

HIST 338: Cities in History



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| Semester | Spring 2025 |
| Instructor | Prof. Neil Maher (he/him) maher@njit.edu 973-596-6348 (office); 646-325-3704 (cell) |
| Class Time | Tuesdays & Thursdays, 10:00-11:20 a.m. |
| Location | Faculty Memorial Hall, Room 412 |
| Office Hours | Cullimore Hall, 329 Tuesdays & Thursdays, 8:30 – 9:30 a.m.; 1:30 – 2:30 p.m.; and by appointment. You can attend these office hours as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stop by my office during these times.• Email me at maher@njit.edu to schedule a meeting at another day/time. |
| Course Overview | <p>When we think of cities we usually imagine places devoid of nature: cement sidewalks, crowded streets, tall skyscrapers. Yet if we look closer and think more deeply, we can see nature everywhere in and around urban areas. City residents play in public parks, drink water and bathe in water flowing through faucets, and light and heat their homes with natural resources such as wood, oil, and gas. This course provides an introduction to the history of this urban environment in the United States.</p> <p>While I have organized the course chronologically in an effort to trace this relationship between the city and its natural environment over time — from the colonial period through the industrial era and up into the post-World War II moment — over the course of the semester we will explore several important historical themes: how natural resources fueled urbanization and industrialization; the economic and ecological relationship between cities and their hinterlands; political activism to create city parks and clean up urban pollution; deindustrialization and suburbanization; and the rise of the urban environmental justice movement.</p> <p>Class meetings will consist of a mixture of lectures, group discussions, in-class readings of primary historical documents, and the viewing of documentary films.</p> |

Course Goals

There are four major objectives for this course.

- To familiarize students with the urban environmental history of the United States.
- To develop in students the ability to think critically about major historical questions, to read primary historical sources analytically, and to articulate interpretations of the past based on the reading of these primary source materials.
- To help students develop good writing and critical reading skills.
- To help students express their ideas orally in both formal presentations and informal class discussions.

Attendance and Participation

Throughout the semester I take attendance, and both your attendance as well as how you participate in class matter for your final grade. This is especially important since 15% of your grade depends on your class participation. Such participation should involve active listening and engagement — more than simply showing up.

Reading

Reading assignments will average 75-100 pages per week, and will consist of three books and one article. You are expected to have completed the reading assignment BEFORE class, since our discussions may draw directly on the readings for that week. We will also read and discuss primary historical documents in class. When reading all of these, try not only to understand the factual information being presented, but also to think critically about the author's argument.

Please note: if it appears that students are not doing the assigned reading before class, pop quizzes will be necessary.

Required Texts: You must purchase the books for the class. All three are currently available online in inexpensive paperback editions. Please make sure you purchase a hard copy of each book, since we will be referring to them while in class.

- Michael Rawson, *Eden on the Charles: The Making of Boston* (Harvard University Press, 2010)
- Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1987)
- Char Miller, *West Side Rising: How San Antonio's 1921 Flood Devastated a City and Sparked a Latino Environmental Justice Movement* (Trinity University Press, 2021)

Course Assignments

Short Papers: Throughout the semester you will be required to write three short papers no longer than four pages in length. The papers will be in response to the three books we are reading during the term (see list above). For each assignment I will provide a specific question beforehand, which you will then go on to answer in your paper. You will be graded on both your *ideas* and your *writing*.

Exams **Mid-Term and Final Exams:** This course will include two exams (one covering the first half of the course, and a second covering the second half). Both will draw on material from lectures, discussions, films, the assigned readings, and primary historical documents. Each exam will consist of three different types of questions: identification questions in which you will be asked to define a give term, event, or person; short answer questions involving a one or two sentence description of a given concept; and longer essay questions for which you will be expected to use the course materials to make analytical arguments.

Grading Consistent effort and improvement will be weighted heavily in grading, which will be apportioned as follows:

- Attendance and Participation: 15% (15 points)
- Short Papers: 45% (15 points each)
- Mid-Term and Final Exam 40% (20 points each)

Late Submissions: Written Assignments will lose one grade for every day late (A to A-, A- to B+, etc.). Assignments will not be accepted more than 1 week late.

Number and Letter Grade Correlation: All of the course assignments will be given a letter grade that will be converted into number grades in order to determine your final grade for the course. Because NJIT does not allow A+ and minus grades, the final numerical grades will correlate as follows:

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| A | 90 – 100 |
| B+ | 87 – 89.9 |
| B | 80 – 86.9 |
| C+ | 77 – 79.9 |
| C | 70 – 76.9 |
| D | 65 – 69.9 |
| F | Below 65 |

Writing Support

For all of our writing assignments you are welcome (and encouraged) to take advantage of the writing resources at NJIT. If you'd like assistance with your writing, you can make an appointment to work with a writing tutor in the NJIT Writing Center at: <https://www.njit.edu/writingcenter/>

Academic Integrity

The Federated History Department takes the NJIT honor code seriously and enforces it strictly (link here to NJIT code). If you cheat on an exam or plagiarize the writing assignments, I will be forced to report you to the Dean of Students. If you are unsure whether or not you are plagiarizing while writing your paper, please contact me before you hand in the assignment and we can discuss.

AI Policy

The use of AI software (ChatGPT, Grammarly, etc.) is not allowed in this class for the following reasons:

- AI hurts students by outsourcing critical thinking regarding reading assignments.
- AI robs students of the opportunity to improve their own writing.
- AI steals intellectual property without the consent of the authors (including mine).

- AI require an enormous amount of computing energy that contributes to climate change.

