

NYU Gallatin School of Individualized Study

IDSEM-UG 1925/HIST-UA 282.002: Food and Nature in Cities
Spring 2021

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By-Zoom office hours by appointment T 1:00-5:00

Book office hours at <https://tinyurl.com/remes-appointments>

Description

What is the proper place of nature and agriculture in cities? How do cities shape nature, and vice versa? Where do—and where should—city-dwellers get their food? “Concrete jungles” (as opposed to “real” ones) often seem to be purely human-built, unnatural places where things are made and consumed, not grown. But the place of nature in cities, and our relationship to it, has long been contested. When we look at food in relationship to urban centers, we end up seeing far beyond the questions of what we eat and where we get it. The proper place of nature in cities is at the heart of many contemporary debates over urban policy, including food and agriculture, land use, disaster policy, and immunization. In this class, we will think historically and critically about these debates both in the past and in contemporary cities, focusing, though not exclusively, on North America, especially New York. Readings will include William Cronon, Ted Steinberg, Catherine McNeur, Katherine Leonard Turner, and others.

Learning goals

- Students will be introduced to, consider, and learn major themes in urban environmental and food history.
- Students will learn the historical background of and develop a critical analysis of questions of urban land use, urban agriculture, and other questions of urban policy.
- Students will practice their research, analytical, and academic writing skills.

A note about this semester

This semester is going to be unusual, and it’s going to be difficult. Even though we did it last semester, we’ll still all be figuring things out as we go along. We will all need to be patient and flexible. We should expect things to be tougher than usual for all of us and to make allowances for each other. We all have mounting experience with Zoom University, but we will need to experiment with ways to approximate at a distance the in-person modes of learning, thinking, and socializing to which we were once accustomed. To borrow ideas from Japan, we will all need to *ganbaru* and *gaman*—to do our best and to persevere—and we’ll need to help each other do that.

We all should try hard to replicate the ordinary seminar room on Zoom. For that reason, please join the Zoom meeting on time, please keep your camera on, and please engage as you would if we were meeting in person. If there are reasons you can't do any of these things, please talk to me and we'll come to an agreement about how to accommodate your circumstances.

This semester may come with special challenges for you as a student, whether it is in your ability to study, write, and think, or to pay tuition, eat, remain housed, or stay sane. I won't be able to solve every problem, but I can help with many of them, and I can direct you to people and offices who can help with others. But I can't help if you don't tell us that you're struggling. You can feel free to tell me as much or as little as you are comfortable sharing, but please do not hesitate to let me know if you need support so I can try to help you.

Required texts

In general, we'll be reading about large chunks of books each week—about 150 pages per week. Those books in which we will be reading at least 100 pages—which is to say, most of them—are listed below, are available for purchase at the NYU Bookstore. Where there are online editions in Bobst, I have linked to them in the schedule below. We are reading shorter excerpts from two other books (by Scott and Colgrove), and you will find those on Brightspace. If you are concerned about spending too much on books, I encourage you to shop around online for used books (use the ISBN listed below). You can also come talk to me and I'll help you figure out some strategies. Note that many of these books are available in e-reader formats at a substantial discount.

- William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: Norton, 1991). ISBN 978-0393308730
- Nathanael Johnson, *Unseen City* (New York: Rodale, 2016). ISBN 978-1623363857
- Eric Klinenberg, *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). ISBN: 978-0226276182
- Catherine McNeur, *Taming Manhattan: Environmental Battles in the Antebellum City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014). ISBN 978-0674979758
- Bryant Simon, *The Hamlet Fire: A Tragic Story of Cheap Food, Cheap Government, and Cheap Lives* (New York: New Press, 2017). ISBN 978-1-62097-238-0
- Kendra Smith-Howard, *Pure and Modern Milk: An Environmental History since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). ISBN 978-0190655785
- Ted Steinberg, *Gotham Unbound* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014). ISBN 978-1476741284
- Katherine Leonard Turner, *How the Other Half Ate: A History of Working-Class Meals at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014). ISBN 978-0520277588
- Monica M. White, *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018). ISBN 9781469643694
- Jane Ziegelman, *97 Orchard* (New York: Harper, 2010). ISBN 978-0061288517

Assignments and grading

Class participation and discussion – 20% of your final grade

The purpose of class participation is not only to show that you have done the reading assigned, but also to help yourself and your classmates better understand the readings and the issues discussed in them. In addition, class participation provides practice for the skill of engaging in honest, respectful, and thoughtful intellectual discussion. The point of discussion is quality, not quantity; you don't get points each time you open your mouth, and the person who talks once but says something brilliant that moves the discussion forward is more appreciated than the person who talks every five minutes but never says anything useful. That said, you can't participate well if you never participate, so you can't be silent; if I don't know the sound of your voice by the end of the term, you're unlikely to get a good class participation grade. Likewise, you can't participate if you're not in class, so please prioritize attendance.

Reading responses – 10% of your final grade

Each week, you will bring to class a short (approximately 250 words, or one page) reading response. **Please email them to me by the beginning of class.** This isn't a paper, and it won't be graded as a paper. It's a way to make you think about the reading before you come to class, to get your intellectual juices flowing, and to practice writing. In each reading response, you should think about the argument of what you have just read and assess its success. These papers will be graded check-plus (10/10), check (9/10), or check-minus (8/10). This means that the only way you can get less than an 8 out of the 10 possible points in this section is by failing to turn in your reading responses. Note that because the point of the reading response is to think about the readings *before* class, late reading responses will not be accepted.

Presentation – 15% of your final grade

One week, you (or in some cases, you and a colleague) will be in charge of presenting the reading to your classmates. For that week (we'll pick the first session of class) you will be responsible for presenting the reading and its key issues to the class. Don't just summarize the reading; put it into the context of the course. Prepare some discussion questions that you think will spark a good conversation. The best judge of your success as a presenter will be the quality of the discussion that follows.

Final paper – 30% of your final grade – Due Tuesday, May 11

The primary project will be a research paper on a relevant topic of your choice. Your paper can be on any relevant topic in urban history and studies, environmental history and studies, food history and studies, or (hopefully) the intersection of these three/six things, but it must require primary source research, advance an argument, and contain your original analysis. It should be 15-20 pages long (plus a bibliography), include Chicago/Turabian style footnotes, and have a title. In keeping with the Gallatin ethos you may propose a different sort of final project as long as it has major research and analysis components; if you are interested in doing this come and talk to me in office hours. If you need help thinking of a topic, I'm always happy to talk and give ideas.

To help you prepare for your final paper, you will do three preliminary assignments:

- *Proposal – 10% – Due March 18.* Write about two pages proposing your topic. Explain what you want to write about (what questions you will ask), how you plan to research it, and why it is a good topic. Important for this assignment is to say what primary sources you plan to use—that is, what sources or data will you analyze yourself as the basis of your paper?
- *Annotated bibliography – 10% – Due April 8.* Prepare a bibliography of at least seven *scholarly secondary* sources. Cite them in proper Chicago/Turabian bibliography format and then write four or five sentences about their argument, their evidence, and their relevance to your topic. Be sure not to include non-scholarly sources or primary sources.
- *Primary source report – 5% – Due April 24.* Write about two pages telling me what you've learned from looking at your primary sources. This can be informal, but it should be the start of the analysis you'll end up writing in your final paper.

Recommended texts

These are books that, because we have a limited number of weeks, I cut out of the syllabus. Depending on your research topic and interests, you might find them helpful or interesting.

- Frederick L. Brown, *The City is More than Human: An Animal History of Seattle* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016).
- Novella Carpenter, *Farm City: The Education of an Urban Farmer* (New York: Penguin, 2009).
- Susanne Freidberg, *Fresh: A Perishable History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 2009).
- Andrea Gaynor, *Harvest of the Suburbs: An Environmental History of Growing Food in Australian Cities* (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2006).
- Paul Greenberg, *American Catch: The Fight for Our Local Seafood* (New York: Penguin, 2015).
- Laura J. Lawson, *City Bountiful: A Century of Community Gardening in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
- Ian Mosby, *Food Will Win the War: The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food in Canada's Home Front* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015).
- Luc J. A. Mougeot, *Agropolis: The Social Political and Environmental Dimensions of Urban Agriculture* (London: Earthscan and the International Development Research Center, 2005).
- Jonathan Rees, *Refrigeration Nation: A History of Ice, Appliances, and Enterprise in America* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).
- Daniel Sidorick, *Condensed Capitalism: Campbell Soup and the Pursuit of Cheap Production in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: ILR Press, 2009).
- Emily E. LB. Twarog, *Politics of the Pantry: Housewives, Food, and Consumer Protest in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- August Wilson, *Seven Guitars* (New York: Plume, 1995).

Course schedule

Part I: Theory, or, Nature in Cities

January 28– Introduction

no reading

February 4 – Thinking about Nature in New York

Ted Steinberg, *Gotham Unbound: The Ecological History of Greater New York* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), xv-38, 109-179, 208-258. [Introduction, chapters 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 13.]

February 11 – Nature into commodities

William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: Norton, 1991), 55-147, 207-259. [Chapters 2, 3, and 5.] [[Hathi online link](#)]

February 18 – Legislative Day

Attend your Monday classes

February 25 – Animals and space in New York

Catherine McNeur, *Taming Manhattan: Environmental Battles in the Antebellum City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), 6-174 [Chapters 1-4.] [[Available online through Bobst.](#)]

March 4 – Cities, nature, and state simplification

James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: Why Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 11-83, 103-146. [Chapters 1, 2, and 4.] [PDF on Brightspace and also [available online through Bobst.](#)]

Part II: Class and food

March 11 – Culture

Jane Ziegelman, *97 Orchard* (New York: Harper, 2010).

March 18 – Material

Katherine Leonard Turner, *How the Other Half Ate: A History of Working-Class Meals at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014). [[Available online through Bobst.](#)]

- Paper proposal due.

March 25 – Individual conferences.

We will meet individually to talk about your paper proposals.

