductions

Please do the following in preparation for class.

Read: [“Solidarity not Charity: Mutual Aid for Mobilization not Survival”](#)
[“What Is Mutual Aid, and How Can It Help With Coronavirus?”](#)

Listen: [“Community fridges a fresh form of a long Philly tradition”](#)

Peruse: [Database of mutual aid during Covid-19](#)

PART ONE: Territories of Poverty and Inequality

M 14 Sept

Racial Capitalism and Urban Geographies

(I recommend following the order listed)

“Of property and poverty” in *The Economist*, August 26, 2006

*Watch video on [“Dharavi Slums”](#) (4 min)

**Mike Davis, *A Planet of Slums* (Selections)

*Peter Marcuse, “Reading the Right to the City”

N. Avni and O. Yiftachel (2014). “The New Divided City? Planning ‘Gray Space’ between the Global North-West and South-East”

**Watch: [“Are Slums the Global Urban Future?”](#) (15 min)

**Watch: [“Geographies of Racial Capitalism with Ruth Wilson Gilmore”](#) (16 min)

Browse: Whyhunger.org, [“Storytelling”](#)

M 21 Sept

Mapping Gentrification, Inequality, and Poverty in Philly

(For today’s class focus on the big picture rather than the nitty gritty details of these reports)

*Pew Study: “Philadelphia’s Poor: Who they are, where they live, and how that has changed”

**Bruce Katz and Matt Fellowes (2005). “The Price Is Wrong: Getting the Market Right for Working Families in Philadelphia”

Carolyn Adams et al., *Restructuring the Philadelphia Region: Metropolitan Divisions and Inequality*, 30-35, 36-60

**Brenda Kayzar and Kate Derickson. 2017. “Gentrification”

Aaron Moselle & Annette John-Hall, [“The surprising truth behind the racial dynamics of gentrification in Philly,”](#) WHYY (March 13, 2018)

J. Peter Byrne, “Two Cheers for Gentrification”

**Browse the following maps. What do the maps show? How do they represent the problems?
How are they different and what are their limits?**

Article with links to maps showing gentrification, loss of low-cost rental units, and “Philadelphia progress index” (map of trends in home values, crime, poverty, etc.):

<http://planphilly.com/articles/2018/03/13/3-maps-that-explain-gentrification-in-philadelphia>

An Interactive Map with color coded indications of ongoing gentrification in the Bay Area:

<http://www.urbandisplacement.org/map/sf>

A set of maps for New York City mapping gentrification and racial shifts in NY’s boroughs and sub-boroughs: <https://www.citylab.com/life/2017/05/mapping-the-transformation-of-new-york-city/525330/>

Article with a table showing increase in incomes for Philly’s 15 most gentrified neighborhoods (2000-2014):

<https://philly.curbed.com/2016/5/20/11717308/philadelphia-top-gentrifying-neighborhoods>

Pew Study of Philadelphia’s changing neighborhoods

http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/assets/2016/05/philadelphias_changing_neighborhoods.pdf

Study of life expectancy in Philadelphia neighborhoods

<https://philly.curbed.com/2016/4/7/11380408/life-expectancy-in-philly-neighborhoods>

Maps of poverty in Philadelphia

<https://philly.curbed.com/2016/4/27/11510912/philly-poverty-rate-increasing>

Gentrification report, including maps of 50 most populous cities in U.S. (scroll down for links to city maps)

<http://www.governing.com/gov-data/gentrification-in-cities-governing-report.html>

PART TWO: Seeing Diverse Economies

M 28 Sept

Diverse Economies

For this class, we read from Post-Capitalist Politics, a foundational text by J.K. Gibson-Graham that makes a theoretical argument for why we should view the economy through the lens of economic diversity rather than through the lens of capitalism (capitalocentrism). The Take Back the Economy book aims to provide practical applications and extensions of the ideas contained in “Post-Capitalist Politics.” You might find it easier to begin with this latter book. Come to class prepared to put some of the conceptual tools into practice.

J.K. Gibson-Graham, *Post-Capitalist Politics*, Ch. 3, pp. 54-78

J.K. Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron, and Stephen Healy, *Take Back the Economy: an Ethical Guide for Transforming Our Communities*

- Preface and Introduction, xiii-15
- “Take back work: surviving well,” 17-48
- “Take back business: distributing surplus,” pp 49-84

- “Take back the market: Encountering others,” 85-123

Peruse the Community Economies website:

<https://www.communityeconomies.org/take-back-economy/home>

T 5 Oct

Philly’s Community Gardens & Urban Agriculture Movement

**Domenic Vitiello and Michael Nairn, “Community Gardening in Philadelphia. 2008 Harvest Report” *(Use this report to acquaint yourself with the Philly garden scene. Do not get bogged down in the details.)*

**Cahn, Amy Laura Esq. (2015) “Supporting Our Land Stewards: Building a Constituency to Change Policy and Preserve Philadelphia’s Gardens”

*Saldivar-Tanaka, L. and Krasny, M.E. (2004). “Culturing community development, neighborhood open space, and civic agriculture: the case of Latino community gardens in New York City.”

David Adams, Michael Hardman & Peter Larkham, “Exploring guerrilla gardening: gauging public views on the grassroots activity”

Christina Rosan and Hamil Pearsall. 2017. *Growing a Sustainable City? The Question of Urban Agriculture*, 104-130

Selected short journalistic articles on Urban Agriculture in Philadelphia

Class Visit

Jenny Greenberg

Executive Director, Neighborhood Gardens Trust

M 12 Oct

Food Justice and Mapjamming

(In the first part of this class period, we will continue our discussion of urban agriculture and food justice. In the second part, you will share your MapJam projects.)

PART ONE: Food Justice

*Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy, *Take Back the Economy*:

- “Take back property: Commoning,” 125-158

**J. Guthman, “If only they knew. The unbearable whiteness of alternative food” in *Cultivating Food Justice*, 263-283

Alex Kotlowitz (text) & Emily Schiffer (photos). 2012. “[Plant Tomatoes. Harvest Lower Crime Rates](#)”

*Leah Penniman and Blain Snipstal. 2017. “Black Agrarianism: Regeneration,” in Justine Williams and Eric Holt-Giménez (eds.) *Land Justice: Reimagining Land, Food, and the Commons in the United States*. 61-74

Leah Penniman story. <https://www.clarku.edu/articles/soul-proprietors-clark-university-alums-farm-feeds-inner-city-poor>

*Penn Loh and Julian Agyeman. 2019. "Urban food sharing and the emerging Boston food solidarity economy" *Geoforum* 99: 213–222

PART TWO: Mapjamming

A lightning round of sharing your completed mapjam assignment

M 19 Oct

Cooperatives and the Politics of Race and Class

**Jessica Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice* (selections)

**Andrew Zitcer, "Food Co-ops and the Paradox of Exclusivity"

Susan Pagani, "This Cooperative Grocery Store Wants to Break the Diversity Mold"

Vivian Yee, "Food Co-ops in Gentrifying Areas Find They Aren't to Every Taste"

Visit [Philadelphia Area Cooperative Alliance website](#)

Anne Meis Knupfer, *Food Co-ops in America*

- Introduction (only pp 1-6)
- Chapter 7: Food Cooperatives, 1960s-1990s
- Epilogue: The Age of the "Organic-Industrial Complex"

Class Visit

Jamila Medley

Executive Director, Philadelphia Area Cooperative Alliance

M 26 Oct

Gifts, Susus, and Solidarity Finance

PART ONE

**Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy, *Take Back the Economy*:

- "Take back finance," 159-188

**Doina Petrescu, Constantin Petcou, Maliha Safri, and Katherine Gibson. 2020. "Calculating the value of the commons: Generating resilient urban futures"

PART TWO

**Jonathan Morduch and Rachel Schneider, *The Financial Diaries: how American families cope in a world of uncertainty* (Selections)

Rehn, A. (2014). "Gifts, gifting and gift economies: on challenging capitalism with blood, plunder and necklaces."

*Caroline Shenaz Hossein, "Building Economic Solidarity: Caribbean ROSCAs in Jamaica, Guyana, and Haiti"

**Watch: "[The Banker Ladies](#)" (21 min)

Watch: "[Doing Finance Differently](#)" (9 min)

Short Materials on Informal Loan Funds

- “ROSCA: What’s in a Name” <http://www.gdrc.org/icm/rosca/rosca-names.html>
- Patricia Cohen, “In Lending Circles, a Roundabout Way to a Higher Credit Score,” *New York Times* (Oct 10, 2014)
- “Banking for immigrants: Far-sighted,” *The Economist* (Jan 9, 2016)
- Sasha Abramsky, “NEW YORKERS & CO.; Newcomers Savings and Loan.” *NY Times* (Oct 22, 2000)
- Visit the website of Mission Asset Fund, an organization promoting ROSCAs <https://missionassetfund.org/lending-circles/>

AUDIO FILES

- NPR, “Lending Circles Help Latinas Pay Bills and Invest.” (Read the webpage & listen to the NPR story) <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/04/01/292580644/lending-circles-help-latinas-pay-bills-and-invest>
- Marketplace: “This financial innovation could help low-income people gain access to credit” (listen to interview): <https://www.marketplace.org/2016/09/26/wealth-poverty/jose-quinonez-macarthur-unbanked-credit-lending-circle>

M 2 Nov

Sharing Cities and The Racial Politics of Solidarity Economies

(This class has two parts. In the first part, we will discuss myriad examples of “sharing cities.” The second part will focus on the racial politics of urban solidarity economies)

