Declining Cities
Department of Planning and Geography
Semester: Spring 2017
Thursdays 2-4pm
Location: SS 5017a

Instructor:
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General description:
The majority of urban theory is implicitly or explicitly oriented around the idea of growth. In the face of decline, the most common policy proposal is to (try to) reignite growth. Existing theoretical paradigms frame such places as problems or anomalies despite the fact that virtually every city has (or will) experience some form of decline somewhere within its boundaries. This class explores how to understand and engage with urban decline. The hope is that this exercise will shed light not only on iconic declining places like Detroit, but also on the nature of uneven development and how it is the rule rather than the anomalous exception within capitalist urbanization. Framing decline in this way allows us to see that vacated spaces within an otherwise growing city like Toronto are produced by similar forces as vacated spaces in declining industrial or resource-based regions.

Readings:
Most course readings are retrievable through the University of Toronto Library System; the remainder will be provided to students directly (details TBA).

Policies:

Assignment submission: The final paper for this class must be submitted (hard copy) by the date listed below. Written work will incur a penalty of 15 percent per day (with nothing accepted one week after the deadline).

Academic integrity: I expect that most of you are well-acquainted with the university’s policies regarding plagiarism and academic misconduct. Briefly, the quotation or paraphrasing of an author without proper citation is strictly prohibited, as is the submission of an assignment that you did not complete (e.g. buying a term paper, re-using old term papers). For more information about this matter, please visit: http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/facultyandstaff/Pages/Academic-Integrity.aspx

Disability services: If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible: disability.services@utoronto.ca or www.accessibility.utoronto.ca.

Evaluation:

15 percent: Participation in discussion/engagement with the reading. I am not going to police the latter vigilantly nor do I intend to penalize students who are not particularly outgoing. But by the same token,
it is crucial for students to engage with the readings as seriously as possible. As part of this component, students will be required to provide a short presentation on one of the supplemental readings listed below. The presentation should be no more than 5 minutes in length and be centered around relating the article in question to the day’s required reading.

25 percent: Interventions assignment. Produce a three-page hand-out and deliver a presentation on a planning, policy, or activist approach that has been used in the past to manage or mitigate some aspect of urban decline. Examples can be state-based (such as government take-over of dis-used land to build public goods) or activist based (such as forming a co-operative or protesting an essential cause of decline). The essential element though is that it be a tangible policy or approach that has been used by a person, institution, or government in the past. More details about this assignment will be announced in class. These presentations will occur on February 16 and March 2.

60 percent: Final paper and presentation. You are required to develop, research, and write a 15-20 page paper on some aspect of urban decline. Each student will present the paper briefly (<10 minutes) in class on March 30 or April 6. The paper itself will be due one week after the end of classes, April 13.

Schedule:

* Reading available on the class portal site (Blackboard); all others available online through the library online system (either journals or online books)

Week 1: Introduction to the course
- why study decline?
- scope of course and content
- expectations
- introductions

Week 2 (January 12): The nature of urban decline
- types of decline
- causes of decline
- geography of decline
- land abandonment as a type of decline
- models of explaining decline
- paradigms of natural or autonomous order
- where does human/ political intervention matter?

Readings:


**Supplemental readings:**


**Week 3 (January 19): Resisting decline**
- urban “resilience”
- the power of regional governance (or lack thereof)
- regional governance and other measures to fight decline
- is there a natural wave to city fortunes?
- can locational advantage (or disadvantage) be changed?
- impacts of deindustrialization

**Readings:**


**Supplemental readings:**


**Week 4 (January 26): Race and urban decline**  
- social divisions and decline; cause, consequence, or both?  
- planning for social division (and economic decline)

**Readings:**


**Supplemental readings:**


**Week 5 (February 2): Urban removal**  
- the politics of defining blight  
- economics of physical decline: reasons for demolition, disinvestment, etc.  
- removing physical blight  
- right-sizing, urban renewal  
- triage  
- “middle” neighborhoods

**Readings:**


**Supplemental readings:**


**Week 6 (February 9): Punishment as urban policy**
- penalizing the most marginalized
- perpetuating marginalization
- incarceration, anti-homelessness laws, weed and seed program
- relationship to triage
- social mix ideas and policy (culture of poverty arguments)
- penalizing residents; enticing (non-resident) investors

**Readings:**


**Supplemental readings:**


**Week 7 (February 16): Planning Interventions Presentations**

**READING WEEK (February 20-24)**

**Week 8 (March 2): Planning Interventions Presentations**

**Week 9 (March 16): Reparations for rentiers**
- deregulation and accommodation for land investors: title clearing, tax incentives, side lots
- contrast with penalty emphasis for actual citizens

Readings:


Supplemental readings:


**Week 10 (March 23): Alternatives**
- alternatives: CLTs (are they necessary in declining environments); right-sizing
- argument against affordable housing in declining environments
- argument for affordable housing in declining environments
- opportunities of declining spaces
- challenges of declining spaces
- using the status quo differently (expanded rent vouchers)

Readings:


**Supplemental readings:**


**Week 11 (March 30) & Week 12 (April 6): Final paper presentations**

**Final paper due: April 13**