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 timeless and its air is charged with energy."

John Steinbeck

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.

Albert Camus

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.

Edna Ferber

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

Le Corbusier

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

Simone Beauvoir

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.

James Baldwin

For those who would understand America’s past two centuries, 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 metropolitan centers on national life has been extraordinary. Following the Civil War 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, if fraught, 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.

Course Objectives:

1. 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.
2. Examine New York's cultural traditions, its diversity and its economic foundations.
3. Provide an appreciation for the layers of experience that form New York's historical tradition.

Sources for general background and broad understanding of the City's past:

- There are many films about New York City. Ric Burns's New York: A Documentary Film which aired on PBS in 7 episodes is the most comprehensive.
- Some relevant websites: https://rihs.us/2021/02/ Roosevelt Island Historical Society.
- www.newyorkalmanack.com

N.B.: Class sessions are hybrid. Starred meeting dates are in class, in person; others are by zoom. In person meetings 8/29... 9/26.... 10/31.... 12/5.

Link to scanned pages:
https://www.dropbox.com/sh/a0rfhgxcpixylga/AABmPCno73QxLOmx0aAER870a?dl=0

Readings *Required, #Secondary Reader and Suggested; S Scanned; E e version available


Eric Sanderson, “New York Before the City.” TED Talk.
https://www.ted.com/talks/eric_sanderson_new_york_before_the_city?language=en

2. 9/5: Colonial New York

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


Or


3. **9/12: The Ditch to Dominance: Merchant City**


#View the embedded film in Floating Ideas: How the Erie Canal Shaped America https://eriecanalway.org/learn/history-culture/social-reform

#Dealing for the land: https://www.lockportjournal.com/opinion/columns/canal-discovery-eminent-domain/article_7dc08fbc-d30e-53d9-b5ad-8d500ec847f0.html

Erie Canal facts https://eriecanalway.org/learn/history-culture/fast-facts

Indian lands and the canal project https://eriecanalway.org/learn/history-culture/native-americans


4. **9/19: Ante-bellum New York**


Dickens, Charles. (1842), "New York", American Notes, 
http://facpub.stjohns.edu/~lazrusp/dickens%20reflections%20on%20ny.pdf

5. *9/26: In-class Reports


America’s First Female Tycoon

10/10 follows a Monday schedule


Golway, Terry. Machine Made: Tammany Hall and the Creation of Modern American Politics. NY: Liveright; 2014. 60-177
White, E.B. “This is New York”
https://langurbansociology.wordpress.com/2013/01/white-on-nyc.pdf

8. **10/24: Metropolitan Gender**


9. **10/31 Report #2**

10. **11/7: The Working City: Labor and Life**

1890. *Here’s is a re-creation of Riis’s slide lecture


11. **11/14: African Americans, Race, and the Transforming City**


12. **11/21: Entertainment and Information Capital**
Here is a list of outstanding novels with New York as a principal theme:

Crane, Stephen, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets & Other Stories -1893
Wharton, Edith, The House of Mirth – 1905
Dreiser, Theodore, Sister Carrie- 1900
Dos Passos, John, Manhattan Transfer, 1925
Petry, Ann, The Street, 1946
Ellison, Ralph, Invisible Man- 1952
Smith, Betty, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn – 1943
Baldwin, James, Another Country – 1962
McCarthy, Mary, The Group - 1963
Doctorow, E. L., Ragtime - 1975
Morrison, Toni, Jazz- 1992
Chopin, Kate, The Awakening - 1993
McInerney, Jay, Bright Lights, Big City – 1984
Tóibín, Colm, Brooklyn- 2009
Attenberg, Jami, Saint Mazie- 2015
Davis, Fiona, The Dollhouse – 2016
Egan, Jennifer, Manhattan Beach - 2017

13. 11/28: The Challenge of Planning a Future in the Present

Brooklyn Bridge Film: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9I-JFnbJ19U
Google.com/search?rlz=1C1OKWM_enUS862US862&q=Building+the+Brooklyn+Bridge&sa=X&ved=2a
14. *12/5: Final Paper Power Point Reports

**Collateral Assignments:**

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 (2-3 pages) of the reading to be distributed after the session and lead a discussion on the reading. Each topic will also have an assigned second reader who will offer a synopsis of a suggested reading to offer an additional perspective on the week’s topic. (2-3 pages).

There are several additional assignments.

**Due Session 5.** Prepare a report on pre-Civil War NYC based on one of the suggested readings. This report will be in two forms: a 15 minute Power Point presentation to class and a submitted essay describing the presentation’s central theme in 2-3 pages. Think about this as a lecture to an undergraduate class.

**Due Session 9.** 1. Go back sixty years from your birthday and look up the *NY Times* (or other newspaper) 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 30 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 papers. Power Point summaries.

**Final Paper.** Select a NYC neighborhood or institution (police precinct, library, community district, public school, municipal agency) or a New York personality (e.g. a mayor, public figure or a person of interest to you) and prepare a 12-15 page paper based on documents, newspapers, interviews, memoir and diary literature, but not principally secondary sources. If you choose a community profile for, example, the paper should offer a brief history of the area (use print material and
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. You will also present a 25 minute Power Point report summarizing the paper.

By the sixth session you will submit a brief description of your subject and your sources. The paper will be due the first week in December. Reports will begin on 11/28. Feel free to consult me with any problems or questions.

N.B 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.

“I never thought that going back to England, returning to all who are dear to me, and to pursuits that have insensibly grown to be a part of my nature, I could have felt so much sorrow as I endured, when I parted at last, on board this ship, with the friends who had accompanied me from this city. I never thought the name of any place, so far away and so lately known, could ever associate itself in my mind with the crowd of affectionate remembrances that now cluster about it. There are those in this city who would brighten, to me, the darkest winter-day that ever glimmered and went out in Lapland; and before whose presence even Home grew dim, when they and I exchanged that painful word which mingles with our every thought and deed; which haunts our cradle-heads in infancy, and closes up the vista of our lives in age.”

Dickens, Charles. (1842), "New York", American Notes