

NYU Gallatin School of Individualized Study

Americas Scholars
Labor and Landscapes of a Post-Industrial Periphery
Academic Year 2021-22

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Description

Economic transitions are hard. What do you do when there aren't enough fish to sustain the fishing industry on which a culture was based? What do you do for work when the mines and factories close? What happens to the polluted land, water, and neighborhoods those industries leave behind? How do you organize for a just transition as industries and the environment change? Communities in Nova Scotia, on Canada's east coast, have been grappling with these questions for generations, even as they have remained on North America's and Canada's economic, cultural, and geographic periphery. Through studying Nova Scotia, we will seek to learn what this region can teach us about our own looming transitions.

In this trip, we'll visit the two largest cities in Nova Scotia. Halifax is the province's capital. Once famously called "the warden of the north" for its naval strategic importance, it retains a large military and naval presence, although its importance in trade and finance has long since dissipated. Today the Canadian Forces are joined by employers we commonly see in neoliberal economies: universities, hospitals, and tourism. We'll also visit Sydney, once the center of the steel and coal industry on Cape Breton Island; both coal and steel are no more, and their end left massive pollution and unemployment. We will do some traditional tourism—seeing pretty places, museums, and historic sites—and also visit places, like former toxic "tar ponds"—where tourists don't often go. We'll also be thinking critically *about* tourism and the role tourism plays in postindustrial economies.

Your Responsibilities

Please treat Americas Scholars like you would your other classes: attend class sessions, do the assigned readings for those meetings, and participate actively as you would in any Gallatin classroom. Readings will be posted on our Brightspace site. Attendance is expected

and required but will be excused for good reason (including religious observance); please let Jacob and Rachel know ahead of time if you will need to miss a session. It is especially important this year that you not come to class if you're feeling sick, especially if you have respiratory or other potential Covid symptoms.

After our trip, you will produce a **final project**. This project will be on a topic of your choice that explores some of the subthemes and issues that come up throughout the fall and during the research trip. You might come up with a traditional (if shorter) research paper or another more experimental, experiential, or artistic format such as a film, a play, a short story, or a piece of music. We will talk more about the possibilities during our Tuesday night meetings and workshop your ideas when we return in the spring. In any case, you will want to have an idea of what project and/or research question you will pursue before we travel so that you can do some work on it while we are doing our "fieldwork" abroad. Your projects may be showcased in one of a few possible venues: the journal [Mosaic](#); Gallatin's online forum, [Confluence](#); a Gallatin galleries show; or a self-organized symposium.

Important Dates

We will likely New York on Friday, March 11, 2022, and return on Sunday, March 20. You must leave and return with the group.

Before and after the trip—during the fall and spring semesters—we will meet on alternate Tuesday evenings at 6:30pm. Unfortunately, Covid restrictions mean we're not allowed to eat during our seminar sessions.

Readings and Seminar Schedule

These readings are subject to change. In addition, there may be other events—a lecture, a field trip to an exhibit, a performance—that will come up during our year together. For instance, we are working to schedule all going to see the Tony-winning Broadway musical *Come From Away*, which is about Newfoundland.

September 21 – Introductions

No reading

[A Spotify playlist of Nova Scotian music is available here.](#)

October 5 – Thinking about transitions

- J. Mijin Cha, Vivian Price, Dimitris Stevis, and Todd E. Vachon with Maria Brescia-Weiler, "[Workers and Communities in Transition: Report of the Just Transition Listening Project](#)" (Labor Network for Sustainability, 2021).
- Katie Toth, "[The Struggling Canadian Coal Town Desperate to Return to Its Roots.](#)" *Vice Canada* 20 October 2016.

October 14 – Come From Away

- We're all going to go see the Broadway musical Come From Away.

October 19 – Cape Breton Industry and Post Industry

- Lachlan MacKinnon, *Closing Sysco: Industrial Decline in Atlantic Canada's Steel City* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 3-20, 110-155.

If you're interested in this topic, I recommend reading the whole book.

November 2 – Halifax Explosion

- Jacob A.C. Remes, "[Committed as Near Neighbors': The Halifax Explosion and Border-Crossing People and Ideas.](#)" *American Review of Canadian Studies* 45, no. 1 (March 2015): 26-43.
- Suzanne Morton, *Ideal Surroundings: Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 15-50.
- Jacob Remes, "[Mi'kmaq in the Halifax Explosion of 1917: Leadership, Transience, and the Struggle for Land Rights.](#)" *Ethnohistory* 61, no. 3 (summer 2014): 445-466.

