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Seminar:
Tuesdays 12:30-3:30
226 Bay State Rd., Rm. 304
Office Hours:
Thursdays 11:15-1:15

HI568: The Modern Metropolis: Approaches to Urban History

This course investigates the rise of the modern metropolis during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when urban life brimmed with both the worst problems and the most exciting possibilities of the age. Our primary focus will be American urban life, especially in New York and Chicago, but great cities everywhere faced the same pressing issues. For this reason, we will also study Paris, London, and Shanghai.

Our goal will be to study modern cities as physical and social spaces. We will think of them as more than inert containers or simple backdrops for cultural, economic, or political activities. Cities were constituent parts of modern American culture—the very stuff from which people made up their sense of self, their lives, their work, and their play. There was something special about urban life in the age of railroads, industrial labor, and music halls—of new leisure grounds, new social types, and fundamentally transformed daily experiences. We will try to figure out just what made it seem to exciting, so daunting, so provocative.

Each week, we will delve into a combination of primary and secondary sources. Reading the work of leading urban cultural historians, we will consider the methods and challenges in researching and writing this kind of scholarship. By studying a wide variety of primary sources—fiction, painting, film, photographs, sociological investigation, and urban space itself—we will also strive to think creatively about historical inquiry.

COURSE MATERIALS

The following books are available for purchase at the Bookstore:

Timothy Gilfoyle, *A Pickpocket's Tale: The Underworld of Nineteenth-Century New York*
(Norton, 2006)

Steven Johnson, *The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic—and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World* (Riverhead Trade, 2007)

Clay McShane and Joel Tarr, *The Horse in the City: Living Machines in the Nineteenth Century*
(Johns Hopkins, 2011)

Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*
(Temple University Press, 1986)

Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park*
(Cornell University Press, 1992)

George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (Basic, 1994)

Michael Sorkin, *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (Hill and Wang, 1992)

Additional sources will be available on Blackboard Learn. Readings posted on Blackboard are designated on the syllabus with **.

ASSIGNMENTS

Class participation: This is an advanced, 500-level course designed for history concentrators. As such, this seminar demands a greater level of preparation, effort, and commitment than a regular lecture class. You are expected to attend every session, to arrive on time, and to remain for the entire class period. Students are required to attend every session—there will be **no unexcused absences**. If you are unable to attend a meeting (due to illness or family emergency), it is your obligation to contact the instructor in advance. *If you miss more than three class meetings for any reason, you cannot receive credit for this course.*

Discussion questions and other short assignments: Please bring **a set of discussion questions to every class session**—issues that arose out of the readings and which you wish to examine or debate. How do the different readings and sources fit together? What are the most important historical themes or problems raised by the readings? Preparing at least three questions each week will help you make the most of the course material. I will call on participants periodically to share their questions, so make sure you're prepared!

You will also present to the class an **oral report on a topic of your choice**. This should be a brief but informative discussion of a subject (5-10 minutes max), which adds to our understanding of some aspect of modern urban life. The topic you choose can form the basis for your research paper (see below).

Essay assignments: Detailed descriptions of the essay assignments can be found at the back of this syllabus along with grading criteria, but the breakdown is as follows:

First essay (5-6 pages)	20%
Second essay (10 pages)	35%
Third essay (7-8 pages)	30%
Class participation (including presentation)	15%
Attendance	Required

To pass the course, you must complete and pass all of the essays.

Graduate students will be expected to adhere to a modified set of requirements discussed after class.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS

Week 1 (September 2): City Living, City Reading

In class: introductions, logistics

Sketch of Paris apartment, New York classifieds, *Rear Window* (1954)

Week 2: (September 9): Public Lives, Private Lives

** Marcus, "The Haunted London House, 1840-1880," in *Apartment Stories*

** Haltunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, chapters 1-2

In class: Finish *Rear Window*

Week 3: (September 16): Mapping Danger, Reading Death

**Lui, *Chinatown Trunk Mystery*, introduction, chapter 1

** Walkowitz, "Jack the Ripper," in *City of Dreadful Delight*

** Schwartz, "Public Visits to the Morgue: *Flânerie* in the Service of the State," in *Spectacular Realities*

In class: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Man with the Twisted Lip" (1891)

Week 4: (September 23): Plagues!

Johnson, *The Ghost Map*, 1-35, 51-62, 68-79, 90-109, 116-21, 139-88, 207-28

In class: Map of San Francisco's Chinatown

Week 5: (September 30): Pests?

**Etienne Benson, "The Urbanization of the Eastern Gray Squirrel in the United States," *Journal of American History* (December 2013): 691-710

McShane and Tarr, *The Horse in the City*, chs. 1, 3, 5, plus epilogue and photo essay

In class: etchings and photographs

Week 6: (October 7): Crime and Corruption

Gilfoyle, *A Pickpocket's Tale*, preface, chapters 1-2, 5, 8-11, 15, 17, 20-1, epilogue

In class: *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* (1905)

Paper due Tuesday, Oct. 14, by 5pm to my box in the history office, 3rd floor of 226 Bay State.

