

Research Project (Paper and Presentation)

By now you have been assigned a topic related to land use or property proposals that are currently being debated in the Lower East Side/East Village neighborhoods. You will be responsible for researching the history of the site or sites or policy in question, the existing and ongoing debates about the proposal, the larger questions the topic recalls in relation to New York City land use and property history and/or the longer histories/philosophies we will study in class. This project will require you to conduct on-line and archival research, attend community meetings, and read relevant secondary texts. You may also wish to interview people related to the topic. This project will result in two final submissions:

Research Paper (12-15pp): 35% of your final grade

Presentation of Research (10-12 minutes): 25% of your final grade

Format of Paper

1-inch margins, Times New Roman/Cambria Font (12 point), Double-spaced, page numbers in bottom right-hand corner. Give it a title and put your name on it.

Content

The general research question you should ask in your project is: What does this topic illuminate about property relations and the meaning of land overall, in New York City, and in this neighborhood?

Because your instructor for this course is a historian, you will answer some of this question by contextualizing your research in both the past and present. For example, if you were assigned Tompkins Square Park, I would want you to tell me when the park was laid out, how it has changed over time, and what important events have happened there. I would also want you to tell me what is happening with Tompkins Square Park today. That is, is anything happening with regard to land use in the city or the neighborhood that would impact Tompkins Square Park today? Or, is there anything specific happening in Tompkins Square Park with regard to land use that we should watch unfold?

Your project should also incorporate analysis derived from 2-3 readings from the FIRST HALF OF THE SEMESTER -- that is, Daenckerts, Locke, St. Augustine, George, Blackstone, Harris, Caffentzis & Federici, etc.

Finally, your project will require you to conduct primary and secondary research that may make use of archives, in-person interviews, newspapers, photographs, maps, or public records. At a few points during the semester, we will have mini-lessons on how to mobilize these resources to your best advantage.

Frequently Asked Questions:

How do I start a research project?

My advice is to start the way you start every other kind of research: Google. See what comes up using a combination of the key words in your topic. You might be surprised to see that a lot -- or only a little -- is being written about your topic already. If it's highly controversial and fast-moving now, chances are you might see news about it daily. So I'd recommend setting a Google News Alert for your topic (and/or for Lower East Side and/or for East Village) to keep up to date on what's going on. These leads will give you a place to start, but only that. Your next stop should be that well-known, but mysterious and underutilized institution: The Library.

How do I use the library for this research?

Glad you asked! There's a wealth of resources, not all of which I will enumerate here. Here are a few to get you started:

- The Milstein Division for United States History, Local History, and Genealogy at the New York Public Library (42nd/5th)
- Proquest Historical Newspapers, accessible through Bobst or NYPL
- NYU Special Collections
- The New York History section at Bobst
- Free Ancestry and Newspapers.com accounts at NYPL
- Ask an actual librarian for help, but come with a specific question, such as, "I'm researching the history of Tompkins Square Park. Can you recommend a book or archive I should consult?"

What other sources can I use?

New York City is required to make a lot of data free, public, and accessible. The most useful tool for those just getting used to researching land use is the NYCMap:

<http://maps.nyc.gov/doitt/nycitymap/> However, everyone and their brother is creating land-use maps in New York City, so you can find all sorts of maps with useful information through housing and advocacy organizations, historical societies, GitHub, and newspapers.

Can you tell me which sources are reliable and which are not?

This is a tough question because in some sense no source is truly reliable. The first thing you learn as a researcher is that whatever claim you make, you should do your best to find the claim documented in more than one source. So, if you see that Tompkins Square Park was named after Joe Tompkins in one source, but you find Fred Tompkins listed three sources, then you should probably assume it was named after the Fred. More importantly, you want to be able to trace your information to one or more of the following:

- Government records and documents
- The written work of legitimate scholars of the topic (i.e. not a random blogger, not Wikipedia, not an advertisement, not the accompanying web site to a WNET documentary). This can be a monograph, journal article, dissertation, thesis, or other publication produced by that scholar.
- A university- or library-based archive
- Newspaper articles (you might fact-check these too!)
- An interview (you might try to corroborate information with other documentation too)

How should I cite my information?

I strongly prefer the Chicago Manual of Style/Turabian. Use it with my blessing.