Research Project 1: Cultural Landscapes

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Geography 1301: Introduction to Human Geography

Project 1: Cultural Landscapes:
Ethnic Neighborhoods in the Twin Cities

1. Project Overview

How and why have immigrants and residents transformed areas of Minneapolis into ethnic neighborhoods? In this project you will write an essay that answers this question based upon your fieldwork, interpretations of readings and Internet resources (such as census track data), and class discussions. You will explore how immigration has changed the social fabric of the Twin Cities and how residents and visitors actively produce (and consume) ethnicity through the landscape. You are asked to observe a neighborhood and write critically about your observations by linking your research experience to readings and class discussion. This project consists of four main components.

1. You will learn basic concepts of migration, urban development, and ethnic landscapes through readings in the text, on library reserve (book chapters and newspaper articles), and the Internet. You will also read oral histories about immigrants who have moved to the U.S. in recent years. In week 4, you will review at least one required reading and discuss the reading in recitation (worth 5 points).

2. In the next couple of weeks, you will go to one of two Minneapolis neighborhoods in a small group, observe a small portion of that urban landscape and interpret its meaning and significance. In week 5 you will discuss your field experiences and study questions. In week 6 you will turn in a photocopy of your field notes, typed answers to study questions about the neighborhood, and a draft land use map based upon your fieldwork (worth 10 points).

3. After discussing your research (from phases one and two) in section, you will write an individual essay that answers the project question: How and why have immigrants and residents transformed areas of Minneapolis into ethnic neighborhoods? To answer this question, you will use the readings, your field observations, and interpretations of your fieldwork and readings. Your essay is due week 6 (worth 15 points).

4. To fulfill your CLE Writing Intensive requirement for this course, you will revise (not merely edit) your essay. Your revised essay and revised thematic map is due in section in week 9 (worth 30 points).

The entire project takes about six weeks and it is worth 60 pts. If you miss part of it, you will not get full credit (see timetable and points below).
2. Phase I: Reading and Preparing for Fieldwork (weeks 3 and 4)

The following readings are required for this project. You are expected to use and cite some of these sources in your essays. Selections come from the textbook, reserve readings at Wilson Library, and Internet sources. Some provide you with background information about the basic concepts of migration, urban development, and ethnic landscapes in the U.S. Additional background readings provide census data for the neighborhoods of your study and information about the history and development of the Twin Cities. Finally, some of these readings are written from the perspective of immigrants and describe the reasons why they left their homes and what they experienced once arriving to the U.S., and to Minnesota and the Twin Cities in particular.

Reading and Internet Sources

Background Materials:

Basic concepts

- Knox and Marston, pp. 131-141, 219-221, 239-245, 450-455.

Census Information

- City of St. Paul census information: http://www.ci.stpaul.mn.us/census/
- Hennepin Country census information: http://www.co.hennepin.mn.us/opd/Census_2000/Products.htm (Hennepin County).

Information about the Twin Cities and urban development


Immigrant Perspectives:

Views of immigrants


Information about migrants in the Twin Cities

- Suzukamo, Leslie. 2000b. Somali main street: Minneapolis bazaar is home to many businesses that cater to the Somali community, now estimated at 20,000 to 40,000 residents in Minnesota. St. Paul Pioneer Press, 24 April, 1B. Boyd, Cynthia. Freedom from fear. St. Paul Pioneer Press, 27 February, 1A.

For Group A (Nicollet):

- Nicollet Avenue Task Force, City of Minneapolis.
  http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/citywork/planning/nicollet/

For Groups B (Lake Street):


Other Resources
Forming a group

Today you will form a research group of 3 to 4 people in recitation. Although it is often difficult to coordinate schedules of 3 or 4 busy students, it is important to spend at least one period of time together as a small group. It is also a very good idea to form a group of people with different backgrounds and experiences. Why? Working in a group on this project will help you to “see” more and learn to become a better geographer. When there are four sets of eyes belonging to individuals with different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, you will find that each person will interpret the landscape differently.

As you bus, walk, sit, and observe, you should share your observations and ideas with each other. You will find that different people observe and interpret urban landscapes differently and according to their own experiences. By working with others, you will learn from your colleagues’ insights. Our students from past years have told us on evaluations that discussing and sharing with others makes this research project far more interesting.

The ‘fieldwork’ portion of the project will take approximately 4 or so hours, so plan for an afternoon/early evening or a morning during the weekend. Although it may be difficult to schedule a group time, you should note that weekday mornings are not good because there are more people using the streets later in the day. Please visit your neighborhood at least once before brainstorming in class about the project in week 5.

