

Professor Brooke L. Blower
History Department, Boston University
226 Bay State Road, Rm. 307
bblower@bu.edu

Date
Location
Office Hours:

HI568: The Modern Metropolis: Approaches to Urban History



During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a metropolis was so much more than a town with extra people in it. It had become a fundamentally new kind of historical settlement, one that captured the worst problems and the most exciting possibilities of the modern age. What political, cultural, economic, and environmental consequences did these great hubs have? What did it take for so many to reside in such close proximity?

In this seminar we will think about cities as more than inert containers or simple backdrops for human activities. We will study them as physical and social spaces, distinctive terrains from which people made up their sense of self, their lives, their work, and their play. We will try to figure out just what made metropolitan life seem so exciting, so daunting, so provocative in this moment of rapid urbanization and industrialization. Our primary focus will be on American locations (New York, Boston, Chicago, New Orleans, San Francisco), but great cities everywhere faced similar issues, so we will also occasionally stray abroad.

Each week's readings will present a variety of topics and scholarly methods by drawing from the research of leading urban cultural historians. In class, we will build on this work and practice our own skills of creative historical inquiry by analyzing an array of primary sources, including newspapers, fiction, film, photographs, sociological investigation, and urban space itself.

COURSE MATERIALS

Most readings will be available on [Blackboard Learn](#). In addition, the following required books are available for purchase at the Bookstore:

- Catherine McNear, *Taming Manhattan: Environmental Battles in the Antebellum City* (Harvard University Press, 2014)
- Eric Avila, *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014)
- Eric Klinenberg, *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago* (2nd ed, University of Chicago Press, 2015)

REQUIREMENTS

First essay (4 pages)	20%
Second essay (8-10 pages)	30%
Third essay (revision and expansion, 12-15 pages)	20%
Class participation (including presentation)	20%
Final Reflection (3 pages)	10%
Proposal and bibliography (1-2 pages)	Required
Attendance	Required

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

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

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.

ACADEMIC CONDUCT: 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/>

ATTENDANCE: 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.**

ACCOMMODATIONS for Students with Documented Disabilities: If you are a student with a disability or believe you might have a disability that requires accommodations, please contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) at (617) 353-3658 or access@bu.edu to coordinate any reasonable accommodation requests.

PRE-REQUISITE: First-Year Writing Seminar (e.g., WR 100 or WR 120).

HUB LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Historical Consciousness

Students will create historical narratives, evaluate interpretations based on historical evidence, and construct historical arguments as they complete the courses' written assignments and participate in seminar discussions.

Students will demonstrate an ability to interpret primary source material (textual, visual, or aural) using a range of interpretive skills and situating the material in its historical and cultural context as they explore and closely analyze in class each week new primary sources (photographs, sketches, maps, passages from fiction, newspaper classifieds, film clips, etc).

Students will demonstrate knowledge of urban traditions, intellectual paradigms, forms of political organization, and socioeconomic and environmental forces, as they have shaped cities and how these have changed over time while each week's discussion draws knowledge from the secondary source reading, students' own analytical insights, and connections to previous discussions.

Research and Information Literacy

Students will be able to search for, select, and use a range of historical sources and information in ways that are ethically sound and strategically effective in order to address research questions as they embark on original research by becoming acquainted with a blossoming array of digital databases as well as do things the old-fashioned way by scouring the Mugar stacks and microfilm reels.

Students will demonstrate understanding of the overall research process and its component parts, and be able to formulate good research questions or hypotheses, gather and analyze information, and critique, interpret, and communicate findings as they present their works in progress to the class, comment on their peers' projects, and collectively brainstorm effective research strategies.

Writing Intensive Course

Students will be able to craft responsible, considered, and well-structured written arguments, which draw on a range of media and modes of historical expression as they complete a series of assignments, leading to an original, primary-source based research paper.

Students will be able to read, both published work and that of their peers, with understanding, engagement, appreciation, and critical judgment as they discover assigned readings by leading urban historians as well as engage with their classmates' drafts in writing workshops.

