Looking back a century:
New York from 1910 to 1919

Photo by Paul Strand, 1915

Dr. Miriam Nyhan Grey
Fall 2019
Course Number: FYSEM-UA 733
Class Location: 1 Washington Mews
Class Time: Wednesdays 11am to 1.30pm
Office Hours: 2pm to 4pm Mondays and by appointment

Course Description:
For historians, the centennial of an event or period tends to hold a special significance. We like to divide the course of history up into distinct borders of periodization which is, of course, entirely contrary to how we actually live our lives or experience historical events. In this seminar, we will self-consciously take the viewpoint of one hundred years to explore the history of New York City from 1910 to 1919. New York, in this period, was being shaped by issues like the suffrage movement, the Great War, the growing presence of the automobile and the arrival of almost one million immigrants, among many other things. We will explore the New York of a century ago using a wide range of sources and approaches.

Instructor Biography:
Miriam Nyhan Grey is Associate Director of New York University's Center for Irish and Irish-American Studies, where she is also Director of Graduate Studies for the Master of Arts in Irish and Irish-American Studies. With an interest in the intersections of migration, race and ethnicity, she focuses primarily on migrant experiences in comparative frameworks.

She has been on faculty at NYU since 2009, teaching an array of classes on Irish history and migration, oral history and comparative migration. In 2016, she edited a collection of essays which looked at New York circa 1916 in the context of Irish nationalist activity, which has sparked her interest in this period in the city’s history.
Purpose of the Class:

The goal of this class is to use the prism of one full century to look back on the fundamental ways in which New York City was shaped by developments and changes which evolved in the period between 1910 and 1919. We will consider how periodization affects how we view historical events and periods. We will thematically drill down into the physical, social, economic and demographic changes of the period under scrutiny. The hope is to afford students a great appreciation of the ground literally under our feet and how the New York we experience today is still marked by this eventful period in American history. The class will involve at least two class trips, one to the Tenement Museum and another to the Frick Collection. Both of these sites shed fascinating light on the history of early twentieth-century New York City in different ways.

Course Requirements:

Class meets once a week and attendance is mandatory. This class is designed to be a cooperative effort-- please do the assigned reading, viewing, and listening before coming to class each week. 10% of your final grade for the class is based on your thoughtful, text-based contributions to class discussion and active participation. Work is assigned on a weekly basis and is outlined in the syllabus distributed at the start of the semester. All class submissions must be typed, double-spaced and meet the page/word count assigned for each project. Submissions will be graded on content, writing clarity, strength of argument, evidence and narrative cohesion.

Required text:


Additional readings will be made available via NYU Classes.

Grade Distribution and Due Dates:

1. Statement of purpose: 10% (2 pages): why are you taking this class? What are your goals? Due 9/11/19

2. Book review: 20% (5 pages): a reading pertinent to the history of New York City in this period will be assigned. Due 10/9/19

3. Review of visit to the Tenement Museum: 15% (3 pages) Due 10/2/19

4. Review of visit to Henry Clay Frick Mansion: 15% (3 pages) Due 11/20/19

5. Final paper: 30% (10 pages) Due 12/11/19

6. Participation: 10%
Disability Disclosure Statement: Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosecsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

Week 1:

Topic: Introduction to the course, instructor and peers. Discuss objectives. How did New York City look in 1910? How will the vantage point of one century influence how we read the history?

Reading for week 2: “Vantage Points” section, of Wallace’s, Greater Gotham. pp. 3-12

Herbert Croly, “New York as the American Metropolis”, Architectural Record, 13 (March 1903), pp., 193-206

View a “Trip Through New York”, 1911: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aohXOpKtns0


Week 2:

Topic: History and the issue of periodization. How does the time since an event or period shape how we view the history? How do we study cities in history?

Reading:


Week 3:


Reading:


[https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=gNYJAAAAIAAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA26&ots=Z9uCWePzUj&sig=YA7awmGzbBjiuFZ4izAOHt_KBUA#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=gNYJAAAAIAAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA26&ots=Z9uCWePzUj&sig=YA7awmGzbBjiuFZ4izAOHt_KBUA#v=onepage&q&f=false)

Week 4:

Visit the Tenement Museum to do the Victoria Confino Tour.

Discover life as an immigrant in 1916 through the eyes of 14-year-old Victoria Confino. A costumed actor portraying Victoria provides a first-person perspective inside her apartment. Hear Victoria share experiences about immigrating to America from Greece, living at 97 Orchard Street with her parents and five brothers, and adjusting to life on the Lower East Side.

Reading: Listen to excerpts of oral histories with immigrants who arrived through Ellis Island. Precise interviews to be assigned. See: [https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/oral-histories](https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/oral-histories)

Week 5:


Reading: Wallace, *Greater Gotham*, pp. 751-804

Week 6:

Topic: The Great War and New York City. America at war.

Reading: Wallace, *Greater Gotham*, pp.919-976

Week 7:

Topic: The sights and smells of New York in the 1910s. How New Yorkers moved around. The automobile, the subway, the trollies and New York.

Week 8:


Week 9:


Week 10:


Week 11:
Visit the Frick Collection.

In 1912-14, Henry Clay Frick had a mansion built in New York City, where resided until he died in 1919. It is now the home of the Frick Collection. Visiting the Henry Clay Frick Mansion will provide a counter point to the Tenement House museum.

Reading:


Additional readings to be assigned.

Week 12:
Topic: Housing in New York: an evolving landscape.

Reading:

Wallace, *Greater Gotham*, pp. 251-303

Week 13:
Readings:

View Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler’s 1920 film, *Manhatta*:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHqb1dXER-0

Additional readings to be assigned.

**Week 14:**

Final class:

Reflections and conclusions.