# Exam 2

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### *“I pledge my honor that I have abided by the Stevens Honor System”*

## Section 1

### Q: What is the importance of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel’s ideas in urban sociology? Please, explain.

Karl Marx was a real pioneer in European urban sociology. He was one of the first classical sociologists to examine the impact industrialization had on the economic climate of European countries, which he argued also extended and affected social, cultural, and political norms. Marx believed that the capitalist system was failing the working-class *proletariats* - those who did not control means of production - and was unfairly rewarding the *bourgeoisie* - those who did. This created social conflict and tension between the two groups. Marx’s colleague Fredrich Engels - who held similar capitalist ideals - acknowledged the fact that urban life in particular was special in that it gave rise to political systems and forms of governance and specialization within the economy. However, they purported, the system was open to exploitation - and those who were exploited wound up worse off than the ones who were exploiting.

Today, Marx and Engel’s theory of urban sociology remains relevant, and perhaps has become even more relevant now with the dawn of billionaires like Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk. While inflation continues to rise and affect consumers, business owners continue to hike their prices to keep their margins unrealistically high. Meanwhile, minimum wage workers who provide most of the real value for the company struggle to get by and see almost none of the actual profits reflected in their hourly wages. I think Marx’s claim that the social climate is determined largely by the economic situation is a strong one: as proletariat working-class people feel the affects of the COVID-19 supply chain crisis reflected in the prices at the grocery store, gas pump, and more, they continue to feel more and more resentment towards those who are ultimately unaffected by these changes. They also feel more strongly about the political situation: voter turnout went up significantly following the 2008 financial crisis.

## Section 2

### Q: Why are cities where they are? Please, explain.

Though cities can develop essentially wherever a large population congregates to trade and live with one another, there are some geographical trends that the location of cities tend to follow. For one, economic opportunity has to be (or at least, once was) optimal in the region. This usually means either being near an abundance of natural resources like a mine or a forest, or being near a key trading location like a port, railroad, or major highway. Secondly, the environmental factors at play must be tolerable: not many cities develop in areas with extreme weather conditions like the Arctic tundra or the barren deserts. It’s also uncommon to see cities developed in regions with dangerously high water tables, which can cause frequent floods and damage to infrastructure. Lastly, historical and social aspects can attract cities: it’s common for cities to develop around learning institutions like universities, and even more common for them to develop around religiously significant areas like Jerusalem for the Abrahamic religions.

Though cities tend to be located in areas with access to a waterway, either along the coast to an ocean or sea, or somewhere along a major river, we do see landlocked cities as well. A great example of this is Vatican City, which has great religious significance to followers of Christianity. It developed despite its poor geography because people were drawn to the social and cultural influences in the area. Another great example of this is Las Vegas. It was able to grow thanks to advances in modern technology like air conditioning and cars and trucks. Now, major cities can develop anywhere along a major highway because modern trucks are just as critical to trade and economy as merchant ships were historically. Overall, cities today continue to pop up in regions that were once impossible, and as time goes on and the human population continues to grow, we will see more and more urban areas develop in unlikely places.

## Section 3

### Q: How do city dwellers deal with anonymity (Lyn Lofland)? Please explain by using examples if you can.

One way that city dwellers deal with their *own* anonymity living in a “world of strangers” is by emphasizing their appearance to a greater degree than non-city dwellers. A great example of this is Fifth Avenue in New York City, where many expensive and luxury fashion boutiques line the streets. In order to better associate with a certain group or class of people, many people come to shop here and spend thousands of dollars developing a distinguishable sense of style that places them above the average passerby. Another way urban residents deal with the scope of cities is by creating their own cognitive maps of the area they reside in: the reality of the city is far too scary, but the image they build of it in their head is controllable and conquerable. Lastly, people who live in a city tend to build a strong network of friends and acquaintances to keep themselves socially anchored.

While these coping mechanisms may work well for some in dealing with the anonymity that comes with living in a big city, it’s important to note that they are not equally accessible to all city dwellers. For example, marginalized people may have a harder time forming social networks that extend beyond their marginalized group due to factors such as discrimination or economic inequality. It may be harder for well-off Black yuppie living in the financial district to make friends with their majority white neighbors due to prejudice. Also, the very act of creating these group identities and strong networks based on likemindedness and social stature perpetuates existing economic and social inequalities and reinforces the power dynamics of them. It’s important to not let these “once-over” judgements of the many strangers you meet every day determine how you treat them, or whether or not to include them in your network.

## Section 4

### Q: What can we learn from the case study of communist-capitalist Beijing? Please, explain.

Beijing is a great example of how cities can not only be centers for culture and art, but can amplify them with proper planning and infrastructure design. The city housed Chinese citizens who practiced cultural and social norms that they valued as a whole, but also implemented it in its own design and layout. For example, the city is built perfectly on the north and south axis, promoting symmetry and uniformity throughout its various buildings, temples, and altars. The city was built to encircle the emperor and his closest allies in many layers of walls and protection from attackers, as the Chinese believed the emperor was the “Son of Heaven” around which everything and everyone revolved. The working class and general population lived on the outskirts, and mostly in the South, and their main accessible focal point of the city was the Temple of Heaven and the Temple of Agriculture. In this way, they reinforced the idea that their lives revolve around the emperor and his associates, and also around their work: mostly farming and agriculture.

The lessons from the city of Beijing during the Ming Dynasty are still applicable today in several ways. Namely, urban planning remains crucial for optimizing the use of space, resources, and infrastructure in modern cities. Also, preserving, practicing, and celebrating cultural themes are crucial for promoting social cohesion and reinforcing identity. This leads to an increasingly happy population overall. Lastly, we can take away that efficiency, optimal use of space, and sustainability are key to maintaining the healthy growth of cities with a huge population. Green infrastructure and public natural spaces like parks and bodies of water can increase the happiness of residents and keep the quality of air healthy for years to come.