April 1 – Labor

Bryant Simon, *The Hamlet Fire: A Tragic Story of Cheap Food, Cheap Government, and Cheap Lives* (New York: New Press, 2017). [[Available online through Bobst.](#)]

April 8 – Agricultural resistance

Monica M. White, *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018). [[Available online through Bobst.](#)]

- Annotated bibliography due.

Part III: Taming Urban Nature

April 15 – Bringing urban nature to the countryside

Kendra Smith-Howard, *Pure and Modern Milk: An Environmental History since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). [[Available online through Bobst.](#)]

April 22 – Disease and public health

James Colgrove, *State of Immunity: The Politics of Vaccination in Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 17-112. [Chapters 1, 2 and 3.] [PDF on Brightspace]

April 29 – Climate and disaster

Eric Klinenberg, *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1-164, 225-235. [Prologue, introduction, chapters 1, 2, and 3, conclusion, and epilogue.]

- Primary source report due.

Part IV: Coda

May 6 – Wildness

Nathanael Johnson, *Unseen City* (New York: Rodale, 2016). [[Available online through Bobst.](#)]

May 11 (Tuesday)

- Final papers due by email at 2:00 Eastern time.

Course policies

Attendance. As described elsewhere in this syllabus, participation in class discussion is a key thing we do in this class. You can't participate if you're not in class. Therefore, attendance on our Zoom sessions is required. Please turn your camera on and be prepared to participate as you would in an in-person seminar room. Frequent absences will be factored into your participation grade. That said, some absences are legitimate and unavoidable, and it is up to you to decide what those are. It is always better to be on the Zoom call than not, but if an absence is unavoidable, please email me ahead of time and I will excuse your absence. Absences for religious observance are always permissible, but you should let me know what days you'll be out. No matter why you miss a class, it's your responsibility to find out what happened during it, so you should ask a classmate for notes. If your situation is such that attendance and participation via Zoom is or becomes impossible, please talk to me.

Academic integrity. As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the university. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website (<http://gallatin.nyu.edu/about/bulletin/undergrad/policies/integrity.html>).

Beyond the above boilerplate warning, the best rule is: When in doubt, cite. This admonition isn't just about following the rules. To be convincing, arguments must be based in fact, and in order to assess facts the reader must know from whence they came. Academic dishonesty also robs you of the education you're here for; if you don't do the work you're supposed to do, you don't get the educational experiences you're supposed to get. If you have questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty or plagiarism, ask.

Deadlines and extensions. Written work must be turned in on time. Reading responses will not be accepted late under any circumstances; all other work that is turned in late will be marked down a third of a grade per day; that is, a paper turned in a day late that would otherwise have gotten an A- will get a B+. If a legitimate delay is unavoidable, you can ask for an extension, but you must ask for one no less than 24 hours before the deadline. Practically, what this means is that you should try to get your work done on time, and if you can't you should ask me for an extension and we'll work something out. But if you don't ask me for an extension first, you'll be in trouble.

Office hours and help. I encourage you to come to my office and chat about history, the class, or about anything else. You can make an appointment for my office hours at <https://tinyurl.com/remes-appointments>. If you need to meet outside my office hours, feel free to email me for an appointment and we'll make something work. You're also welcome to email me about anything else at jacob.remes@nyu.edu (but please don't expect a fast response on weekends). Always, the rule is, if you don't understand something, or if you're having trouble, ask for help, whether in class, by email, or in office hours.

Academic assistance. What we're trying to do here is think about hard things in a supportive environment. This course is supposed to be difficult (if it's not, complain to me and we'll fix it!) but I also want to be supportive. Giving you help is my job. But I'm not the only one you can turn to for help. I strongly encourage you to make use of the Gallatin Writing Center at every stage of your writing, from conceiving of your paper to your final revisions. See <http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/undergraduate/writing/writingcenterappointments.html> for more details. The general rule, whether for reading or writing or researching, is, ***If you're having trouble, ask for help.*** That's what I'm here for. If for whatever reason you don't want to talk to me, reach out to your academic advisor or to your class advisor. The most important thing is not to suffer in silence and to make use of the many NYU and Gallatin resources that exist to help you.

General support. Beyond academic support, Gallatin has resources for you if you need help. There are many entry points: you can turn to your academic advisor; to your class advisor; to Richard Jung, the assistant director of student affairs (richard.jung@nyu.edu, 347-453-9751(c), room 525); to the NYU Wellness Exchange (212-443-9999, 24 hours a day); or to me. If you're having difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or if you lack a safe and stable place to live, and you think it's affecting your performance in the course, I urge you to contact Richard Jung or Dean of Students Pat McCreery (patrick.mccreery@nyu.edu) for support. If you feel comfortable speaking to me, I will advocate on your behalf.

Disabilities. New York University is committed to providing equal educational opportunity and participation for students with disabilities. It is the University's policy that no qualified student with a disability be excluded from participating in any University program or activity, denied the benefits of any University program or activity, or otherwise subjected to discrimination with regard to any University program or activity. If you have a disability and need accommodation, the first step is to talk to the Moses Center for Students for Disabilities. You can contact them at 212-998-4980 or email mosescsd@nyu.edu; see <http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/students-with-disabilities.html> for more information. Before or after you speak with the Moses Center, I am happy to talk to you about accommodating you.