PART ONE

**Shareable, *Sharing Cities: Activating the Urban Commons*

- Read “Introduction” (20-37)
- Browse through the rest:

*This book is a compilation of over 100 case studies (1-2 pages each) of urban initiatives that prioritize sharing and the commons. Browse through the book, paying attention to examples from each of the chapters. **Identify at least 5 cases** that you find particularly interesting or problematic. Come to class prepared to discuss them and the potential and limits of the Sharing Cities project.*

PART TWO

**Borowiak, C., Safri, M., Healy, S., and Pavlovskaya, M. (2017) “Navigating the Fault Lines: Race and Class in Philadelphia’s Solidarity Economy”

**Lauren T. Hudson, “Building Where We Are: The Solidarity-Economy Response to Crisis”

**Caroline Shenaz Hossein, “A Black Epistemology for the Social and Solidarity Economy: The Black Social Economy”

Adam Lynch, “After Centuries of Housing Racism, a Southern City Gets Innovative”

Peruse Cooperation Jackson [website](#). (*Pay particular attention to the “About us” and “our Work” tabs*)

Peruse SolidarityNYC [website](#), map, and videos

PART THREE: Edges

M 9 Nov

Grassroots Arts Economies

Marcus Renner, “the Art of Localism in Philadelphia” (Selections) (*Do not get bogged down in the details of this report. Focus on the big picture and take notice of examples*)

Melissa Bublitz et al. 2019. “Collaborative Art: A Transformational Force within Communities”

Vox Populi: We're working on it, 2009. ed by Andrew Suggs.

Amy Adams. 2009. “A History of Vox Populi,” pp 4-10

Paul Galvez, “A Philadelphia Story,” 22-25

Ellen Mara De Wachter. 2017. *Co-Art: Artists and Creative Collaboration* (Phaidon).

“Introduction: Co-art: the art of collaboration through the ages,” 4-21

“Guerrilla Girls,” 23-29

“Assemble,” 182-189

“ãyr,” 207-213

“August Orts,” 151-157

“Superflex,” 79-85

Visit Project Row House website. <https://projectrowhouses.org/>

Walter Hood and Carmen Taylor, “Musing the Third Ward at Project Row Houses [Houston, Texas]: from cultural practice to community institution”

Class Visit

Stephanie Bursese

Vox Populi Artist Cooperative

M 16 Nov

DIY Cities & Garden Interviews

PART ONE

Kimberly Kinder, *DIY Detroit: Making do in a City Without Services*

- Introduction (*read pages 1-11; skim pages 11-22*)
- **Chapter 1: Do-It-Yourself Cities
- **Chapter 3: Protecting Vacant Homes
- Chapter 4: Repurposing Abandonment
- Chapter 7: Producing Local Knowledge

**Samantha Melamed, "[Once-homeless Philly families are squatting in city-owned houses. PHA wants them out.](#)"

TBD: Additional material on economies of homelessness in Philadelphia

PART TWO

Present and discuss findings from community garden interviews

November 20 – 29: Thanksgiving Break

M 30 Nov

Scavenging and the Moral Economies of Urban Violence

Dope and Violence:

- **George Karandinos, Laurie Kain Hart, Fernando Montero Castrillo, and Philippe Bourgois (2014). "The Moral Economy of Violence in the US Inner City"
- **Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg, *righteous dopefiend*: pp82-85, 147-181

Recycling:

- Jeff Ferrell, "Scrounging and Reclaiming"
- *Teresa Gowen, *Hobos, Hustlers, Backsliders*, Chapter 5

Freeganism:

- *Visit and explore the freegan website <https://freegan.info/>
- **Watch film: *Dive! Living off America's Waste* (53 min)
- Kedar Bersten, "[Anti-consumerists are thriving during the pandemic. The freegans are doing fine](#)"
- Eilie Enziotti, "[New York's Freegans Expose The Insane Waste Of Our Food System](#)"

M 7 Dec

Grassroots Prison Economies and Post-Prison Realities

Bruce Western, *Homeward: Life in the Year After Prison*:

Chapter 3: Transitions

Chapter 6: Income

Ajowa Nzinga Ifateyo, "The World's First Prisoner Worker Co-op: Transforming

prisoners' lives through cooperation in Puerto Rico”

<http://www.geo.coop/story/worlds-first-prisoner-worker-co-op>

When Prisoners Return to Communities: Political, Economic, and Social
Consequences. -Joan Petersilia, *Federal Probation* June 2001.

Fortune News: “Food and Nutrition”

Patricia Leigh Brown, “[Kale, Not Jail: Urban Farming Nonprofit Helps Ex-Cons
Re-enter Society](#)”

Watch Film: “Pull of Gravity” (79 min)

Class Visit

People’s Paper Co-op

M 14 Dec **Last Class. Catch up. Wrap up**