

URBAN CULTURAL LIFE

SCA-UA 608 (608-060, pre-college)

Instructor: Jackson Smith
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Summer Session II, 2020
July 6 to August 16
T/Th 3:00 – 6:00 PM

Virtual Office Hours: Thursday afternoons by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The spring and summer of 2020 have presented unprecedented challenges for New York City. The COVID-19 pandemic has all but suspended the city's rich cultural life, while both the unequal toll of the pandemic and the ongoing Black Lives Matter protests have revealed the racial inequalities that shape the city's cultural life. Meanwhile, we are unable to meet in person and experience the field trips that usually structure this course. In lieu of being able to move together throughout the city, we will be viewing documentary films and hearing from guest speakers as we consider the culture of New York City at this historical crossroads. Each week we will explore a distinctly New York culture—hip-hop, gay and lesbian culture, the queer ballroom scene, Brooklyn's neighborhood cultures, and the culture of immigrant street food vendors—as we work to understand the political and economic contexts that shape processes of community formation and modalities of cultural expression. Two overarching themes will run through each of these case studies: 1) the roots of urban cultural life in homes and neighborhoods; and 2) the role played by protest and community organizing in carving out and defending the cultural spaces of historically marginalized communities.

TEXTS

All required readings are posted on NYU Classes. The reading load for this course is the equivalent of three book chapters or academic journal articles per week (or the equivalent of about two books over the entire class), plus additional media (news coverage, short documentary videos, etc.). One reading each week is *suggested*—these pieces are a bit denser than the required readings, but I highly recommend that you read them!

EXPECTATIONS

Participation is a crucial component of this course, especially given the condensed schedule. Students are expected to attend every class (you may have one unexcused absence), complete all required readings by Tuesday of each week, and actively participate in class discussions. In order to approximate a classroom experience, I ask that you turn on your Zoom video and refrain from using your phone or distracting applications on your computer during class. Our sessions are quite long, but we will take a planned break during each class.

Our class takes place amid extraordinary circumstances that have intimately impacted many of our lives. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you are facing challenges participating in this course. We can work out accommodations for any circumstance—I am committed to your success in this course.

Students are expected to turn in all assignments on time. Please notify me as soon as you expect to need an extension.

NYU treats cases of plagiarism and cheating very seriously and offers severe penalties for those caught violating the University's Honor Code (<http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity>). When in doubt, always cite your sources! And if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Final grades will be evaluated as follows:

Attendance and Participation (20% of final grade): This course is short and will proceed quickly, making it especially important that students attend all class meetings. Active participation involves not merely presence in the class, but also demonstrating awareness of and engagement with the course materials. You will also be expected to participate in a Zoom group chat during our film screenings.

Reflection Pieces (30% of final grade): Students will compose weekly reflection pieces during class, to be posted to NYU Classes. Posts should be one or two paragraphs long and should critically consider course readings in relationship to the weekly films, guest speakers, supplemental media, and/or outside media. The purpose of the reflection pieces is to pose questions or insights for classroom discussion. You will be responsible for five reflection pieces during class sessions, which are denoted on the course schedule below. You will also be responsible for a reflection piece on Week 5's film. Finally, you will be asked to compose shorter reflection questions for each of our guest speakers. You may choose one reflection piece/guest speaker question to skip without penalty.

Final Essay (50% of final grade): Students will compose a final paper of six to eight pages, due to me by 5pm on Wednesday, August 12th. In this paper students should develop an original argument, appraisal, or interpretation rooted in a single week's themes. This essay must use materials from that week as primary and secondary sources, but it also must reflect some original research with either/both primary or secondary sources. Students are required to meet with me during the week of August 4th or earlier to propose and discuss final papers and should begin working on final papers by mid-July. Students will also give a brief and informal presentation (five minutes or less) during our final class session. I am open to non-traditional final projects, as I understand that many students prioritize learning skills and practices other than academic writing during their undergraduate education. If you wish to complete a non-traditional final project, please notify me as soon as possible.

WEEK 1: THE BRONX FIRES AND THE ORIGINS OF HIP-HOP

Tuesday, July 7

Introductions

Film: *Style Wars*, Tony Silver, 1983, 69 minutes.

Thursday, July 9

Film, 3:00pm to 4:15pm EST: *Decade of Fire*, Vivian Vázquez-Irizarry, 2019, 75 minutes.

