

# Media History of New York

MCC-UE 1151.001

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Office Hours: Thursday, 1:45-3:30pm and by appointment

New York has played a crucial role in the history of media, and media have played a crucial role in the history of New York. This course investigates the city's media technologies, institutions, and geographies from Dutch settlement to the digital age. We'll begin by exploring how media like maps and archives have shaped New York's cultural memory. Then we'll consider structures of urban experience as and in relation to the development of media, thinking especially about spectatorship and display in the nineteenth-century city. Shifting gears, the second half of the course will focus on site-specific media environments. We'll examine, for example, early twentieth-century representations of a city-wide transit system, the evolution of the advertising industry on 1960s Madison Avenue, and cultures of spectacle at Times Square.

Throughout the course, we'll collaborate on the production of an online guidebook to the media history of New York. It will be organized around the cultural lives and geographies of particular media artifacts, chosen by you to be rescued from archival obscurity.

## Goals

- analyze the relationship between media and New York City's form, identity, and history
- develop a historical and theoretical framework for examining media and urban space
- practice collaborative, digital, archival, and geographic research
- evaluate examples of projects demonstrating such research
- produce critical work in dialogue with course materials and other critics

## Required Texts

Marshall Berman, *On the Town: One Hundred Years of Spectacle in Times Square* (2009)

Patti Smith, *Just Kids* (2010)

\*other readings available as links or pdfs on NYU Classes

## Requirements and Grade Distribution

**Participation (20%)**: In addition to your participation in class discussion and in the collaborative production of the guidebook, you'll be asked to help lead one class by posting discussion questions the night before and being a resource during class about the reading.

**2-3-paragraph digital project analysis (5%)**: Identify and evaluate an online project dealing with the history of New York. Your response will be submitted to our class forum, and you'll be expected to comment on at least two posts by your classmates.

**5-page artifact essay (proposal and bibliography—5%, essay—25%)**: Select an artifact from New York's historical record (a text, an image—from a physical collection or digital database) and generate an analysis of what it tells us about media and the city's history.

**Map/guidebook entry (draft—10%, presentation—10%, final—25%)**: What is the relationship between your artifact and urban space? What sites or networks does it reveal? Your map/guidebook entry will chart a geography of your artifact, including relevant archival media.

**Policies**

**Attendance:** Each unexcused absence reduces your participation grade by one-third of a letter grade. More than three unexcused absences results in failure of the course. Multiple instances of tardiness count as an absence.

**Reading and discussion:** You should come to class with the assigned reading, and you should be prepared to participate in informed discussion about it.

**Electronics and classroom etiquette:** Laptops and tablets are allowed (phones aren't). Non-course-related activity is not permitted and will negatively impact your participation grade. Drinks and simple (i.e., not messy, noisy, or smelly) snacks are allowed.

**Late assignments:** will be reduced by one-third of a letter grade for each day late.

**Written assignments:** Papers should be double-spaced, with one-inch margins, in 12-point Times font, with pages numbered and your last name on every page.

**Academic integrity:** Words and ideas that come from another person must be cited in your writing. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, which will result in a failing grade for the assignment and possibly the course. Please consult [nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html](http://nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html).

**Resources**

In addition to my office hours, you can find general writing assistance at the Writing Center: [ewp.cas.nyu.edu/object/writing.center](http://ewp.cas.nyu.edu/object/writing.center).

NYU Speaking Freely offers informal language conversation courses: [speakingfreely.cas.nyu.edu/page/home](http://speakingfreely.cas.nyu.edu/page/home).

For physical, mental and emotional health issues, the NYU Student Health Center and Wellness Exchange are available to you: [nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/student-health-center.html](http://nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/student-health-center.html) and [nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/wellness-exchange.html](http://nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/wellness-exchange.html).

