

UPPP 275: CRITICAL URBAN THEORY
“THE (il)LIBERAL CITY”

Open to Ph.D. and Masters Students

Fall 2021

Thursdays 9:00a-11:50a

Social and Behavioral Sciences Gateway (SBSG) 3240

This is an advanced graduate-level seminar designed for Ph.D. students and open to masters students in UPPP and related fields. The fall 2021 iteration of this course will focus broadly on the topic of the production of urban space and its relation to relevant discourses on freedom, with an emphasis on iterations of liberalism, citizenship and the conditions of possibility for both social/spatial exclusion as well as individual and collective forms of citizen-based claims-making.

Cities are sites where global forces of production and consumption are unleashed and experimented upon. They are where new forms of social life, political identity and organizational forms are innovated and tested. As such, they are also the primary sites of state and parastatal techniques of regulation and social control as well as sites of innovation for action, social movements and progressive change. On the regulatory side, state and parastatal modes of urban control can appear coercive on some registers while on others they incite innovation at the level of human desire and interest. In this way, modern metropolises are as much spaces of exploitation and segregation as they are places of contestation, innovation and creativity. This course understands freedom as a discourse that is intimately tied to the production of specifically, urban space: a set of relations and a repertoire of power techniques that unleash both the repressive and enabling facets of the city.

This course is designed in two halves. The first half of the course traces the genealogy of the modern concept of freedom as they relate to the production of urban rights, citizenship and urban space itself. As such, the course interrogates the multiple meanings of freedom in the city beginning with texts about liberalism, neoliberalism and advanced liberal rationality and their relation to urbanism. The second part of the course moves dialectically by examining the limitations of these forms of high theory and the difficulty of applying such theories to global city spaces (particularly global South urbanism). This second half of the course thus begins by questioning the applicability of North Atlantic theories of liberalism to colonial and postcolonial cases as well as their limits in describing racialized and gendered violence and exclusion, drawing heavily from postcolonial, feminist and racial justice critiques.