

**Hist. 75800 - Twentieth Century New York City**  
**GC: Thursdays, 6:30-8:30 pm, 3 credits, Prof. Mike Wallace**

How to tackle the history of Gotham – one of the most complex human constructions the species has yet come up with – as it transpired over the twentieth century?

I propose two methods. One is to read two of my efforts at grasping the whole thing in its entirety. *Greater Gotham* (2017), which covers the period from 1898 to 1919, has been generously reviewed by the critics, but I would value seminarians' professional assessment of its methodology and execution. That goes double for the chunk of text I'll be handing out, drawn from the working draft of *Gotham III (1920-1945)*, on the city during World War 2.

The second method is to read new and classic accounts of the city in the twentieth century, with an emphasis on emerging interpretations and histories. The seminar will be organized in chronological order. Each session will take up (on average) four books, which are centered in that week's period, and further delimited by some obvious topic focus(es): thus the twenties boom (consumerism, prohibition), the thirties depression (new deal, radical culture), the fifties (cold war, urban renewal), the sixties (black, women, gay, antiwar, antipoverty movements), the seventies (so-called fiscal crisis, punk culture), the eighties (immigration, gentrification, homelessness, crack), the nineties (financialization), etc etc.

Everybody will read one of the week's books as part of a team. If we have twenty seminarians and four books, there'll be four teams of five. Each book will be introduced to the general assemblage by two members of its team, one making the strongest positive case for the volume, the other taking the most critical position. Both of the commentators (they can prepare in concert or independently) will post a presentation (four to eight pages) that describes the book's argument, and surveys reviews. A quick oral summary of the posted analyses by the opposing presenters will be followed by a half hour of general conversation.

In addition, seminarians will be expected to read a book (or a congeries of books) and write a substantial review essay – again drawing on commentaries already out there in the scholarly and popular literature – something on the order of a piece in the *New York Review of Books* or *Reviews in American History*, etc.

I'm providing a link -- <https://www.gothamcenter.org/seminar.html> -- to a list of roughly a hundred tentative titles, from which the weekly readings – and volumes

for individual review – might be drawn, but would welcome suggestions for additional books, and alternative period focuses. The goal is to collectively fashion a generally acceptable reading and writing program before the seminar begins.