

Ottawology II: A Critical Study of Ottawa's Third Spaces

Lecturer: Dr. Tonya Davidson

Dr. Tonya Davidson follows up her popular Ottawology series with a second set of lectures drawing on sociology, cultural geography, and social history that will offer a spotlight on Ottawa's third places. Sociologist Ray Oldenburg defines third places as places that are neither home, nor work; third places include cafes, bars, malls, libraries, and community centres. In these places, people can interact with strangers, develop a sense of community, and be exposed to new and surprising things. In this series, the lectures will focus on many of the cherished third places in Ottawa: libraries, pools, arenas, malls, markets, hotels and parks. The series will include three walking tours that situate Ottawa's locally-cherished and crucial third places within the context of Ottawa's role as Canada's capital city.

NOTE: This series has a concerted focus on developing an experiential understanding of Ottawa's hidden (and well-known but perhaps less understood) places; 50% of the lectures in this course will be downtown walking tours. This series is a good companion to, but is distinct from, the initial Ottawology lecture series. It has no pre-requisites. It ran in Spring 2021 as an entirely-online series.

Series Schedule:

Lecture Outline:

Week 1: Introduction: from town to crown— *a walking tour*

This series will begin right in the heart of the capital. We will meet under Maman (the spider at the National Gallery), and I will lead a two-hour walking tour that takes us to Nepean Point, through Major's Hill Park and around Parliament Hill. On this tour I discuss Ottawa's location on unceded Algonquin land, and role as both a city and a national capital. I offer a brief history of the development of the city, and a series of provocations about what is and isn't represented in Ottawa's central ceremonial locations. We will end at the Centennial Flame on Parliament Hill.

Week 2: Libraries and arenas

This lecture focuses on two key third places: libraries and arenas. I offer a sociology of libraries—beginning with the city's earliest public libraries in the 19th century, to its latest new city library main branch and National Library and archives— demonstrating that libraries continue to become more democratic, open spaces that offer crucial, albeit contested sites of socialization. In the second half of this lecture, I offer a history and sociology of Ottawa's arenas. Like libraries, arenas are important sites of socialization. And, like the newly created architecturally spectacular libraries being built in Canadian cities, arenas are imagined to be possible economic engines for cities. I analyze how public-public-private arena-building partnerships impact communities, and access to these leisure spaces.

Week 3: From Markets to Malls

In this lecture, I describe the shifting landscape of Ottawa's commercial spaces, including the Byward market, commercial streets, department stores, malls, and big box stores. This lecture furthers two arguments. First, following trends in other cities shaped by advanced capitalism, markets in Ottawa have shifted from being inextricably tied to place to becoming tied to an abstract market and acting as *non-places*. Second, (and relatedly), markets and malls continue to offer important third places to Ottawans. However, access to and experiences within these spaces are influenced by one's class, gender, race, and age.

Week 4: Hotels—*a walking tour*

Hotels are exemplary liminal spaces: they are not home, but they can be somehow intimate. Hotels bridge the extraordinary: the foreign exciting city outside their doors, with the mundane: a bed, a washroom. Hotels are both an attraction and crucial amenity for tourists, and, as such are central to the "tourist gaze" focused on Ottawa. This lecture will offer a history and analysis of Ottawa's spectacular hotels including the Chateau Laurier, the Lord Elgin, and historic and long-gone Russell House Hotel. While oriented towards tourists, hotels are also workplaces for their employees, and third places for Ottawans who enjoy hotel pools, bars and restaurants. I will also offer a sociological analysis of why and how some, including the many unhoused families and individuals who are housed in hotels by the city, do make homes out of hotels. This lecture will take the form of a walking tour, beginning at the Lord Elgin Hotel and ending at Le Germain hotel.

Week 5: Trees

In this lecture, I detail different forms of human-tree relationships and show how these relationships show up in Ottawa's past and present. Trees feature in our human imaginings and have been, in different times, hero, villain, and victim. Trees are treated as sacred: mythological, profound, and profane: a commodity to be harvested as efficiently and crudely as possible. The tall, old-growth Eastern Pines were the heroes in the 19th century story of colonial expansion, while some trees, like the Manitoba Maple, derisively seen as a 'weed tree' are imagined as villains to both humans and other less robust flora and fauna. Finally, many trees, notably elm and ash trees, have been victim to vicious fungi, beetles, and Parliament Hill renovations.

Week 6: National narratives, local protest: *a walking tour*

In this final week, we will return to where we began, in downtown Ottawa for a final walking tour. Beginning at the National War Memorial, I offer a reading of how war memories are cast as central to national narratives in Ottawa, and more broadly in Canada. The tour will take us down Elgin Street to a series of monuments and discussions about multiculturalism, anti-poverty activism, colonial violence, and violence against women.

Tonya Davidson is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University. Her research interests have focused on questions of memory, national belonging, the built environment, and Ottawa. She most recently published *Seasonal Sociology* (co-edited with Ondine Park), which won an American Association of Publishers award for “best textbook in the social sciences” in 2021. [Read what participants say about Dr. Davidson’s lecture series.](#)

