

**CAS EN 128: REPRESENTING BOSTON  
BOSTON UNIVERSITY, FALL 2014  
PROFESSOR HOWELL**

**Final Paper: 128 Under Construction  
8-10 pp, double-spaced  
Phase One due 11/18/14  
Phase Two due 12/9/14**

It is a truth universally acknowledged that syllabi are hard to generate—especially syllabi for experimental and trans-historical classes like EN 128. Because of time and space constraints, professors have to make enormously difficult decisions about inclusion and exclusion—what sermons will most elegantly capture the Puritan sense of their City on a Hill? What broadsides will speak most plainly to the role that Boston played in the American Revolution? How much utopian fantasy (Transcendentalist, socialist) can one course handle? In the end, every syllabus reflects an ongoing set of compromises—the best provisional solutions to the questions that you’ve asked and the problems that you face. This, in turn, means that no syllabus is ever really finished: it can be printed out and distributed and followed carefully for a semester, but it’s still available for interrogation and revision. This is especially true in the case of 128—a course that will be back, in different forms, for years to come.

Your job in this final paper is to

1. Take a moment (or an event) in the history of Boston *or* a place in the city *or* a Bostonian or group of Bostonians that are particularly interesting to you
2. Locate a text (or a small group of texts) that captures/reflects/conjures some of that moment/event, that place, or that people
3. Make a strong case for including your text(s) in future versions of the class you are taking right now. This case should take the form of a thoughtful and argumentative introduction to your chosen text(s): What moment/site/group have you chosen? What sorts of issues or ideas does the moment’s/site’s/peoples’ text(s) engage? How do the texts seek to engage them? How might such subjects, arguments, or techniques fit into the literary traditions of Boston, broadly (or narrowly) conceived? Does your chosen text reinforce our received ideas about the period/space/group or challenge them? Is it of a piece with other works already on the syllabus, or does it fill in an essential gap? All of this will require some extended meditation (in advance *and* on the page) on what can be said to be *Bostonian* about Boston’s literature—above and beyond questions of geography, history, or citizenship.

**Phase One: Prospectus/Annotated Bibliography/Pageant (11/18/14)**

As it says, the first step in all of this is identifying a spot or an event or a historical moment that you want to think more about. It can be broad (the Puritan era; the Back Bay) or super-specific (October 26, 1986 [Google it—I can’t bear to explain]; Old South Meeting

House). It can be as serious as the busing crisis of the early '70s or as unserious as the formation of the New Kids on the Block (1984). You can talk about architecture, about anti-slavery, about ethnic identity, about *The Practice* (or *Boston Legal*, I suppose), about the Civil Rights movement, about the great molasses flood of 1919, the Cocoanut Grove fire of 1942, the Tall Ships parade of 1976, or whatever else strikes your fancy. You've always wanted to write a paper about Government Center (either the place or the Modern Lovers' song)? *The Boondock Saints*? The Dropkick Murphys? Faneuil Hall? *Love Story*? My friends, now is your chance. The trick of the assignment is twofold. First, you need to find some kind of textual object that fits with your interest. In some cases, the thing you will be interested in is itself a text already (*The Departed*; *The Town*; *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*; *The Heat*; *R.I.P.D.*; *Boston s/t* [1976]); hooray! In other cases, though you'll need to hit the library (likely the BPL, in Copley Square—that's where most of the great stuff is) and find some documents to analyze. Newspaper stories can work very nicely—especially editorials—as can things like court documents, affidavits, etc. As you know, this course's definition of "literature" is rather broad, so don't be shy about bringing strange objects around. Second, you'll need to connect your chosen object of study with some sort of larger current in the culture—a big idea, a bigger picture—the kind of thing future students will want to debate in class. (In this, the final is rather like the City Diary Exposition—finding cultural and intellectual resonance in the putatively minor effects of everyday life.) Once you've found your phenomenon/object/space/text, you'll need to figure out how to talk about it—what interpretive lenses or vocabularies you'll use to link it up with these larger questions about the City that we've been invoking all semester long. For phase one (due 11/18), what you need is a prospectus—a paper in which you sketch what you might want to think more about. The purpose of this is to start a dialogue with me (I'll return it with comments and suggestions for expansion) and with your colleagues (it will be the basis, I hope, for these Student Presentations scheduled for 11/20 and 11/25). I would expect this section of the assignment to occupy about three pages. It can be prose or it can be an outline—or a mix of the two—it's up to you. To this you should append a very lightly annotated bibliography (maybe a page), in which you indicate some of the texts you anticipate consulting over the course of your final paper project and an exceedingly brief (a sentence or two) rationale for consulting each of them.

**Phase Two (due 12/9/14):** This is where you write up the paper. I'll have your prospectuses back to you—with comments and suggestions—by 12/2/14, giving you a week to expand from 3 pages to 8-10.

### **Questions? Concerns? Stumped?**

I am, as ever, available in office hours and over email ([whhowell@bu.edu](mailto:whhowell@bu.edu)); please don't hesitate to ask.