If you use it for any of the assignments, our Canvas platform will detect it when you submit the papers and you will receive no credit for the assignment.

**Federated
History
Department**

The history department at NJIT has seven full-time faculty members, and is part of the Federated History Department at NJIT—Rutgers University, Newark. There are approximately 24 faculty members across the street in the Rutgers, Newark history department. Because these two departments are Federated, NJIT and Rutgers students can take history courses offered at either institution. The NJIT History Department also offers a pre-law major called Law, Technology and Culture or LTC (link here: LTC), and a minor in history.

On the graduate level, the Federated Department of History also administers a joint Rutgers—NJIT master's program in history, which offers two joint degrees (link here: MA program): the Master of Arts (MA) and the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT). Fields of concentration are available in American History, World History, and the History of Technology, Environment and Medicine/Health. Application is made to the program at Rutgers-Newark.

COURSE SCHEDULE

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| | Week 1 |
| January 20 | Introductions <u>Required Reading:</u> The syllabus <u>In-Class Discussion:</u> <i>New York Times</i> , front page |
| January 22 | Defining the Urban Environment <u>Required Reading:</u> Jennifer Price, "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.," <i>The Believer</i> , April 2006 (Parts 1 & II). |
| PART I | BUILDING URBAN AMERICA |
| | Week 2 |
| January 27 | Native American Cities <u>Required Reading:</u> Rawson, <i>Eden on the Charles</i> , 1-21 |
| January 29 | Colonial Urbanites <u>Required Reading:</u> Rawson, <i>Eden on the Charles</i> , 22-74 |
| | Week 3 |
| February 3 | Urban Hinterlands: Lowell, Massachusetts <u>Required Reading:</u> Rawson, <i>Eden on the Charles</i> , 75-128 |
| February 5 | Urban Hinterlands: Newark, New Jersey <u>Required Reading:</u> Rawson, <i>Eden on the Charles</i> , 129-178 |
| | Week 4 |
| February 10 | Disease and the City <u>Required Reading:</u> Rawson, <i>Eden on the Charles</i> , 179-232 |
| February 12 | Securing Clean Water: New York City <u>Required Reading:</u> Rawson, <i>Eden on the Charles</i> , 233-281 |

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| | Week 5 |
| February 17 | Discussion: Rawson, <i>Eden on the Charles</i> <u>Required Reading:</u> Rawson, <i>Eden on the Charles</i> , finish book before class |
| February 19 | The Walking City and the Transportation Revolution <u>Required Reading:</u> Jackson, <i>Crabgrass Frontier</i> , 3-44 |
| | Week 6 |
| February 24 | Urban Machine Politics <u>Required Reading:</u> Jackson, <i>Crabgrass Frontier</i> , 45-72 Assignment: First Paper Due (Rawson) |
| February 26 | City Pollution <u>Required Reading:</u> Jackson, <i>Crabgrass Frontier</i> , 73-102 |
| | Week 7 |
| March 3 | Newark's Beer Problem <u>Required Reading:</u> Jackson, <i>Crabgrass Frontier</i> , 103-137 |
| March 5 | Review for First Exam <u>Required Reading:</u> Jackson, <i>Crabgrass Frontier</i> , 138-171 |
| PART II | URBAN REFORM AND SUBURBANIZATION |
| | Week 8 |
| March 10 | First Exam <u>Required Reading:</u> None – Study for Exam |
| March 12 | The Anti-Urban Turn <u>Required Reading:</u> Jackson, <i>Crabgrass Frontier</i> , 172-218 |

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| March 17-19 | <p style="text-align: right;">Week 9</p> <p>NO CLASS — SPRING BREAK <u>Required Reading:</u> Jackson, <i>Crabgrass Frontier</i>, 219-271</p> |
| <p>March 24</p> <p>March 26</p> | <p style="text-align: right;">Week 10</p> <p>Discussion: Jackson's <i>Crabgrass Frontier</i> <u>Required Reading:</u> Jackson, <i>Crabgrass Frontier</i>, 272-305</p> <p>No Class – NJIT AI Exploration Day <u>Required Reading:</u> None – write your paper</p> |
| <p>March 31</p> <p>April 2</p> | <p style="text-align: right;">Week 11</p> <p>Urban Progressives <u>Required Reading:</u> Miller, <i>West Side Rising</i>, 1-24</p> <p>Assignment: Second Paper Due (Jackson)</p> <p>Urban Parks <u>Required Reading:</u> Miller, <i>West Side Rising</i>, 25-49</p> |
| <p>April 7</p> <p>April 9</p> | <p style="text-align: right;">Week 12</p> <p>City vs Country: The 1920s <u>Required Reading:</u> Miller, <i>West Side Rising</i>, 49-73</p> <p>Suburbanization and White Flight <u>Required Reading:</u> Miller, <i>West Side Rising</i>, 74-97</p> |

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| | Week 13 |
| April 14 | Deindustrialization and the Urban Crisis in Newark <u>Required Reading:</u> Miller, <i>West Side Rising</i> , 98-124 |
| April 16 | Urban Environmental Justice <u>Required Reading:</u> Miller, <i>West Side Rising</i> , 125-150 |
| | Week 14 |
| April 21 | Discussion: Miller, <i>West Side Rising</i> <u>Required Reading:</u> Miller, <i>West Side Rising</i> , 151-193 (finish book before class) |
| April 23 | Cities and Climate Change <u>Required Reading:</u> None – write your paper |
| | Week 15 |
| April 28 | Review for Second Exam <u>Required Reading:</u> None – Finish Your Paper <u>Assignment:</u> Third Paper Due (Miller) |
| April 30 | Second Exam (In Class) |