Guest Speaker, 4:45pm to 6:00pm EST: Vivian Vázquez-Irizarry, director and producer of *Decade of Fire*

Readings

DJ Kool Herc, “Introduction,” in *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: Picador, 2005), xi – xiii.

Jeff Chang, “Necropolis: The Bronx and the Politics of Abandonment” and “Making a Name: How DJ Kool Herc Lost His Accent and Started Hip-Hop,” in *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York, New York: Picador, 2005), 7 – 20 and 67 – 85.

Evelyn Gonzalez, “The South Bronx,” in *The Bronx* (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 109 – 129.

Suggested: Bench Ansfield, “The Broken Windows of the Bronx: Putting the Theory in Its Place,” *American Quarterly* Volume 27, Number 1 (March 2020), 103 – 127.

Media

Read text, listen to music, watch videos: “How the Burning of The Bronx Led to the Birth of Hip-Hop,” Joshua Jelly-Schapiro, 2019, *PBS: Independent Lens* website for *Decade of Fire*.

Read intro and explore redlining in New York City and other communities: Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et. al., “Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America,” *American Panorama*.

Read: Neyda Martínez, “Revisiting the Bronx’s Decade of Fire as Fault Lines Reemerge Under Pandemic,” *The Latinx Project*, May 26, 2020

WEEK 2: PROTEST AND PANDEMIC, FROM ACT UP TO BLACK LIVES MATTER
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Tuesday, July 14

Film, 3:00pm to 4:30pm EST: *United in Anger: A History of ACT UP*, Jim Hubbard and Sarah Schulman, 2012, 93 minutes.

Guest Speakers, 4:45pm to 6:00pm EST:

Steven W. Thrasher, Assistant Professor and Daniel H. Renberg Chair, Northwestern University, Medill School of Journalism

Gregg Gonsalves, Assistant Professor of Epidemiology, Yale School of Medicine

Thursday, July 16

Student Discussion and Reflection Pieces, 3:00pm to 6:00pm EST

Readings

Tamar W. Carroll, “Turn Anger, Fear, Grief into Action: ACT UP New York,” in *Mobilizing New York: AIDS, Antipoverty, and Feminist Activism* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 131 – 161.

Deborah B. Gould, “Education in the Streets: ACT UP, Emotion, and New Modes of Being,” *Counterpoints* Volume 367 (2012), 352 – 363.

Media

Read: Steven W. Thrasher, “I Study Prisons and AIDS History. Here’s Why Self-Isolation Really Scares Me,” *Slate*, March 20, 2020.

Read: Steven W. Thrasher, “An Uprising Comes from the Viral Underclass,” *Slate*, June 12, 2020.

Read: Julia Marcus and Gregg Gonsalves, “Public-Health Experts Are Not Hypocrites,” *The Atlantic*, June 11, 2020

WEEK 3: THE QUEER SPATIAL POLITICS OF THE PIERS AND THE BALLROOM

Tuesday, July 21

Film, 3:00pm to 4:35pm EST: *Kiki*, Sara Jordanö and Twiggy Pucci Garçon, 2016, 96 minutes.

Student Discussion and Reflection Pieces, 5:00pm to 6:00pm EST

Thursday, July 23

Student Discussion and Reflection Pieces, 3:00pm to 6:00pm EST

Readings

Marlon M. Bailey, “Engendering space: Ballroom culture and the spatial practice of possibility in Detroit,” *Gender, Place and Culture* Volume 21, Number 4 (2014), 489 – 507.

Kian Goh, “Safe Cities and Queer Spaces: The Urban Politics of Radical LGBT Activism,” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* Volume 108, Number 2 (2018), 463 – 477.

Suggested: Martin F. Manalansan IV, "Race, Violence, and Neoliberal Spatial Politics in the Global City," *Social Text* Vol. 23, Nos. 3 – 4 (Fall-Winter 2005), 141 – 155.

Media

Watch: "Episode 304: Fenced Out," *Paper Tiger Television* and FIERCE!, July 1, 2015.

Watch: "Ballroom Vogue Houses March at NYC Black Trans Lives Matter Protest," *New York Times*, June 24, 2020.

WEEK 4: CULTURE, AUTHENTICITY, AND GENTRIFICATION IN BROOKLYN

Tuesday, July 28

Film, 3:00pm to 4:35pm EST: *Battle for Brooklyn*, Michael Galinsky and Suki Hawley, 2011, 93 minutes.

