New York is an ugly city, a dirty city. Its climate is a scandal, its politics are used to frighten children, its traffic is madness, its competition is murderous. But there is one thing about it -- once you have lived in New York and it has become your home, no place else is good enough.

All of everything is concentrated here, population, theater, art, writing, publishing, importing, business, murder, mugging, luxury, poverty. It is all of everything. It goes all right. It is tireless and its air is charged with energy."

sometimes, from beyond the skyscrapers, the cry of a tugboat finds you in your insomnia, and you remember that this desert of iron and cement is an island.

in New York the sky is bluer, and the grass is greener, and the girls are prettier, and the steaks are thicker, and the buildings are higher, and the streets are wider, and the air is finer, than the sky, or the grass, or the girls, or the steaks, or the air of any place else in the world.

New York is the only real city-city.

A hundred times have I thought New York is a catastrophe, and fifty times: It is a beautiful catastrophe.

Anytime four New Yorkers get into a cab together without arguing, a bank robbery has just taken place.

There is something in the New York air that makes sleep useless.

And New York is the most beautiful city in the world? It is not far from it. No urban night is like the night there.... Squares after squares of flame, set up and cut into the aether. Here is our poetry, for we have pulled down the stars to our will.

Whoever is born in New York is ill-equipped to deal with any other city: all other cities seem, at best, a mistake, and, at worst, a fraud. No other city is so spitefully incoherent.

For those who would understand the past century of American history, the role of urban society is crucial. The influence of our cities has been considerable, pervasive and shaping. America's cities exerted broad economic, political and cultural authority, often steering the transforming forces of
nineteenth and twentieth century American life. The impact of cities and especially the major
metropolises on national life has been extraordinary. While the founding elite of the early republic -
Washington, Jefferson, Madison and Monroe - fastened upon the nation the ethos of the plantation and
southern life, cities assumed a more important part in setting national priorities following the Civil War.

Before long urban life came to define American progress; and driving that narrative was New York City.
Herald of twentieth century modernity, New York made itself into the center of world capitalism and
American culture. The variety of its markets and services afforded it a reach in space and influence that
remains unmatched. Its fabled diversity provides a riveting history of relations between groups divided
by class, interest, culture, ethnicity, and race.

Shown a portrait of her painted by Picasso in his characteristic style, Gertrude Stein gazed at it with
some distaste, protesting: "But I don't look like that". "Don't worry," he replied, "You will, you will." How
often New York has been viewed as unique only to discover that it was merely early. Its history offers a
compelling perspective for examining the development of American economic, social, and political life.

Over the past decades a generation of freshly conceived city studies have dispelled local history's
lingering fascination with superficial antiquarianism. Urban historians have fashioned a rigorous body of
systematic work that is informed by theory and driven by broad questions. Skilled in the tools of social
science, and sensitive to calls for inclusion and complexity, city scholars have crafted a textured urban
past from the lives of workers, blacks, women, immigrants, and other strands from the common weave.

Emphasizing analysis over narrative, applying quantitative techniques to the study of social, economic
and demographic patterns, and interested in subjects having to do with the material basis of existence,
as well as cultural and political issues, these historians have elaborated a complex process of city history.
While some works fail to pass the test of significance, many of these studies have been provocatively,
even dazzlingly conceived. At the same time many of these studies have tended to isolate their subjects
from the larger history of the nation or even of American cities in general, creating a field of brilliant
fragments. But other studies have taken up the challenge to relate their studies to the larger theme
about the textured and varied nature of America’s past.

Course Objectives:
1. Provide a survey of the history of one the world's great urban centers.
2. Offer an understanding of what forces led NYC to develop in the way that it did, and how these
   larger forces helped frame human decisions and actions.
4. Provide an appreciation for the layers of experience that form New York's historical tradition.

