

IF YOU CAN MAKE IT THERE...

NEW YORK CITY IN LITERATURE AND FILM



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Room and Time: Room SR 34 D2 · Thur, 13:30-15:00
Course number: SE 512.250

First session: March 14, 2013

Course description: “New York is a different country,” the entrepreneur Henry Ford once quipped. Throughout its history, the ‘Big Apple’ has been characterized as both an ‘independent space’ in its own right and the epitome of the ‘American Dream.’ It is part of this ambiguous rhetoric that the city has come to symbolize ‘Americanness’ (being the first U.S. capital), but also globalization (‘The World’s Business Capital’). Perhaps more than any other place in the U.S., NYC lends itself to such contradictory projections. This course will investigate a wide range of works based in the city of New York, from the early days of the U.S. republic to the heyday of immigration and the terror of 9/11. We will examine a number of influential texts about the ‘Big Apple,’ including short fiction (Stephen Crane’s *Maggie*, 1893), longer prose (Dos Passos’s *Manhattan Transfer*, 1925), poetry (Walt Whitman’s “Mannahatta,” 1855), comedies (*Annie Hall*, 1977), television shows (*Sex and the City*, 1998-2004), as well as post-9/11 fiction (*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, 2011). Our discussions will be grounded in scholarly works associated with urban studies and spatial theory (T. Bender, M. de Certeau, H. Lefèbvre, S. Sassen, E. Soja).

Methods: This is an interactive course. Participation in group discussions as well as contributions to the discussion forum on the Moodle course site will be part of the final grade. Each meeting will be held by ‘experts’ who organize the session by means of questions, games, illustrations, video clips, and group work. The most relevant facts will be conveyed in a short information block (or, alternatively, a ‘fact file’ on a handout).

Assessment: Regular attendance; active in-class participation; presentation as part of an expert session with 2-page handout to be distributed in class; at least 8 elaborate entries in the discussion forum; and a final paper of ca. 15 pages.

Syllabus

- March 14** **Introduction: New York – The Quintessential American City?**
Basic texts (optional):
Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean, “The American City” (2006).
Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, Introduction to *Gotham: A History of New York City* (1999).
Edward Margolies, Introduction to *New York and the Literary Imagination* (2008).
Richard A. Blake, “Cinema City: All around the Town” (2005).
- March 21** **Sizzling New York – Vibrancy and the Melting Pot**
Main texts (required):
Walt Whitman, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” and “Mannahatta” (poems) (1855-1892).
Additional text (for experts):
Richard Lehan, “The Urban Vortex” (1998).
Keywords: Broadway, Brooklyn Bridge, Immigration, Manhattan, Mid-19th Century, Urban Rhythm.
- March 28,** **No class! (Easter Holiday)**
Apr. 4 & 11 *Relax and enjoy!*
- Apr. 18** **How the Other Half Lives – New York and Its Dark Side**
Main text (required):
Stephen Crane, *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* (1893).
Additional text (for experts):
Jacob Riis, excerpts from *How the Other Half Lives* (1890).
Keywords: Ash Can School, Darwinism, Naturalism, Poverty, Prostitution, Sick City, Slums, Tenements.
- Apr. 25** **The Roaring Twenties – Enthusiasm and Disillusionment**
Main text (required):
John Dos Passos, excerpts from *Manhattan Transfer* (1925).
Additional text (for experts):
Joyce Appleby et al., “The Jazz Age,” from *The American Vision* (2002).
Keywords: Disillusionment, Immigration, Lost Generation, Metropolis, Success Myth.

- May 2** **The Harlem Renaissance – Double Consciousness and Urban Black Identity**
 Main text (required):
 Rudolph Fisher, "The City of Refuge" (1925).
 Additional text (for experts):
 Alain Locke, "The New Negro" (1925).
 Keywords: Double Consciousness, Ethnicity, Harlem Renaissance, New Negro, Passing, Urban Frontier.
- May 9** **No class! (Ascension Day)**
Relax and enjoy!
- May 16** **The Music of the City – Ragtime, Jazz, and Nightclubbing**
 Main text (required):
 James Weldon Johnson, ch. 6-8 from *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912).
 Additional text (for experts):
 Jack Kerouac, "New York Nite Club" (1999 [written ca. 1940]).
 Keywords: Billie Holiday, Clubbing, Hip hop, Jazz Age, *New York, New York* (film), Ragtime.
- May 23** **Gotham City – Organized Crime, the Urban Jungle, and Noir Aesthetics**
 Main text (required):
 Naked City (dir. Jules Dassin, 1948).
 Additional material (for experts):
 Episode from *CSI: NY* (CBS Television, 2004 -).
 Keywords: Asphalt Jungle, *Batman* series, CSI, Corruption, Police, Prohibition, Reality Effect.
- May 30** **No class!**
Relax and enjoy!
- June 6** **The Comical City – Jewish Culture, Diaspora, Humor**
 Main text (required):
 Isaac Bashevis Singer, "The Cafeteria" (1968).
 Additional materials (for experts):
 Woody Allen, *Annie Hall* (1977) & *Manhattan* (1979).
 Keywords: Brooklyn, Diaspora, Humor, Jewish Community, LA vs. NYC, Art Spiegelman.
- June 13** **Postmodern New York – Reading and Misreading the "Big Apple"**
 Main text (required):
 Paul Auster, *City of Glass* (1985), read selectively.
 Additional materials (for experts):
 Jean Baudrillard, "New York" (1986).
 Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City" (1984).
 Keywords: Anti-Architecture, Detective Fiction, *flâneur*, Labyrinth, Legibility, Madness, Postmodernism, Textuality.
- June 20** **The Romantic City – Searching for "Mr. Big"**
 Main examples (required):
 Selected clips from *Sex and the City* (1998-2004).
 Additional materials (for experts):
 Episodes "Sex and the City" (1998), "I Heart NY" (2002) and "Anchors Away" (2002).
 Joanna di Mattia, "Mr. Big, Mr. Perfect and the Romantic Quest" (2004).
 Susan Zieger, "Sex and the Citizen in *Sex and the City's* New York" (2004).
 Keywords: 'Big', *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Business, Citizenship, Consumption, Fashion, Romanticism, *You Got Mail*.
- June 27** **Queer Metropolis – Eroticism and Urban Subcultures**
 Main examples (required):
 Trailer and clip for the movie *Shortbus*.
 Additional materials (for experts):
 Shortbus (dir. John C. Mitchell, 2006); Nick Davis, "A View from the Shortbus" (2008).
 Keywords: Bohemians, Christopher Street, Diversity, Greenwich Village, Statue of Liberty, Subculture.
- July 4** **Apocalyptic New York – Fear, Terrorism, and Scenarios of Doom**
 Main text (required):
 Jonathan Safran Foer, excerpts from *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005).
 Additional materials (for experts):
 Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close (dir. Stephen Daldry, 2011).
 E. Ann Kaplan, "Reflections on Trauma and the Twin Towers" (2002).
 Keywords: Apocalypse, Falling Man, Global City, Ground Zero, Postmetropolis, Terrorism, Trauma, 9/11.