**“New York,” “media,” and other keywords**

- T, Jan. 26 Introductions  
 R, Jan. 28 Friedrich Kittler, “The City Is a Medium,” *New Literary History* 27 (1996)\*

**Media and the making of history**

- T, Feb. 2 Russell Shorto, *The Island at the Center of the World* (2005), selections\*  
 R, Feb. 4 explore digital exhibitions on the “New Netherland Project” website, [newnetherlandinstitute.org](http://newnetherlandinstitute.org)  
 explore your block on the “Mannahatta Project” website, [welikia.org](http://welikia.org)  
 visit to Fales with Marvin Taylor  
 S, Feb. 7 DUE by 10pm to NYU Classes: digital project analysis

**Theatricality and urban life**

- T, Feb. 9 Royall Tyler, *The Contrast* (1787), available at Early Americas Digital Archive, [mith.umd.edu/eada/html/display.php?docs=tyler\\_contrast.xml](http://mith.umd.edu/eada/html/display.php?docs=tyler_contrast.xml)  
 W, Feb. 10 DUE by 10pm on NYU Classes: your responses to at least two other students’ digital project analyses  
 R, Feb. 11 *The Contrast*

**Race, performance, and public space**

- T, Feb. 16 Shane White and Graham White, “Dandies and Dandizettes,” *Stylin’: African-American Expressive Culture from its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (1998)\*  
 R, Feb. 18 W. T. Lhamon, “Dancing for Eels at Catherine Market,” *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (1998)\*  
 S, Feb. 21 DUE at 10pm by email to me: proposal and bibliography

**New media and the masses**

- T, Feb. 23 Edgar Allan Poe, *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* (1842), [xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/poe/m\\_roget.html](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/poe/m_roget.html)  
 R, Feb. 25 George Foster, *New York by Gas-Light* (1850), selections\*  
 explore “Fanny Fern in *The New York Ledger*” and choose one column to read, [fannyfern.org](http://fannyfern.org)

**Visual culture and display**

- T, Mar. 1 ““Edifying Curiosities”” and “Stereotypes and Realities,” John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown* (2001)\*  
 R, Mar. 3 William J. Wilson, “Afric-American Picture Gallery” (1859)\*

**Communities in print**

- T, Mar. 8 explore “The Vault at Pfaff’s,” [pfaffs.web.lehigh.edu](http://pfaffs.web.lehigh.edu)  
 R, Mar. 10 Elizabeth Jordan, “Ruth Herrick’s Assignment,” *Cosmopolitan* (1894)\*  
 DUE at the beginning of class: artifact essay

**SPRING BREAK**

- S, Mar. 20 optional: 3pm performance of *Walk Hard* at the Metropolitan Playhouse

**The subway and the El**

- T, Mar. 22 watch Thomas Edison, *City Hall to Harlem in 15 Seconds* (1904)\* and Carson Davidson, *Third Avenue El* (1955)\*
- R, Mar. 24 explore “The Roaring Twenties” website, [vectorsdev.usc.edu/NYCsound/777b.html](http://vectorsdev.usc.edu/NYCsound/777b.html)

**Harlem**

- T, Mar. 29 *Fire!!!* (1926)\*
- R, Mar. 31 Abram Hill, *Walk Hard* (1939)\*

**Broadway**

- T, Apr. 5 Damon Runyon, “The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown” (1933)\*  
6pm: optional screening of *Guys and Dolls*, 239 Greene Street, Room 741
- R, Apr. 7 watch *Guys and Dolls* (1955), available on course reserve

**East Village**

- T, Apr. 12 Patti Smith, *Just Kids* (2010)
- R, Apr. 14 explore the online archive of the *East Village Eye*, [east-village-eye.com](http://east-village-eye.com)  
visit to Fales with Marvin Taylor

**Madison Avenue**

- T, Apr. 19 watch “The Real Men and Women of Madison Avenue” (2013), [thirteen.org/programs/real-mad-men](http://thirteen.org/programs/real-mad-men)
- R, Apr. 21 explore the gallery and complete at least ten questions on the *New York Times* digital archive of 1960s print ads, “Madison,” [madison.nytimes.com](http://madison.nytimes.com)
- S, Apr. 24 DUE: draft map/guidebook entry

**Times Square**

- T, Apr. 26 Marshall Berman, *On the Town* (2009)
- R, Apr. 28 watch a few minutes of the Times Square Live Cam, [earthcam.com/usa/newyork/timessquare](http://earthcam.com/usa/newyork/timessquare)

**In-class presentations**

- T, May 3
- R, May 5
- R, May 12 DUE: final map/guidebook entry