Students will be able to write clearly and coherently in a range of genres and styles as they complete assignments in a range of academic styles: proposal; annotated bibliography; oral presentation of work in progress; close analysis essay; primary-source based research paper (through two revisions); and reflection on contemporary urban life informed by historical understanding.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS

Week 1: Reading Cities

In class: Excerpts about the city and democracy

Sketch of a Paris apartment building (1843)

Week 2: Deadly Places

Kelman, "New Orleans' Phantom Slave Insurrection" in Isenberg, *The Nature of Cities* (2006)

Schwartz, "Public Visits to the Morgue," in *Spectacular Realities* (1998)

Marcus, "The Haunted London House, 1840-1880," in *Apartment Stories* (1999)

Walkowitz, "Jack the Ripper," in *City of Dreadful Delight* (1992)

In class: Stephen Crane, "When a Man Falls a Crowd Gathers" (1894)

Week 3: Crime and Class

Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women* (1982), chapters 1-2

Baldwin, "In the Heart of Darkness: Blackouts and the Social Geography of Lighting in the Gaslight Era," *Journal of Urban History* (July 2004)

Gilfoyle, "Street-Rats and Gutter-Snipes: Child Pickpockets and Street Culture in New York City, 1850-1900," *Journal of Social History* 37.4 (2004)

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

Week 4: Smelly Infrastructure

Barnes, "Confronting Sensory Crisis in the Great Stinks of London and Paris," in *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life* (2005)

McShane, "Gilded Age Boston," *New England Quarterly* 74.2 (2001)

Stroud, "Dead Bodies in Harlem," in Isenberg, *The Nature of Cities* (2006)

In class: etchings and photographs from Edinburgh to Shanghai

Proposal due XXX, by 5pm as an electronic Word document: bblower@bu.edu

Week 5: Adventures in Governing

Smith, "The Individual and the Collective: Water, Urban Society, and the Public Good" in *City Water, City Life* (2013)

McNeur, "Mad Dogs and Loose Hogs," in *Taming Manhattan* (2014)

Anbinder, "'We Will Dirk Every Mother's Son of You': Five Points and the Irish Conquest of New York Politics," *Éire-Ireland* 36.1 (2001)

In class: A Trip Down Market Street, footage of San Francisco, 1906

First essay due XXX, by 5pm as an electronic Word document: bblower@bu.edu

Week 6: Quests for Order

Gutman, "The Landscape of Charity in San Francisco: First Imprints" (2014)

McNeur, "Clearing the Lungs of the City" in *Taming Manhattan* (2014)

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

Keire, "Race, Riots, and Red Light Districts" in *For Business and Pleasure* (2010)

In class: maps

Week 7: Repertoires of Protest

Traubgott, "The Insurgent Barricade" (2010)

Keller, "The Elements of Democracy," in *Triumph of Order: Democracy and Public Space in New York and London* (2008)

Enstad, "Ladies and Orphans: Women Invent Themselves as Strikers in 1909" in *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure* (1999)

King, "Black Working-Class Self-Defense and Community Politics in Harlem during the 1920s," *Journal of Urban History* 37.5 (2011)

In class: Anderson, "The Soapbox and the Open Forum," in *The Hobo* (1923)

Week 8: City Rebels

Keire, "The Sporting World," in *For Business and Pleasure* (2010)

Stansell, "Bohemian Beginnings in the 1890s" in *American Moderns*

Chauncey, *Gay New York*, chapters 1 and 7

In class: Chicago Vice Commission report (1911)

Second essay (hard copy) due XXX, by 3pm to my box in the history office, 3rd floor of 226 Bay State.

Week 9: Work and Commerce

Harris, “Black Women, Urban Labor, and New York’s Informal Economy” in *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners*

Bluestone, “The Pushcart Evil,” in *Landscape of Modernity* (1992)

Brooks, “The War on Grant Avenue: Business Competition and Ethnic Rivalry in San Francisco’s Chinatown 1937-1942,” *Journal of Urban History* 37.3 (2011).

In class: classifieds

Week 10: Writing Workshop I

Week 11: Writing Workshop II

Final research paper due XXX, by noon to my box in the history department office, 3rd floor of 226 Bay State.

