

Local and Community History

G57.1752

Jan. 20, 2009

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Wed 4:55 to 7:45 -- Room 607, Dept of History, King Juan Carlos Center 4 Credits

Office Hours: 4 to 5 on Wed. or by appointment, Room 513

Description: Emphasizing that the practice of history is both participation and a form of citizenship, we will look at local and community history activity in a wide variety of contexts. The course investigates material culture, history through the senses, unconventional forms of evidence and various controversial topics that have pitted grassroots practitioners against the academy. Classroom debate will sharpen skills to critically examine media, museum exhibition, and digital forums. Students will gain a rich appreciation of how history is conducted in public history settings shaped by local and community forces. Note that the order of readings and class work is thematic, rather than chronological. Topics are spread through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Mandatory Class Attendance and Participation – We are a learning team, and the class is only as good as what we ALL put into the mix.

Required books (in order of use):

Thomas Bender. *Community and Social Change in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.

Clay Shirky. *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*. New York: Penguin Press, 2008

Dolores Hayden. *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth. 1820-2000*. New York: Vintage, 2003.

David Blight, ed. *Passages to Freedom: The Underground Railroad in History and Memory*. Smithsonian/Harper Collins, 2004

Gail Lee Dubrow & Jennifer B. Goodman, ed. *Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2003.

Mark M. Smith, ed. *Hearing History* Athens, Georgia: Univ. of Georgia, 2004.

Melvin Patrick Ely. *The Adventures of Amos n' Andy*. Free Press, 1992. (excerpts)

Timothy Gilfoyle *A Pickpocket's Tale*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006

Some articles available on JStor and Blackboard as listed below

Evaluation will be based on assignments and class participation:

Six blog posts over semester

Museum object paper

Place Matters web page
Final paper project

Jan 21 Introduction

Part I **Defining Community/ Interpreting Evidence**

Navigating the shifting boundaries of community studies requires consideration of various models and assumptions. The study of local events or community history begins, of course, with people, but rapidly follows up with collection and evaluation of evidence. Once attention is focused on the local, the absence of the official record associated with the national political narrative spurs historians to be inventive in locating and interpreting fragmentary evidence.

Jan. 28

Thomas Bender *Community and Social Change in America*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982.

Katharine T. Corbett & Howard S. (Dick) Miller "A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry" *The Public Historian* Vol. 28 No. 1, pp 15-38 (Winter 2006).

Theory and practice of community.

Feb. 4

Jules David Prown *American Art and Artifacts*.

Material culture and thick description, the world of objects.

Feb 11 CLASS at New York Public Library, 42nd St. and Fifth Ave!

Museum objects assignment due.

Visit on your own the Yaddo exhibition (which looks at artistic community in its rural mode) on first floor first, but don't be late, or you might not get a seat at screening of *The City* at 6.

Special Screening: The City, 6 pm, New York Public Library: Humanities & Social Sciences Library, South Court, Celeste Bartos Auditorium

The City, b&w, 43 min., (Directed by Ralph Steiner and Willard Van Dyke, 1939).

Original soundtrack by Aaron Copland.

Screening will be followed by a conversation between music historian Joseph Horowitz and documentary filmmaker/scholar George Stoney.

Feb 18 Digital Community and Social Media

Guest presenter: Prof. Amanda French

Clay Shirky, read pp 1-54.

* William G. Thomas "Computing and the Historical Imagination"

in *A Companion to Digital Humanities*

<http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion/view?docId=blackwell/9781405103213/9781405103213.xml&doc.view=print&chunk.id=ss1-2-5&toc.depth=1&toc.id=0>

Podcast (11 minutes) Introduction to the Valley of the Shadow website
<http://www.podnova.com/channel/6441/>

- * <http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu/>
- * <http://www.coneyislandhistory.org/>
- * <http://flickr.com/search/?q=mermaid+parade>

Part 2. **Motivations**

What motivates participation in history and community efforts? Discussions will center on two case studies: the first on the museum and exhibition context, examining gate-keeping functions and self-representation; the second, on the popular trend for marking the history of the Underground Railroad.

Feb 25 EARLY CLASS, start at 4:30 at New-York Historical Society, 170 Central Park West (corner of West 77th St. Take B or C to 81st St. stop, disembark at tail of train)

Grant and Lee/ Lee and Grant Case Study --Regional interpretations and the “local” Civil Wars, collaboration and its discontents

Steven Dubin *Displays of Power* “Introduction” (posted on Blackboard) New York: New York University Press,

March 4

David Blight, ed. *Passages to Freedom* – UGRR

Visit (on your own) Swing Low: Harriet Tubman Memorial at St. Nicholas Ave. and West 122nd St. Blogpost on Landscape of Human Rights in New York

Part 3 **Defining Places**

A sense of place contributes powerfully to community identity. How does this process work, and what are significant changes in citizen involvement in defining and strengthening community?

March 11

Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia*

Community change and the built environment.

Mar 18 NO CLASS Spring Break

March 25

Place Matters Assignment Due: Write a Place Matters entry

Read the Street: choose a place from the list provided (or speak to me about a place of your choosing with rationale) that you think characterizes the neighborhood, then analyze

the elements that mark it as a specific place: street furniture, people, informal economy, passersby, church, school, playground, store fronts, signs, parking, plants, green spaces, lighting, sound (languages, music). Try to use as wide a range of evidence as possible. Make an appendix called “material culture” and list nominees for the things we could save that mark this neighborhood. Illustrate with your own photographs and/or ephemera (store flyer, YouTube posting, real estate ad, web page, school or community event poster)

Guest Claude Shostal, former head of Regional Plan Association discussing development

April Fool

Dubrow and Goodman *Restoring Women’s History through Preservation*

In class work with National Park Service website “Teaching with Historic Places”

explore one site that interests you before class. <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/twhp/>

Part 4 **Other Voices**

Listening to community voices is the key to developing good community history projects. In this portion of course, we will work directly with voices as they appear in your final projects, gaining insight from some of the approaches below, which include the notion of the soundscape.

April 8

Mark M. Smith *Hearing History*

Read Intro Part 1 and 3, and chapters in Part 2 by Corbin and Johnson.

April 15

Melvin Patrick Ely. *The Adventures of Amos n’ Andy*

Comparing the ear and the eye: radio v. TV and the community response.

April 22

Timothy Gilfoyle *A Pickpocket’s Tale*.

Benjamin Chesluk “‘Visible Signs of a City Out of Control’ Community Policing.”

Cultural Anthropology Vol. 19. No. 2 pp. 250-275 (Winter 2004).

April 29

Read James Fernandez (NYU) “Invisible Immigrants: Spanish Enclaves in the US” and paper on 14th St. Project. Discussion of exhibition development of Nueva York and the Hispanic presence in New York.

May 6

Course Evaluations

Final Presentations

Final Paper project based on final presentation is due. 20-25 pp. typed double-spaced with proper footnotes.