Week 7: (October 21): Democracy and Didactic Spaces

** Keller, "The Elements of Democracy," in *Triumph of Order: Democracy and Public Space in New York and London*

Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, chapters 8-9, 12

In class: Haussmann's Paris

Week 8: (October 28): Commercial Corridors

** Nord, "Grand Magasins and Small Shops," in *Paris Shopkeepers and the Politics of Resentment*

**Rappaport, "Resting Places for Women Wayfarers," in *Shopping for Pleasure*

**Yeh, "Visual Politics and Shanghai Glamour," in *Shanghai Splendor*

In class: Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (1900)

Week 9: (November 4): Subcultural Vanguards

Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, introduction and chapters 2-3, 7

Chauncey, *Gay New York*, introduction, chapters 1, 7, 8

**Heap, "The Negro Vogue: Excursions into a 'Mysterious Dark World,'" in *Slumming*

In class: Ash Can School painting and Brassai night photography

Week 10: (November 11): Writing Workshop I

Week 11: (November 18): Writing Workshop II

Paper due Fri., November 21, by noon to my box in the history department office, 3rd floor of 226 Bay State.

Week 12: (November 25): Food, Class, Power

**Ross, “ ‘There Is Meat Ye Know Not Of’: Feeding a Family” in *Love and Toil*

** Erenberg, “After the Ball: Hotels and Lobster Palaces,” in *Steppin’ Out*

Chauncey, *Gay New York*, ch. 6

** Walkowitz, “The Italian Restaurant,” in *Nights Out*

In class: *Dining in Paris* (1925)

Week 13: (December 2): Life and Commerce on the Margins

**Ross, “Pawning and Power” in *Love and Toil*.

** Lu, “Beyond Stone Portals,” in *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century*

** Bluestone, “The Pushcart Evil,” in *Landscape of Modernity*

** Cayton and Drake, *The Black Metropolis*, selections

In class: Chicago Vice Commission report (1911), excerpts

Week 14: (December 9): The Fate of the Modern Metropolis

Sorkin, “Introduction”; Boddy, “Underground and Overhead”; Boyer, “Cities for Sale”; Davis, “Fortress Los Angeles” in *Variations on a Theme Park* (1992)

**“The City Solution” including Photo Gallery and Special Report on Car-Free Cities, *National Geographic*, December 2011

In class: *Magic Highway* (1958)

Paper due Mon., Dec. 15, by noon to my box in the history office, 3rd floor of 226 Bay State.

GUIDELINES FOR THE ESSAYS

For each of these essays, your goal is not simply to summarize and regurgitate the ideas of others, but rather to craft an original and provocative but sound argument that responds to the assignment at hand. You should support your thesis with detailed evidence and analysis that is sustained throughout the entire paper in a clear and cogent manner.

For the first two essays, your argument should be a historical one; your job is to make claims about what urbanites thought at the time under consideration, NOT what you think about certain beliefs or policies. Try to imagine and uncover how people in the past viewed themselves and their world, and consider the historical conditions that led them to think in particular ways at particular moments in time.

All essays should be double-spaced, with one-inch margins and a reasonable font. For a detailed description of the proper format for history essays and other things to keep in mind, consult the BU History Department Writing Guide: <http://www.bu.edu/history/undergraduate-program/resources/writing-guide/>

Essay #1, 5-6 pages

Analyze a primary source from the period that illuminates some aspect of urban culture and **set it in the context of the readings and themes of the course**. Please consult with me for picking your primary source. It can be a film, novel, artwork, or other source that catches your attention, and it can be something that will help you prepare for your research paper. Your source can relate to the cities we have read about or it can touch on others—Buenos Aires, Sydney, Tokyo, Johannesburg etc. Whatever you choose, make sure you can relate it effectively to some of the themes of the course and make an argument about its significance to the study of urban history.

The result of this assignment should not be a research paper, but a thoughtful, analytical essay. Do not simply summarize the source or relate what others have said about it. You should read your source with your own eyes and using the historical tools and references from the course—not through the eyes of other historians or interpreters.

Your goal in this paper is twofold:

First, you should provide **a close analysis of your source**. Pick it apart and say something original about it. Analyze its overt and implied messages, and determine how it communicates those messages. Read it with and against the grain. Are there any tensions within the source? Can it be used for multiples purposes? The result should be a richly textured essay that demonstrates how you have thought in depth about the different facets of your chosen image or text.

Second, you must place your source in **a meaningful historical context**. Why is your source important to our understanding urban history? How does it relate to other things you have seen and read this semester? If your source had been assigned, what would we have talked about in seminar that week? *How does it challenge, complicate, or extend the picture of urban culture as*

you have come to understand it? Alternately, how does historical knowledge about city life during this period enhance your understanding of this source and allow you to draw out insights about it that might otherwise be overlooked? Draw on other sources from the course to make your case.

