Course Syllabus

Jennifer Gray  Fall 2018  Mondays 11-1  Avery 113

HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN CITY

This course surveys urbanism in the United States from the colonial era to the present. During these years, industrialization, urbanization, and mass migrations, all fueled by an expanding market economy, transformed the built environment. We will learn about ambitious urban plans, exceptional architects, and iconic buildings, but also about everyday spaces, such as shopping malls, suburbs, and highways. Questions about race, gender, inequality, and militarism as they relate to urban space will be explored. We will unpack the meaning of terms such as modernism, democracy, and American and consider them in a global context, especially the geopolitical relationship between North and South America. We also will engage topics in critical preservation, such as ecological conservation and curatorial practices. The class will be a mixture of lectures and discussions; walking tours in New York City; a film screening; as well as visits to museums and to special collections at Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, where students will have the opportunity to engage with original drawings, rare books, and archival materials relevant to the course.

Course Format

Weekly lectures provide the framework for the course. A portion of some classes will be devoted to discussion of contemporary architectural discourse that relate to material in the course. The slides for each lecture will be made available on the course website. There will also be two visits to Avery Drawings & Archives, one museum visit, one gallery talk, a film screening, and one walking tour of Lower Manhattan, during which we will explore modern and postmodern buildings and public spaces. Students are expected to attend all lectures and site visits and to participate in class discussions. Readings will be posted on the course website. There will be three short writing assignments – an exhibition review, one essay that uses archival materials, and one topic chosen by the students – throughout the semester. Details to be discussed the first week of class.

DUE OCT 22
PAPER 1: EXHIBITION REVIEW of “Germ City: Microbes and the Metropolis” – 25%

DUE NOV 21
PAPER 2: ARCHIVAL/FILM/CONFERENCE – 25%

DUE DEC 14
PAPER 3: YOUR CHOICE – 25%
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CLASS PARTICIPATION – 25%

Office Hours and Contact Information
Prof. Jennifer Gray
By appointment (jlg2006@columbia.edu)

CLASS SCHEDULE
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Sep 10: Welcome
Introduction to the course; American exceptionalism and transnational influences; questions of national identity, democracy, and modernism


Further Reading


**Sep 17: Colonial Origins and the Emergence of Industrial, Civic, and Commercial Culture**

Cities as key to European colonization; authority and its breakdown; L’Enfant’s Plan for Washington; Commissioner’s Plan for New York; urban boosterism; dissemination of the grid, the town square and the great urban park; producing industrial space; the construction of wilderness and national identity; ecotourism and cities


**Further Reading**


**Sep 24/Oct 1: New York: from Trinity Church to Occupy Wall Street**

**Walking tours of Lower Manhattan – please sign up on CourseWorks**
Skyscrapers and zoning laws; military urbanism; Ground Zero and target architecture; place annihilation; the politics of public space; terrorism and cities; architecture as social practice; Occupy Wall Street


Further Reading


Oct 8: Social Science and the City Beautiful

*Visit to Drawings & Archives, Avery Library – please sign up on CourseWorks

1893 World’s Fair and the City Beautiful Movement; progressive social politics; impact of the social sciences on urban planning and architectural representation; race, ethnicity, and immigration; civic spaces and national identity; the play movement; the social center movement; public schools; municipal playgrounds; the neighborhood unit


**Further Reading**


**Oct 15 – Futurism, Fantasy, and Architecture**

Fantasy spaces and leisure activities; “total experience design” in hotels; movie houses and theaters; Radio City and Rockefeller Center; 1933 Century of Progress; 1939 New York World’s Fair; restoration of Colonial Williamsburg; shopping malls and festival marketplaces; brandscapes; analogous urbanisms; Disney urbanism


Margaret Crawford, “The World in a Shopping Mall,” in *Variations on a Theme Park*, pp. TBD.

Christine Boyer, “Cities for Sale: Merchandising History at the South Street Seaport,” in *Variations on a Theme Park*, pp. TBD.
Further Reading


Oct 22: Technological Sublime: Automobiles, Infrastructure, and Landscape

*Visit to Drawings & Archives, Avery Library – please sign up on CourseWorks*

Highways and infrastructure; model communities of the New Deal; Robert Moses as urban czar of New York; modernist planning; Tennessee Valley Authority; back-to-the-land movements

Robert Fishman, “Frank Lloyd Wright’s Broadacre City,” in Urban Utopias of the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier (MIT Press, 1982), pp. TBD.

Further Reading


Oct 29: Military-Industrial-Architectural Complex: from Total War to Total Living

1940s-50s; defense industries and garden suburbs; military-industrial complex; 194X; Federal Highway Administration; Federal Housing Authority; suburban tract housing; race and gender politics of postwar domestic environment


Diane Harris, Little White Houses: How the Postwar Home Constructed Race in America (University of Minnesota Press, 2013), pp. TBD.

Further Reading


Barbara Kelly, Expanding the American Dream: Building and Rebuilding Levittown (New York, 1993).


Ellen Lupton, Mechanical Brides: Women and Machines from Home to Office (Smithsonian Institution, 1993).

Andrew Hurly, Diners, Bowling Alleys, and Trailer Parks: Chasing the American Dream in Postwar Consumer Culture (New York, 2010).


Nov 5: NO CLASS – ELECTION HOLIDAY
Nov 12: Urban Renewal, Slum Clearance, and Housing Reform

Title I and slum clearance; urban renewal; successes and failures of public housing; zoning; “white flight”; defensible spaces; gated communities; New Towns; contemporary responses to low-income housing (e.g. Estudio Cruz, privatization of affordable housing; demolition and replacement low-rise construction); rural poverty and housing (e.g. Rural Studio, Alabama); housing for homeless and displaced populations (e.g. Mad Hatter project, Atlanta)


Further Reading


Elizabeth Wood, The Beautiful Beginnings, the Failure to Learn: Fifty Years of Public Housing in America (Washington DC, 1992).


John F. Bauman, et. al, eds., From the Tenements to the Taylor Homes: Urban Housing Policy in 20th Century America (University Park, PA, 2000).


**November 19: Learning from Brasilia and Las Vegas: Modern and Postmodern Urbanism**

CIAM planning; international style modernism; global vs. regional expression; structuralism and semiotics; phenomenology; the intellectualization of architecture; historic preservation as avant-garde; site sensitivity; regionalism


**Further Reading**


**Nov 26 – The Neoliberal City**

Spatial manifestations of deregulation, privatization, and globalization (e.g. favelas, spontaneous communities, gated communities); archipelago urbanism; informal cities; self-build communities; capitalism and the production of space; private property vs. rights to the city; use-value vs. exchange value (real estate speculation); borders and extraterritoriality; tactical urbanisms vs. centralized planning; limitations of tactical urbanisms


Further Reading