NOTE: Feel free to go to your study site as often as you wish. After going the first time in a group, many students also liked going again either alone or in groups of two (and at a different time of the day or day of the week).

Where to go? Choose a neighborhood

In this project, you will explore one of the following two neighborhoods:

- Group A: Along Nicollet Avenue S. between 25th Street and the dead end of Nicollet Avenue (29th Street); or
- Group B: Along East Lake Street between 20nd Avenue and 12th Avenue (focusing specifically on the section between 18th Avenue and 14th Avenue).

What to bring?

You need to map the neighborhood and take field notes. Wear comfortable shoes and bring a note/sketch pad and something to write and sketch with. Also bring a copy of the research questions for your neighborhood (specified below). You will save a lot of time if you organize your observations according to these questions.

3. Phase II: Doing the Fieldwork (weeks 3-5)
Observation, taking field notes, and talking to people

Cultural geographers try to understand why people act the ways that they do in particular settings and how they make meaning through their actions, including place-making. One way to understand social interactions in public spaces, like a city street, is observation. To be a good observer you need to pay attention to detail, patterns, and movements. Sometimes you can learn about other people’s experiences by talking to them.

For this project, you will be mainly observing, but feel free to talk to someone if the opportunity arises. Above all, please be aware that when you are doing research you need to respect every individual’s right to privacy and confidentiality. Please be respectful of the people in the neighborhood as you observe and take notes – members of minority groups are often, and justifiably, nervous about people gathering information!

To keep a record of your observations you need to take good field notes, that is, to write down your observations. Taking good field notes are critical to doing well in this project. Your field notes form the basis for your interpretation of what is going on here. You will forget your experiences quickly, and you should plan on spending a bit of time after visiting the neighborhood in a group to write about your experiences before talking to anyone about them (like your friends). Why? It is important first for you to process your observations through writing (as a researcher/geographer) before you process and remember your experiences by telling stories to friends.

Because you are required to turn in a photocopy of your actual field notes, the more systematic you are in taking notes, the better. (It will also make your life much easier when you use the field notes to write your essay!) Here are two suggestions.

1. Organize your notes in *different sections* according to descriptions, interpretations, and personal and group responses. Either use different colored inks or divide the page into thirds. It is helpful to separate out your interpretations (this store looks new) from description (the paint is bright and is not peeling, the design of the building is boxy and modern, the store is clean and bright). Doing so forces you to be a better observer. Be sure to pay attention to how people behave in the neighborhood and how they use the space of the neighborhood, i.e., do they stand together on the sidewalk, at street corners, do they greet each other, do they seem to feel comfortable in the area, etc.? Then you can also write down what you interpret by these patterns, behaviors, and uses of space. You may also want to create another category in which you write down your personal responses (and gut reactions) to your experiences doing fieldwork in this neighborhood (“I didn’t know about this market”; “I wonder how people find out about this shop/building,” etc). As you share ideas in the group, you can also write down their views. If someone has a particularly good idea, you should note who that is and give him or her credit for it.
2. Organize your notes according to the *themes* and questions outlined below for your respective neighborhood. You may wish to bring separate sheets for each question.

**Mapping**

As part of your field notes, you are asked to map the land uses in the neighborhood of your study (see what areas are specified below). We ask you to create a sketch map while you are in the field and hand in the photocopied map in week six. You will then hand in a final thematic map with your essay in week 9. So, how does this work?

- Take a sheet of paper, draw a line that cuts the page in halves, and then start writing down the types of land uses (such as businesses, restaurants, residential, and so on) on each side of either Nicollet Avenue (Group A) or Lake Street (Group B). Sketch out the approximate size of each building and business as you can see from the sidewalk. Map the apparent ethnicity of the businesses.
- To make a thematic map, categorize the establishments according to the ethnicity and the type of their businesses (i.e., what products do they sell, what services does a business offer?)

You can create any combination of symbols and colors as long as they are legible and understandable for the reader. Be creative! Don't forget to include a title and a legend that explains the categories, symbols, and colors you used.

*...even more things to do?*

You might want to stop by one of the many restaurants in the area for some soup or a snack once you are done with the mapping. Feel free to go into shops and look around. This would also be a great opportunity for you to observe interactions between people in the neighborhood, i.e., residents, shop owners, employees, consumers, diners, or spend some time with your group to explore the shops in the area.

While having a snack or while exploring, you might also want to compare your findings and impressions with those of the other members of your group. The more time you spend up front, the easier you will find writing your essay in the end!!

Before you leave make sure to venture into the areas surrounding your neighborhood (but you don’t have to map it). How are those areas different than your study area? Observations that you make upon arriving or leaving will help you to figure out the history and development of the community.

**Phase III: During and After the Fieldwork: Discussion and Writing Your Essay (weeks 4-6)**

*Discussing the readings (week 4)*
In recitation during week 4 (9/26 or 9/27) you will be asked to discuss the required readings for this project. Each person in section will be required to summarize one or more of the readings and come up with possible discussion questions. This part of the project is worth 5 points.

Brainstorming about the project (week 5; notes due week 6)

A photocopy of your field notes, your map, and your typed answers to the research questions is due in recitation in week 6 (10/8 or 10/9). But bring in your notes and map, and be prepared to share your observations with your fellow students in week 5 (10/3 or 10/4). One reason for brainstorming is to help you clarify your answers and think about your essay. You will also discuss the similarities and differences between the two neighborhoods. You will connect the fieldwork to larger geographical processes. In your recitation brainstorming session be prepared to discuss the following questions:

- What issues and processes at an international geographical scale have contributed to changes in the immigration patterns of Minnesota?
- What wider processes of urban developments are related to inner-city neighborhood change (at the local scale)?

Writing an essay about your fieldwork (week 6)

How and why have immigrants and residents transformed Nicollet Avenue or East Lake Street into ethnic neighborhoods? You will write an individual three-page (double-spaced, 12 pt. font) essay answering this question using materials from readings, discussions, and your field research. You must submit your essay to your T.A. by week 6 (10/10 or 10/11). (NOTE: If you do not turn in your essay by this date you cannot get credit for the final, revised paper.)

In your essay, please discuss:

- the reasons why different groups of migrants came to the Twin Cities;
- the difficulties and challenges that many of them face; and
- how they (and other residents) have transformed the cultural landscape of Nicollet Avenue S. and/or Lake Street E.

Use your field notes, your answers to the research questions, the reading materials, your map, and the recitation brainstorming sessions to address the processes that drive immigration to Minnesota. When you write this paper, assume that your audience is a friend who lives in a suburb or rural area and does not know the Twin Cities very well. Assume that your audience also has little experience living in or visiting inner cities.

Remember to underline your thesis. A good essay needs to have a short introduction, a main body, and a conclusion. Also include a short bibliography of references used (book chapters, Internet sources, field notes, and newspaper articles). Your essay will be graded according to the
criteria specified in the Study Guide page. For essay writing skills and citation guidelines, see: http://www.geog.umn.edu/courses/1301/essay_in.html. For grading criteria for essays, see: http://www.geog.umn.edu/courses/1301/criteria.html.

**Phase IV: Revising your essay (weeks 8 and 9)**

Your TA will provide detailed comments on your essay and map, and give you suggestions to improve them. These comments will primarily address the quality of the argument, but your T.A. may also provide some editorial suggestions. You will meet individually with your T.A. in week 8 to discuss ways to revise and improve your paper and map. You are required to revise the essay and map based on these comments and hand them in by week 9 (10/31 or 11/1). Your final grade will reflect how well you worked on revising your paper. Your T.A. will discuss the difference between editing and revising. Your revised essay will be evaluated according to the class criteria and according to the extent and nature of the revisions you made. The final revised essay and map together will be worth 30 points.

**Important Dates and Grades!**

*Discussion of assigned readings and written summary.* Worth 5 points. In section, week 4 (9/26 or 9/27).

*Brainstorming* for essay and discussion of field notes in week 5 (10/3 or 10/4). *Photocopy of field notes, sketch map, and typed answers* to research questions due in section, week 6 (10/8 or 10/9). Worth 10 points. Be sure to turn in:
  a) A photocopy of your sketch map of the area
  b) A photocopy of your field notes of observations (at least 2-3 notebook pages)
  c) Your TYPED answers to the research questions specified above
These must be INDIVIDUAL works. Make sure to keep a copy of these materials for yourself. If you do not turn these in on time you will receive no more than 5 points for a final thematic map.

*Essay.* Worth 15 points. Due week 6 (10/10 or 10/11).
This must be a FULL draft (i.e. NOT an outline or a rough draft). The essay must be three-pages long, double-spaced with 12-point font.

*Final Revised Essay and Thematic Map.* Worth 30 points. Due week 9 (10/31 or 11/1).
Your revised essay should be complete in every respect, and represent your best writing. Remember: revising is NOT just editing. Your revised thematic map should be no bigger than 3 sheets of 81/2x11 paper.

*Reminder:* You must participate in ALL parts of the project in order to get full credit for it and turn in your work on time. As stated in the syllabus, we will not accept late work - which is not fair to other students or to ourselves - unless you have a note from a doctor or counselor explaining why an extension is in order.