Essay #2, 10 pages

For the second paper, formulate an **independent research paper on a focused question or problem** related to the topic you chose for your oral presentation. For this assignment, you might begin with a compelling issue raised by previous readings from the course or a specific subject or piece of historical evidence that sparks your interest. Your goal will be to gather and analyze an array of sources and make a compelling argument that enriches your readers' understanding of urban history.

A strong research essay will go beyond providing a simple summary report. It will be motivated by a question that can be convincingly answered through analysis of available historical evidence. At the same time, however, **its motivating question or problem should not be something that can be answered or solved too easily**; it should invite a complex, arguable thesis that is developed and sustained for approximately ten pages. A strong essay will rest on a solid body of research and demonstrate the writer's interest in the topic and ability to engage the material through historical analysis.

Essay #3, 7-8 pages

Choose a public space anywhere in the Boston area (or in another city if you choose). Study the site—note the way it is organized, the types of uses it was designed for, as well as the complicated ways in which it is actually used. In approximately seven to eight pages, make an argument about the significance of the location and its multiple uses. How does this public space compare to some of the ones you've studied from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? What has changed? Based on your observations, to what extent are the conclusions reached by the authors of *Variations on a Theme Park* borne out for your site? You may do some light research to supplement your firsthand observations (be sure to cite all sources used), but **the central argument should come from your own insights and assessments.**

A strong paper will offer more than superficial observations about the chosen location and will account for multiple, even contradictory, purposes to which the site might be put. It will offer creative analysis of the site's features—material, spatial, etc.—as well as a critique of its cultural importance. A strong paper will also demonstrate an attention to details that the casual visitor might have missed.

Late papers will be penalized **one-third grade per day** (example: a B paper that is one day late becomes a B-). All students are required to keep copies of their graded essays until the end of the semester.

NOTE ON PLAGIARISM. **Remember that plagiarism is a serious offense**, and it's your responsibility to know and understand the provisions of the CAS Academic Conduct Code. Plagiarism is subject to serious sanctions, including reprimand, suspension, and expulsion. Cases of suspected academic misconduct in this course will be referred to the Dean's Office. For a detailed description of Boston University's rules, consult the code of conduct at <http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/>

TOPIC IDEAS

The following are potential topics for oral presentations and research papers. The list is far from exhaustive.

Billboards, street advertising	Penny press
Black and tans	Promenading
Bridges	Prostitution
Bugs	Public health and epidemics
Car crashes	Railroad stations
Cemeteries	Rats
Central markets	Riots, fires, other urban disasters
Children and child labor	Saloons
Chinatown/other ethnic enclaves	Segregation
City Beautiful movement	Skyscrapers
Department stores	Street sellers and performers
Drag balls	Subways/trolley cars
Flash press/Racy tabloids	Tattoo parlors
Fortunetellers	Tango pirates/gigolos
Gas lighting or electricity	Tenements
Gangs and gangsters	Theaters, cinemas
Homelessness and shelters	Traffic control and lights
Laundry	Urban painting
Metropolises at war	Urban photography
Museums	Vice Committees or red light districts
Opium dens	World Fairs
Peeping Toms	

GRADING

Essays will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

An “A” range essay is both ambitious and successful. It presents a perceptive and independent argument backed up by well-chosen evidence, a creative and compelling use of sources, and sensitivity to historical context. Written with grace and confidence, it is the kind of paper that could be read aloud in class. It demonstrates that the writer has grappled seriously with the issues of the course, has done a close, critical reading of the texts, and has synthesized the readings and discussions.

A “B” range essay is one that is ambitious but only partially successful, or one that achieves modest aims well. It may demonstrate many of the aspects of A-level work, but falls short in organizational clarity, the formulation and presentation of its argument, or the depth of source analysis. It exhibits a command of course material and understanding of historical context and contains flashes of insight but lacks consistency in the writing or depth in the argument.

A “C” range essay has significant problems in articulating and presenting its argument, or seems to lack a central argument entirely. Oftentimes, C-range papers offer little more than a summary of information covered in the course, or they might prove insensitive to historical context, contain factual errors, unclear writing, poor organization, or insufficient evidence.

A “D” essay, in addition to displaying the shortcomings of a C-range paper, also fails to grapple seriously with either ideas or texts, or fails to address the expectations of the assignment. A D essay suggests serious insufficient command of the course material.

An “F” essay falls short in the manner of a “D” essay. It is also often significantly shorter than the assigned length, does not demonstrate even a glint of potentially original thought, and suggests a lack of effort or no competence in the material at hand.

Participation grades will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

A student who receives an **A** for participation typically comes to every class with perceptive questions about the readings. An “A” discussant engages with the ideas of others, respects the opinions of others, and consistently elevates the level of discussion.

A student who receives a **B** for participation comes to class with less well-prepared questions and waits passively for others to raise interesting issues. A “B” discussant, while courteous and articulate, does not adequately listen to other participants or relate their comments to the direction of the of the conversation.

A student who receives a **C** for discussion attends regularly but typically is an infrequent or unwilling participant in discussion. A student who fails to attend seminars on time and regularly or who fails to be adequately prepared for discussion risks the grade of **D** or **F**.