Local and Community History  
HIST-GA.1752

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Fall 2019  
Tuesdays, 4:55 to 7:35 pm  
KJCC 404  
Office hours: By appointment

Course Description
The scholarship of British Marxists like E.P. Thompson, which advocated for “bottom-up” social history, influenced the emergence of local history and community history in the United States in the 1970s. We will explore the literature and practices of local history and of community history with a focus on New York City (with some arm-chair traveling to other locations). By reading some of the formative histories of different communities, we will examine the changing nature of “local” and of “community” given the evolving historical interpretations of ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality. We will relate the scholarly literature to the practice of public history by evaluating the interpretation at various historical sites. Together, we will investigate how and why local and community history remain compelling and relevant today.

Course Objectives
Upon successful completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Evaluate the arguments and evidence of the literature relating to local history and community history and relate this historiography to the practices of public history and archives.
- Define and delineate the synergies and differences between the understandings of local history and community history as two distinct, though often conflated, practices.
- Produce a written piece of local history by conducting historical research and communicating your findings about one specific place OR make an original argument in a historiographical essay about the evolution of the historical scholarship about one specific community.
- Articulate your own critique of the presentation and interpretation of local and community history at historical societies, history museums, and historical walking tours.

Required Reading
Books are available on reserve at Bobst Library.


Daphne Spain, *How Women Saved the City* (2001)


**Course Requirements**
- Do all the reading and think about it in advance of class.
- Come to every class. Attendance is part of your grade.
- Talk in class. Consistent and thoughtful class participation is essential.
- Be respectful of all ideas raised during class. One conversation at a time.
- Lead one class discussion and submit an outline for that class in advance.
- Complete the three short assignments by the deadlines.
- Submit a written proposal for the final paper/project by the deadline.
- Give an update on the progress of your final project in class (5-10 minutes) and a brief overview of your final project during the last class (5-10 minutes).
- Submit one final paper/project by the deadline.

**Course Policies**
- **Academic Integrity:** Plagiarism is grounds for failing the course. It is imperative that you cite sources accurately and that you do not copy or paraphrase without proper attribution. Please refer to: [http://gsas.nyu.edu/page/academic.integrity](http://gsas.nyu.edu/page/academic.integrity)
- **Accommodations:** Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.
- **Assignments:** Assignments are due according to the deadlines. There are no extensions on assignments. Late assignments will not be accepted. No incompletes will be given in this course.
- **Attendance:** You are expected to attend (and be on time for) all class sessions. If you must miss a class session, you must notify me via email in advance of the class you will miss. If you miss a class, you remain responsible for completing that session’s readings and for submitting assignments due that day on that day. If you are absent for any reason (except for religious observances and documented medical issues), you must submit a 4-5 page response paper on the readings for that week due in class as a hard copy at the next class session. I excuse absences only for religious observances (with advance notice) and for health reasons with medical documentation. Please do not arrive late or leave early. If you must arrive late or leave early, please alert me in advance.
- **Communication:** Please contact me about the class. I do not have standing office hours, but I will make individual appointments. Please email me to make a meeting time.

- **Etiquette:** When in class, please turn off and put away all cell phones. Do not use laptops in class. No student may record any classroom activities without express written consent from me.

- **Participation:** You are expected to read all the reading and be prepared to ask questions, engage in discussion, and listen thoroughly in class.

**Assignments**

- Write a 2-3 page (maximum) response paper to the theoretical readings in Week 2 which addresses this prompt: Bender argues that community can be defined better as an experience than as a place and that “community is where community happens.” Are community and place the same thing? **Submit paper as a hard copy in class. Due: September 10.**

- On your own time, go in person to the Brooklyn Historical Society at 128 Pierrepont Street, Brooklyn. Show your NYU ID and you will not be required to pay the admission fee. Visit the exhibit on the 2nd floor outside the library called, *A Queer Look at Brooklyn.* Think about some of the possible challenges to mounting an exhibit like this one as part of an outreach program to teens. Select one person or historical event, which was unfamiliar to you before you saw the exhibit and reflect on how the exhibit addresses this person/event. Bring a one-page reflection about this exhibit to class (500 words). Be prepared to discuss this excursion in class. **Submit text as a hard copy in class. Due: September 17.**

- Attend one historical walking tour offered by Big Onion Walking Tours, such as the *Official Gangs of New York Tour* or *Immigrant New York,* or by Black Gotham Experience. Visit [http://www.bigonion.com/](http://www.bigonion.com/) and [http://blackgotham.com/](http://blackgotham.com/) Arrange to attend this tour on your own time. You must confirm with me in advance the tour and the date that you plan to attend. Note taking is not allowed during the tour for Big Onion. After the tour, make some notes about your experience on the tour for your use in the class discussion. How did the tour guide connect history with specific locality? How did she/he connect local history and place with a broader context and larger themes? How did he/she present local history to the general public? Be prepared to discuss your experience in class. **Due: November 5.**

- Lead one class discussion to be assigned (to begin in Week 4). Plan to pose 2-3 broad framing questions, summarize the main arguments, and provide some broader context to the week’s readings. We will discuss how to frame a good question and how to lead a discussion. If two students are assigned to the same session, you should collaborate and co-lead. Submit a one-page outline to me detailing how you will lead the class. We may complete a short peer review exercise after each session. This section will usually come first in the class.
Outline is due to me via email on Monday by 5pm of the week that you lead class.

- Final Project/Final Paper: Select one of these two options below.

**Option One: Go Local:** Select one site from the list drawn from the Place Matters census on the City Lore website (you must confirm your selection with me in advance). Visit [http://www.placematters.net/places](http://www.placematters.net/places) to view the Census of Places that Matter. Go in person to see the site and photograph it for City Lore (2-3 digital photographs). Research the history of the location using secondary sources (include 2-3 secondary sources in your proposal and in the final profile). Write the text for a description of the site that summarizes its history and explains its relevance within a larger context. The text must be 1000-1500 words (approximately 4-5 pages). See [http://placematters.net/node/1739](http://placematters.net/node/1739) and [http://placematters.net/node/1148](http://placematters.net/node/1148) for examples of Place Matters descriptions. Once reviewed by City Lore, your piece may be posted on the Place Matters website. [http://citylore.org/](http://citylore.org/) You must comply with City Lore guidelines, including completing any relevant release forms, when working on this piece. **Due: Proposal -- October 22. Final -- December 10.**

**Option Two: Think Community:** Write a historiographical essay that traces the evolution of the scholarship and the scholarly arguments about a community of your choosing (you must confirm your selection with me in advance). Make an argument about how the scholarship has evolved over time and make suggestions for future research. Page limit is 10-12 pages. **Due: Proposal -- October 22. Final -- December 10.**

**Assignment Timeline**

- **September 10:** Response paper due as a hard copy in class.
- **September 17:** Exhibit reflection due as a hard copy in class.
- **Date TBD:** Lead one class discussion and submit an outline in advance.
- **October 22:** One paragraph proposal of final project due via email by 4pm. Please bring a hard copy to class as well this day).
- **November 5:** Preparation due for class discussion of walking tour.
- **November 19:** Progress report (5-10 minutes) for final project (in person in class). Bring a printed copy of your proposal to class.
- **December 10:** Final project posted and submitted as a hard copy in class. Final paper submitted as a hard copy in class. Give a brief overview of your final project during the last class (5-10 minutes).

**Grading and Evaluation Policy**

Grades will be calculated according to the following weights:

- Class participation/preparedness 15%
- Short assignments 45%
- Lead class discussion (with written outline) 15%
- Final Project 25%
Course Outline (subject to change)

Week 1:
September 3: Introduction to the Course
Before the first class session, please visit these two websites and be prepared to discuss them in class:
City Reliquary -- http://www.cityreliquary.org/
History Harvest -- http://historyharvest.unl.edu/

Please also bring to class EITHER 1) an object (or a picture of an object) that represents some aspect of the history of your community (or communities) OR 2) a print-out of an example of a local history project from your home town.

Week 2:
September 10: Theory and Context
Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (2006). Introduction and Chapter 3. (Chapter 4 is optional reading.)

Thomas Bender, Community and Social Change in America, (1978). Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 3-43).


Assignment due: Response paper due as a hard copy in class.

Week 3:
September 17: Historical Societies

http://ezproxy.library.nyu.edu:18338/doi/abs/10.1179/jme.2010.35.1.71

Watch on Youtube -- The Chicago Historical Society Presents the Making of Teen Chicago. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUDzEzDnfpw

Kevin M. Guthrie, The New-York Historical Society: Lessons from One NonProfit’s Struggle for Survival (1996) Chapters 1, 2, 10, 11. (Guthrie is optional reading)

Assignment due: Reflection about museum exhibit due as a hard copy in class.

5 p.m. -- Guest Speaker: Shirley Brown Alleyne, Interim Director of Education, BHS
Week 4:
**September 24: Colonial Towns and Creation Myths**
Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*. Introduction (pp. 1-11), Chapters 7, 8, 9 (pp. 210-240, pp. 241-277, pp. 278-327) *(Excerpt from book)*

Week 5:
**October 1: Slavery, Monument, and Local History**


Week 6:
**October 8: Race, Ethnicity, and Community: Museums**
Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown*  
Visit: Meet at The Museum of Chinese in America at 215 Centre Street for tour at 5:00 pm.

**October 15 — No class meeting**

Week 7:
**October 22: Race, Ethnicity, and Community: Redemptive Places**  
Spain, *How Women Saved the City*  
6:15 p.m. -- Guest Speaker: Molly Garfinkle, Place Matters Director, City Lore

Week 8:
**October 29: African Diaspora in New York: Local History and Public History**  
Visit this website: [http://blackgotham.com/](http://blackgotham.com/)  
Visit this online exhibit of Slavery in New York: [http://www.slaveryinnewyork.org/](http://www.slaveryinnewyork.org/)

Guest Speaker: Kamau Ware, Artist/Historian, Black Gotham Experience.

Assignment due: One paragraph proposal of final project due by email to me by 4pm. For Option One, proposal must include 2-3 secondary sources. For Option Two, proposal must include a draft bibliography. Bring a hard copy to class.
Week 9:
November 5: Race, Ethnicity, and Community: Neighborhoods and Local History
Gilfoyle, *A Pickpocket's Tale*

Assignment due: Take one of Big Onion’s or Black Gotham Experiences’ walking tours and be prepared to discuss your experience in class.

Week 10:
November 12: Labor, Tragedy, and Commemoration
Von Drehle, *Triangle*
Joshua Freeman, “Remembering the Triangle Fire,” *The Nation.*

6:15 p.m. -- Guest lecture: Mary Anne Trasciatti, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Hofstra University, Chair, Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition, Inc.

Week 11:
November 19: Local History and the Built Environment: Advocacy for Preservation
Chapter 1.

Chapter 2.


Assignment due: Progress report (5-10 minutes) on final project (in person in class). Bring a printed copy of your abstract to class.

Tentative -- 6:15 p.m. -- Guest Speaker: Molly Garfinkle, Place Matters Director, City Lore

Week 12:
November 26: Gender, Sexuality, and Community Archives
Read two short articles from *The Advocate* on NYUClasses.
Visit this website: [http://www.nyclgbtsites.org/](http://www.nyclgbtsites.org/)
Visit the website for the Lesbian Herstory Archives: [http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/index.html](http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/index.html)
On your own time, before class meets, watch *Paris Is Burning* on reserve at Avery in Bobst.

Visit: Meet at The Center, 208 West 13th Street at 5pm for archive visit with Caitlin McCarthy, Center Archivist.
Week 14:
December 3: Public Housing, Oral History, and Memory
Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing*

Week 14:
December 10: Wrap-Up Discussion of Final Projects
Assignment Due: Final project posted and submitted as a hard copy in class. Final paper submitted as a hard copy in class. Presentation about final project/paper (5-10 minutes) in class. Molly Garfinkle may join us.

Updated 8/29/2019