Week 12: The Fate of the Modern Metropolis, Part I: Byways and Neighborhoods

Jane Jacobs, “The Uses of Sidewalks: Contact” in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961)

Eric Avila, *The Folklore of the Freeway* (2014), introduction and chs 1-3.

In class: *Magic Highway* (1958); graffiti art

Week 13: The Fate of the Modern Metropolis, Part II: Disaster Returns

Eric Kleinenberg, *Heat Wave*, second edition (2015), xix-xxxv, 1-128.

J. Mark Souther, “The Disneyfication of New Orleans: The French Quarter as Façade in a Divided City,” *Journal of American History* (Dec. 2007).

Juliette Landphair, “The Forgotten People of New Orleans: Community, Vulnerability, and the Lower Ninth Ward,” *Journal of American History* (Dec. 2007).

In class: movie clips

Final reflection due XXX, by noon as an electronic Word document: bblower@bu.edu

GUIDELINES FOR THE ASSIGNMENTS

Research Project. The main assignment for this course is an **independent research paper** on an unusual event, a terrible disaster, a bygone activity, a curious type of urban character, or some other small, strange urban thing. Despite your topic's seeming obscurity, why is it important? What problems and/or possibilities did it raise for city dwellers? What can it tell us about life in the modern metropolis?

Ground rules: The weirder the better. Your research can extend to any city (even if we haven't read about it in class), but your topic must fall between roughly 1800 and 1945, since that is the period we are learning about.

Other course assignments will build up to, or branch out from, the research paper. All written work should be double-spaced, with one-inch margins and Times 12 pt. font. Use footnotes in the *Chicago Manual of Style* format.

Proposal and bibliography (1-2 pages). Pitch your proposed research topic. What strange or forgotten event, object, person, or practice do you want to write about? Why do you think it is going to be interesting? What kinds of sources have you found so far? What are you still hoping to find, and what problems are you facing in developing a clear argument? Attach an annotated bibliography of the sources you expect to use.

Oral presentation. Share your work-in-progress with the class in a brief five-minute presentation. Using handouts or images is encouraged. Articulate your main findings so far and solicit feedback and advice in areas where you are still struggling.

First essay (4 pages). Offer a close analysis of a single primary source (the most illuminating one you've found for the research project) and put it in a broader historical context. Pick it apart and say something original about it. Analyze its overt and implied messages, and determine how it communicates those messages. In order to develop a compelling and arguable thesis for your paper, reflect on how your source relates to the readings we've done and the themes we have discussed in class. If your source had been used in class, what would we have talked about? What does it teach us about the urban past? How does the knowledge you are gaining about nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century city life enhance your understanding of this source and allow you to unearth insights from it that you might otherwise have overlooked?

Second essay (8-10 pages), plus cover letter explaining what you are trying to do and how you think it worked out. Craft an independent research paper on an unusual event, a terrible disaster, a bygone activity, a curious type of urban character, or some other small, strange urban thing. Despite your topic's seeming obscurity, why is it important? What problems and/or possibilities did it raise for city dwellers? What can it tell us about life in the modern metropolis? A strong essay will not only rest on an impressive body of research but also go beyond providing a simple summary report. It will demonstrate the writer's interest in the topic and ability to engage the material by formulating an insightful thesis, backed up by compelling evidence and analysis.

Third essay (12-15 pages), plus cover letter detailing your revision process. This should be a substantially altered and augmented revision of the second essay, in light of feedback received and work done in the writing workshops.

Final reflection (3 pages). Spend an hour at a public space, anywhere in the Boston area, and take notes, sketch, etc. 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. How does this public space compare to some of the ones you’ve studied from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? What has changed? How would the authors we read during the last two weeks of class interpret your site?