Weekly Assignments:

*Required;  S Scan available;  E Electronic version available from Library;  ^Choose one of two

1. “A great natural pier, ready to receive the commerce of the world”
   Mariana van Rensselaer, History of the City of NY in the Seventeenth Century, Shorto, 8

*Shorto, Russell. The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the


2. **The Ditch to Dominance: Merchant City**


3. **Ante-bellum New York**


4. **New York’s Civil War: Prosperity from the Jaws of Tragedy**


5. **Transforming the National Economy Through Industry and Finance**


6. **A Population Ever in Flux: Immigrants, New, Newer and Newest**


7. **Metropolitan Gender**


8. **The Working City: Labor and Life**

9. **African Americans, Race, and the Transforming City**


10. **Kinetic New York: Sophisticated, Provincial, Diverse**


12. **Building the Modern City**


13. **“The Second Toughest Job in America:” The Modern Mayorality**


**COLLATERAL ASSIGNMENTS:**

The assignments in this course are designed to help train students and to prepare them for research, writing and teaching. Reading, leading class discussions and participating in them are integral to successfully completing the work for this class. Each session will have a discussion leader who will prepare a short synopsis of the reading to be emailed in advance of class and lead a discussion on the reading.
The discussion should focus on major historical issues and pose interpretive/analytic questions to promote a discussion of the issues. Avoid the presentation of questions that are really another form of lecture. Questions should be direct and open ended and they should be part of a well thought out organized presentation. Asking good questions is critical not only for doing good research but also for running good classes.

Each topic will also have an assigned second reader who will offer a critique of the reading based on the review literature and the reader’s own evaluation.

There are several additional assignments.

Session 3. Write a 750 word essay on: which of the assigned books that you have read thus far do you find most instructive/useful if you were to teach this as an undergraduate course. Explain why, touching on quality of writing, research, clarity of argument and suitability for undergraduate classes.

Session 5. Select a neighborhood or an urban institution (police precinct, library, community district, public school, municipal agency) and prepare a history based on research (can include documents, newspapers, interviews, memoir and diary literature, but not secondary sources). In your profile discuss the historic mission and your assessment of the way that it has met the needs it was designed to address. If you choose a community profile for, example, the paper should offer a brief history of the area (use books, magazines, and newspaper articles as well as interviews with residents, local workers, businessmen, political figures) its physical layout, local landmarks, the people and something of the tone and texture of the community. 3,000 words.

Session 7. 1. Go back fifty years from your birthday and look up the NY Times for that day. Read it in its entirety, including reviews and ads. Write a two page description of the day and what you find historically noteworthy. 2. Find the paper for 25 years later and then a third newspaper for the day of your birth. Select a single theme that you trace through all three issues write a four page paper on its development over the half century. You may look at changes in the physical city, in ethnic or race relations, in the kinds of crime that are reported, in municipal politics or entertainment, or even at the changes in advertising strategy and format. Do not use any sources beyond the paper.

Session 9. Write a 750 word review of a book relevant to your research topic. The review should summarize the book, as you understand it. Discuss the highlights and the major points as they relate to the city and its history. Do not select a novel or a text as this will be too complicated for you to review. Once you have summarized the book (2-3 pages) discuss the author’s method of making his/her argument and any other thoughts you have on the quality of the narrative, the clarity of the argument, the use of sources, how the book has changed your understanding of the city, etc. Use examples from the text to back up your points.

The Paper. Either a historiography paper on an approved topic, 12-15 pages; or: choose a topic in Urban history between 1860 and 1960 and based upon research in newspapers and magazines write a documented, analytic essay approximately 15 pages in length. The objective of the essay is to identify, categorize and analyze your topic’s relationship to the larger urban narrative, metropolitan, regional or national.
You may select a topic like the Brooklyn Bridge, the development of a community, the urban political process, a prominent figure, a social movement, an institution, a business, a cultural mode, etc. The paper will obviously be limited in scope. But you can look at an issue as it was reported (recognizing that errors often do creep into reports when an observer writes against a deadline, is forced to depend upon random testimony and often lacks context). Do not settle upon a single circumstance or event; build a base of information that can be related thematically to your topic.

Your paper should be based exclusively on what can be learned from the primary research. You may use one secondary source to provide the context, but not for information. Footnote your material with brief citations.

Start early. Reserve a good bit of time to organize and write the paper.

By the fifth session you will need to hand in a brief outline of your subject and your secondary source. The paper will be due the first week in May. There is a one week grace period. If you submit your paper late your grade will reflect the tardiness.

Feel free to consult me with any problems or questions. If you want a copy back submit two copies of your paper.

N.B.: Keep copies of everything you submit. Your papers should be your own work and reflect your own research. Where you have relied on outside sources for material make sure that this is noted. Quotes should be marked off to indicate they are not your words and they should be footnoted. Do not use previously submitted papers, purchased material or any other form of work that is not your own. The consequences of plagiarism can be serious. Enough said.