If you're interested in this topic, you can read Jacob A.C. Remes, *Disaster Citizenship: Survivors, Solidarity, and Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

November 16 – Urban Renewal, Racism, and the Shape of Halifax

- Tina Loo, "[The View from Jacob Street: Reframing Urban Renewal in Postwar Halifax.](#)" *Acadiensis* 48, no. 2 (autumn 2019): 5-42.

If you're interested in this topic, you can read Ted Rutland, *Displacing Blackness: Planning, Power, and Race in Twentieth-Century Halifax* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

November 30 – Arts

- Erin Morton, *For Folks Sake: Art and Economy in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), xv-xvii, 86-132, 175-217 [preface, chapter 4, chapter 6].
- Erik Moskowitz, Amanda Trager, and Amish Morrell, "[Beyond the Island, Another Island.](#)" *Visual Arts News* 12 June 2018.

If you're interested in this topic, you can read Ian MacKay, *Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994).

December 14 – Film

- No readings. We'll watch "New Waterford Girl" (1999) in class.

January 25 – Mi'kmaq, Acadian, Gael, Dalit, English

- Please listen to these two episodes of the podcast Acadiversité:
 - Episode 3: [Legacies of Settler Colonialism in Atlantic Canada and Beyond](#)
 - LAGNIAPPE: [Dr. Karly Kehoe, Settlement and Legacies of Resilience in Northern Cape Breton](#)

February 8 – Tourism

- Lachlan MacKinnon, "[Coal and Steel, Goodbye to All That: Symbolic Violence and Working-Class Erasure in Postindustrial Landscapes.](#)" *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History* 16, no. 1 (March 2019): 107-125.
- Ian McKay and Robin Bates, *In the Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 3-17.

If you're interested in this topic, you can read more of the McKaye and Bates book and/or another article by Lachlan MacKinnon, "Labour Landmarks in New Waterford: Collective Memory in a Cape Breton Coal Town," *Acadiensis* 42, no. 2 (summer/autumn 2013), 3-26.

February 22 – Nova Scotian Literature

We'll divide into four groups, each of which will read a different book, and then each group will meet to talk about their books. We'll provide the books, and I'll tell you about them before you have to pick. The choices are:

- Alistair MacLeod, *No Great Mischief* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1999).
- George Elliott Clarke, *Whylah Falls*, rev'd 3rd ed. (1990; Kent, N.S.: Gaspereau 2010).
- Shashi Bhat, *The Most Precious Substance on Earth* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2021).
- Jaime Burnet, *Crocuses Hatch from Snow* (Halifax: Nimbus, 2019).
- Leo Mackay, Jr., *Twenty-Six* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2004).
- Frank MacDonald, *A Possible Madness* (Sydney, N.S.: Cape Breton University Press, 2011).
- shalan joudry, *Waking Ground* (Kent, N.S.: Gaspereau, 2020)

If you're interested in this topic, you can read Peter Thompson, *Nights Below Foord Street: Literature and Popular Culture in Postindustrial Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019).

March 8

Pre-travel briefing. Attendance mandatory.

We will continue to meet on alternate Tuesdays after our trip, but we will discuss later what we'll do on those evenings.

When we came back from our trip, students identified a number of topics that they'd heard about while traveling about which they wanted to learn more. After a discussion and vote, we ended up reading and talking about the Irvings [the Livesey dossier] and about Indigenous business [the Mercer article and Prins excerpts].

19th c. Black Halifax

- David A. Sutherland, "[Race Relations in Halifax, Nova Scotia, During the Mid-Victorian Quest for Reform](#)," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 7 no. 1 (1996): 35-54.
- Francis I.W. Jones, "[A Hot Southern Town: Confederate Sympathizers in Halifax During the American Civil War](#)," *Journal of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society* 2 (1999): 52-69.
- Judith Fingard, "[Race and Respectability in Victorian Halifax](#)," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 20, no. 2 (May 1992): 169-195.

Africville

- Jennifer J. Nelson, "The Space of Africville: Creating, Regulating, and Remembering the Urban 'Slum,'" in *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping White Settler Society*, Sherene H. Razak, ed. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002), 211-232.
- Howard McCurdy, "Africville: Environmental Racism," in *Faces of Environmental Racism: Confronting Issues of Global Justice*, Laura Westra and Bill E. