

Ottawology: A Critical Study of the Nation's Capital

Winter, 2020

Prof. Tonya Davidson

How can the cholera epidemic of 1832 and the Spanish Flu help us contextualize Ottawa's response to the opioid epidemic? How would a feminist sociological analysis help us make sense of both the flannel that floods the Glebe every game day and the "Log Driver's Waltz"? In this series I draw on urban sociology, history, and human geography to offer a series of unique takes on Ottawa as both a national capital and a living city. This lecture series will focus on topics that will be approached from multiple perspectives allowing Ottawa to both be a lens through which to understand broader national processes, and as a city in its own right.

Lecture Outline:

Week 1: Introduction to Ottawology

In this introductory lecture, students will be introduced to sociology, Ottawa, and Ottawology. We will discuss the history of settler colonialism in Ottawa, and the "town/crown" tension that frames many of the discussions about how to design, improve, and live in Ottawa. I explain how sociology offers an important lens for thinking about Ottawa. Finally, in this lecture I explore these key ideas through a presentation of my own research on Ottawa monuments.

Week 2: Public health: from cholera outbreaks to opioid crises

Nothing highlights human connectivity more than communicable diseases. Communicable diseases highlight how we are connected through the air we breathe and water we drink; they also highlight when and how these connections become nefarious. In this lecture I look at the malaria and cholera outbreaks that occurred during the creation of the Rideau Canal, the Spanish flu of 1919, and current health crises.

Week 3: Ottawa: the city that fun forgot? Play, gender, class, and ability in the city

In this lecture I ask: where do the children (and the adults) play in Ottawa? We explore how play is both classed, gendered, and premised on certain embodied abilities. I detail how play has been designed into and expelled from imaginings of the city as a city and a capital. This lecture will cover the history of and current controversies surrounding the Rideau Canal skateway, lemonade stand permits, bike lanes, sports stadiums, and libraries.

Week 4: Home Sweet Ottawa

While Ottawa is presented as a home for all Canadians, it is an everyday home for one million Canadians. But the sense of 'home' takes varied forms. This lecture offers two parts: gentrification and homelessness. I begin by looking at practices of gentrification in central Ottawa locations: LeBreton Flats and Lansdowne Park. In the second half of the lecture we focus on questions of precarious housing and homelessness in Ottawa.

Week 5: Work

From the lumberjacks of the 19th century to the Foodora workers and Shopify employees of today, Ottawa's history reflects the national trends in the transformation in work from primary sector (agriculture & lumber) to manufacturing (lumber products) to service and knowledge economy (civil service, health, education). In this lecture, I detail how work, access to, and compensation for work are stratified along racial and gender lines. Ottawa, as national capital, has been a site for creating changes in the work worlds across the country.

Week 6: Crime and Punishment; Law and Order

This lecture begins with the story of Russian clerk Igor Gouzenko, pacing in his apartment on Somerset Street, looking out the window at Dundonald Park, anxious about the men in suits in the park looking up at him in 1945. This moment led to the creation of CSIS. In this lecture, I look at how Ottawa has been the setting for important moments in the Canadian history of surveillance and security, and the federal criminal justice system. We will discuss the surveillance and punishment of Canadian queer civil servants and military personnel from the 1950s to the 1990s, the historic and current criminalization of sex work, and the social issues surrounding the Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre.