United States Urban History

Professor Zachary Schrag
Mondays, 7:20-10pm.
Research Hall 202
Syllabus updated 27 January 2014

Course Blackboard site: http://mymason.gmu.edu.
General advice: http://historyprofessor.org
Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide:
http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

E-mail: zschrag@gmu.edu (please include “615” in subject header).
Office: Robinson B 357A. Tel. 703/594-1844.
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2-4 pm and by appointment.

While I greatly enjoy meeting students individually, meetings and other commitments occasionally force me to cancel scheduled office hours, so please let me know in advance if you are coming to office hours. If you would like to meet some other time, please send me an e-mail with two or three proposed times. I am happy to meet with small groups and am open to suggestions for other communications formats, e.g., text chat or Skype video calls.

Course description
American cities are microcosms of the nation as a whole, places where debates about race, class, gender, nature, power, and technology take physical form, as Americans argue about how to share crowded spaces. This reading seminar will explore the history of these debates since the mid-19th century, tracing the development of housing, transportation, parks, infrastructure, and other elements of the urban and suburban built environment. Though we will consider some non-U.S. examples, the main emphasis will be the United States, and the course is intended to serve students preparing for comprehensive exams in U.S. history as well as those with particular interest in cities. It satisfies U.S. history distribution requirements for either 1861-1914 or 1914 to the present.

The seminar mostly focuses on assigned reading, though students are also asked to locate some primary sources on their own and to consider some popular presentations of urban history in such formats as museum exhibits, walking tours, and documentary film.

Goals
In this course, students will:

• Enhance their knowledge of twentieth-century United States history.
• Explore the connections between urban history and national history and the ways historians study those connections.
• Practice critical reading and analysis of recent scholarship.
• Consider the connections between scholarly history and public history approaches to the history of cities.

Administrative
Please read the administrative information about the honor code, university resources, and the like online at http://historyprofessor.org/miscellaneous/boilerplate/
Books
While you are welcome to use electronic versions of these texts, please make a good faith effort to cite page numbers, not electronic locations. You can often translate locations to page numbers by searching for a passage on Amazon or Google Books.


Assignments

Participation

As graduate students, you are expected to attend class regularly and promptly, and to let me know in advance if you will not be able to attend a session. You are expected to participate actively in class discussions, posing questions to your classmates and asking for their thoughts on challenging portions of the reading. Since I expect these things of every student, I will not grade participation separately. Only if your contributions are deficient will I factor that into your final course grade.

Please do not eat in the classroom before or during class.

Reaction essays (7 percent each, 84 percent total)

For each of the first twelve weeks, each student will write a 500-1000 word reaction to the assigned reading. Please post these on Blackboard by noon on the day of our discussion, so I may read them in advance of our meeting. Please paste the text into the text box, rather than attaching a separate file.

The essays should not summarize the reading. Rather, they should critique it, explaining its significance, noting its weaknesses, and relating it to other reading the
student has done within the course and without. The essays should be designed to stimulate class discussion by provoking other students. In short, they should serve as the good part of a book review. Formal footnotes are not required, but please provide page numbers for quotations and key facts.

For more instructions on reading and reacting, please see “How to Read a History Book,” “How to Write a Review,” “How to Write a Reading Response,” and “Reverse Engineering for Historians” at http://historyprofessor.org/reading/

The books have been assigned in pairs. For the second response of each pair, please refer to material from the previous week and explore the dialogue between the two books. You are also free to refer back to prior pairs, but that is not required.

This assignment is designed to:

- Keep you engaged as active readers.
- Give you practice in writing critically yet respectfully about other scholars' work.
- Ensure that you are prepared for class discussions.
- Prepare instructors and classmates for class discussions by letting them know your initial reactions to the readings.
- Avoid distracting you from the demanding reading list with other assignments.

I will aim to post comments on your reaction essays in the Blackboard gradebook within a week of their submission. Reaction essays are scored roughly as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>Evidence of reading, but significant inaccuracies or inattention to major portions of the work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>A competent summary that shows familiarity with the reading but little original analysis. Some misunderstanding. May discuss book and chapter introductions and conclusions to the exclusion of the body of the narrative. Or lacks essay form, and instead reads as series of unconnected observations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>Accurate, but mostly summary, or timid analysis. Not clear what you found particularly striking about the reading. Claims lack evidence from the text. Possibly some misunderstandings. Some original analysis, but the response is not crafted to emphasize it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>A clear thesis, but weak on details drawn from the body of the text. Some analysis, but not well developed. Claims raise more questions than they answer, or lack evidence from the text. Or many scattered points not tied into a clear thesis. More summary than is necessary, and not enough attention to specific examples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>Original thesis supported by specific facts about the reading. Most claims are persuasive. Some claims need work, or claims are offered independently rather than being integrated into an essay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>Careful analysis of significant choices made by the author. A clear, bold thesis that is likely to spark class discussion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>A coherent essay that poses a question of significance about the text's argument and explores it with careful, detailed attention to the text, including examples from the body of the work. Addresses what might be the author's responses to the claims. As polished as a review published in a journal.</td>
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Discussion leading (8 percent)

Once during the semester, each student will join with one or two others to lead the seminar. Leaders will prepare discussion questions for the group and lead the discussion.

In addition, each leader should either present an additional article-length secondary source and explain its relevance to the common reading, or prepare a primary source for discussion. You may want to choose sources connected to your own research interests, or that represent perspectives and themes you feel are underrepresented in the course. This includes sources about countries other than the United States.

- **Secondary source option.** Read an article, chapter, or review essay. You may instead wish to read a source cited by one of the assigned books, or simply find something on your own. You may wish to explore *The Journal of Urban History, The Journal of Planning History, and Urban History*, all of which are available electronically through the Mason libraries.

- **Primary source option.** Find a primary source relevant to the assigned readings and prepare it for discussion by the group. For example, you might prepare a one-page handout (preferably single sided), show a small number of images, or play a brief video or audio file (no more than 5 minutes).

Please post your questions and, if possible, associated items or links to them to the Discussion Questions blog by noon on the day you will lead discussion.

This assignment is designed to:

- Give you experience leading discussions and preparing materials for discussion.
- Give you the chance to explore your own special interests by selecting primary and secondary materials that shed alternative perspectives on the common readings.
- Enliven class discussions by bringing in those new perspectives.

Public history review (8 percent)

At some point during the semester, please view or attend a non-scholarly presentation of some aspect of urban history. (Please do not review sites where you work as a volunteer or paid employee.) Examples include:

- A museum exhibit (just about anything at the National Building Museum; other options available).

- A walking tour of a neighborhood in Washington or some other city. Aim for a reasonably sophisticated outfit, such as Washington Walks (D.C.) or Big Onion (NYC), and avoid cheesy ghost tours.

- A documentary film.

Please write up a review in the style of a *CRM: The of Journal of Heritage Stewardship* exhibit review, about 2500-3000 words. (*CRM* is no longer published, but several old issues are online at http://www.cr.nps.gov/CRMJournal/) Please consider the ways in which the presenters deploy scholarly insights for a non-scholarly audience.

In our final session, you will present your review to the seminar. Because of time constraints, you will have only **seven minutes** to present. I recommend, but do not require, the **pecha kucha** format, designed for 400-second presentations. See http://www.pechakucha.org/

Please post your review and any associated materials to the assignment section of Bb by the start of our final class (May 5, 7:20pm).
This assignment is designed to:

- Help you consider the relationship between scholarly and public history.
- Give you practice in writing critically yet respectfully about public historians’ work.
- Allow you to explore a personal interest beyond the classroom.
- Give you experience with public presentation.
- Let you have some fun.
Schedule

January 27. Introduction

❖ Reform
February 3. Five Points
February 10. The Park and the People

❖ Progressivism
February 17. Sorting out the New South City
February 24. Building the South Side

❖ Technology
March 3. In the Watches of the Night
March 10. NO CLASS (Spring Break)
March 17. Fighting Traffic

❖ Plans
March 24. Planning the Home Front
March 31. Magic Lands

❖ Projects
April 7. Blueprint for Disaster
April 14. Manhattan Projects

❖ Alternatives
April 21. The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn
April 28. Reston Symposium. The seminar will not meet at Mason. Instead, you are encouraged to attend the Reston Anniversary symposium from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. at the Reston Community Center. Some seats on a Mason bus may be available.

Read: Suburban Alchemy

❖ Wrap-up
May 5. Presentations.