Student Discussion and Reflection Pieces, 5:00pm to 6:00pm EST

Thursday, July 30

Film, 3:00pm to 4:20pm EST: *My Brooklyn*, Kelly Anderson, 2012, 77 minutes.

Student Discussion and Reflection Pieces, 5:00pm to 6:00pm EST

Readings

Stacey S. Sutton, "The Spatial Politics of Black Business Closure in Central Brooklyn," in *Race and Retail: Consumption Across the Color Line* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 200 – 224.

Julie Sze, "Sports and Environmental Justice: 'Games' of Race, Place, Nostalgia, and Power in Neoliberal New York City," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* Volume 33, Number 2 (May 2009), 111 – 129.

Suggested: Sharon Zukin, "Consuming Authenticity: From outposts of difference to means of exclusion," *Cultural Studies* Volume 22, Number 5 (September 2008), 724 – 748.

Media

Read: Rachel Chason, "Field wars: Organized league clashes with pickup players in a gentrifying neighborhood," *The Washington Post*, July 21, 2017.

Read: Norman Oder, "Brooklyn's Accidental New Town Square," *Bklyner.*, June 10, 2020.

WEEK 5: NO CLASS/IN JACKSON HEIGHTS

Film: *In Jackson Heights*, Frederick Wiseman, 2015, 190 minutes

Use this week to watch *In Jackson Heights* on your own time (I recommend watching it in two sessions, as it is quite long!), submit a reflection piece about the film, and work on your final paper. I will be available for required office hour meetings to discuss your final paper during the early afternoon hours of Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Email me to make an appointment by 5pm on Monday, August 3rd.

WEEK 6: FOOD, IDENTITY, AND POLITICS IN THE GLOBAL CITY

Tuesday, August 11

Films, 3:00pm to 4:00pm EST:

“Queens” (excerpts), *Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown*, CNN, 2017.

Judith: Portrait of a Street Vendor, Zahida Pirani, 2014, 17 minutes.

Guest Speaker, 4:45pm to 6:00pm EST: Mohamed Attia, Director, Street Vendor Project, Urban Justice Center

Thursday, August 13

Final Paper Presentations, 3:00pm to 6:00pm EST

Readings

Sarah Fouts, “Re-Regulating *Loncheras*, Food Trucks, and their Clientele: Navigating Bureaucracy and Enforcement in New Orleans,” *Gastronomica* Volume 18, Number 3 (Fall 2018), 1 – 13.

Sharon Zukin, “A Tale of Two Globals: Pupusas and IKEA in Red Hook,” in *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 159 – 192.

Suggested: Martin F. Manalansan IV, “The Empire of Food: Place, Memory, and Asian ‘Ethnic Cuisines,’” in *Gastropolis: Food and New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 93 – 107.

Media

Watch: “Where Food is Family: The Red Hook Food Vendors,” *Food Films America* and *Food. Curated.*, N.D.

Read: Tanay Warerkar, “NYC’s Street Food Vendors Are Closing As Business Comes to a Standstill,” *Eater New York*, March 19, 2020.

STUDENT RESOURCES

Wellness Exchange

NYU offers many resources for those facing medical and mental health issues of all sorts. If you are feeling ill or overwhelmed, please call **212-443-9999** or visit **www.nyu.edu/999**.

Moses Center for Students with Disabilities

The Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) determines qualified disability status and assists in obtaining appropriate accommodations and services for those who qualify. For more information call **212-998-4980** or visit **www.nyu.edu/csd**.

American Language Institute

An especially helpful resource for students for whom English is a second language, the American Language Institute (ALI) provides comprehensive English language instruction and evaluation. For more information visit **www.scps.nyu.edu/ali**.

NYU Writing Center

Need help putting your thoughts on the page? The Writing Center is here to help. For more information or to schedule an appointment to meet with a writing tutor, call **212-998-8866** or visit **www.nyu.edu/cas/ewp/html/writing_center.html**.

University Learning Center

Need studying tips or a little extra help processing the material covered in class? The University Learning Center offers tutoring and academic skills workshops. You can learn more by visiting this (absurdly long) link: **<http://www.nyu.edu/students/undergraduates/academic-services/undergraduate-advisement/academic-resource-center/tutoring-and-learning.html>**

NYU Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Student Center

Located at the Kimmel Center for University Life, Suite 602, the LGBTQ Student Center offers services, programs and resources supportive of varying sexual and gender expressions. For more information call **212-998-4424** or visit **www.nyu.edu/lgbt/**.