RESEARCH TOPIC IDEAS

automats	murders, suicides
bathrooms	opium or reefer dens
barber shops, hairdressers, beauty parlors	orphanages
barkers	parking etiquette
billboards, ticker tape signs	paddy wagons
bootblacks	pawn shops, fences
bootlegging	peeping toms
bridges, canals	penny press, tabloids
bugs	pigeons, pigeon coops
car crashes	prisons, police stations, courts
disasters: blizzards, fires, floods, etc.	psychics, fortunetellers
dog catchers	public baths, pools
docks, wharves	railroad or subway stations
drag balls	seasons, holidays in the city
drinking fountains	sewers, cesspools
elevators, escalators	sidewalks, paving, manhole covers
epidemics	sleighs, sleds
evictions	soapbox, stepladder orators
fire escapes, hydrants	squatters
funerals, funeral parlors, cemeteries	stoops
gas lighting, electricity	storefront churches
gangs, gangsters	street performers, itinerant traders
garbage collectors, scavengers, ragpickers	street sweepers
home delivery services: ice, milk, etc.	subways, trolley cars, cable cars
homeless shelters, flophouses	tango pirates, gigolos, pimps
horseshoers, stablekeepers	tattoo parlors
hospitals, sanatoriums	taxicabs
ice cream parlors, candy stores	telephone booths
laundry lines, laundry mats	traffic lights, control
libraries, museums	waiters, bartenders
lunch	water towers, waterworks
mannequins, window displays	zoos, pet markets

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 thesis 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 thesis, or seems to lack a central thesis 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 insights 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 insights 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 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**.

HI568: The Modern Metropolis—First Day Handout

I think our governments will remain virtuous for many centuries as long as they are chiefly agricultural; and this will be as long as there shall be vacant lands in any part of America. When they get plied upon one another in large cities, as in Europe, they will become corrupt as in Europe.... The mobs of great cities add just so much to support of pure government as sores do to the strength of the human body. — Thomas Jefferson

The tumultuous populace of large cities are ever to be dreaded. Their indiscriminate violence prostrates for the time all public authority, and its consequences are sometimes extensive and terrible. — George Washington

The country life is to be preferr'd; for there we see the works of God; but in cities little else but the works of men. — William Penn

Cities are the abyss of the human species. —Jean Jacques Rousseau

We do not look in our great cities for our best morality. —Jane Austen

Cities force growth and make people talkative and entertaining, but they also make them artificial. —Ralph Waldo Emerson

Towns are excrescences, gray fluxions, where men, hurrying to find one another, have lost themselves. —E. M. Forster

When the Stranger says: "What is the meaning of this city?
Do you huddle close together because you love each other?"
What will you answer? "We all dwell together
To make money from each other"? or "This is a community"? —T. S. Eliot

City life is millions of people being lonesome together. —Henry David Thoreau

The United States was born in the country but has moved to the city. —Richard Hofstadter

“City,’ the word, comes to us from the Latin (*civitas*), but the city as an entity was an ancient Greek invention under the name of *polis*. Almost all our political vocabulary, from ‘political’ on, is rooted therefore in the ancient Greek city, and it was within that very special cultural context that democracy, another Greek political invention, was born.”

— François Hartog

City air makes you free.

—Medieval German adage

The chief function of the city is to convert power into form, energy into culture, dead matter into the living symbols of art, biological reproduction into social creativity.

—Lewis Mumford

All great art is born of the metropolis.

—Ezra Pound

We will neglect our cities to our peril, for in neglecting them we neglect the nation.

—John F. Kennedy

"If the city is both the producer of citizenship and the generator of innovation, it is therefore the soil in which democracy lives, progresses and responds to new challenges. Without the city, the place that maximizes exchanges between people, democracy loses its strength to create potential futures and promote current actions. The city is the past, present and future of democracy."

—Jordi Borja

“The influences which cities exert upon the social life of man are greater than the ratio of the urban population would indicate, for the city is not only in ever larger degrees the dwelling-place and workshop of modern man, but it is the initiating and controlling center of economic, political, and cultural life that has drawn the most remote parts of the world into its orbit and woven diverse areas, peoples, and activities into a cosmos.”

—Louis Wirth

“The city offers a market for the special talents of individual men.... Because of the opportunity it offers, particularly to the exceptional and abnormal types of man, a great city tends to spread out and lay bare to the public view in a massive manner all the characters and traits which are ordinarily obscured and suppressed in smaller communities. The city, in short, shows the good and evil in human nature in excess. It is this fact, perhaps, more than any other which justifies the view that would make of the city a laboratory or clinic in which human nature and social processes may be most conveniently and profitably studied.”

—Robert E. Park