MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning Course # 11.469
BU Metropolitan Studies Program Course # MET SO 502 Urban Sociology

Urban Sociology Study Guide for Week 4: Community and How to Study It

In recent classes, we identified a pervasive anxiety – about the impact of urbanization on community ties – running throughout the foundational literature of urban sociology, first centered in continental Europe (Durkheim, Marx, and Simmel) and then shifting to the more empirical Chicago School (Park and Wirth). We also discussed issues of structural racism in the city (Du Bois and Robinson). Though these early urban theorists were divided about whether to view the changes going on around them with optimism, apprehension, or a bit of both, the general consensus was that unprecedented forms of social interaction were arising and quickly, with important implications for *individuals* (mental life, identity, freedom, constraint) as well as *society* as a whole (cohesion, stability, conflict, innovation).

A century or so later, questions about how and where people "find community," what kinds of social ties are sustained in urbanized areas, which patterns are more universal than urban per se (even if they were urban first), how those ties create networks and other structures that matter, and how these affect the quality of individuals' lives, access to opportunity, political voice, and more – all these questions are still relevant and stir great interest.

1. What aspects of **Brint's** conceptual "reconstruction" strike you as most important and why?

2. Why exactly is "the community question" important for sociology? What does **Sampson** suggest on this issue, for example?

3. With regard to **Wellman** and **Sampson,** what does it mean to take a *network approach* to studying community ties? How is this different from a *place-based approach*?

4. What different kinds of research methods are used in this week's readings? How do they illuminate different aspects of "the community question?"

5. What questions does **Kelley's** critique of ethnography raise about how community is conceptualized and what data are relevant to analyze?

6. What do the authors assigned this week argue that early theorists such as Durkheim or those from the Chicago School miss?

11.469 Urban Sociology in Theory and Practice
Spring 2016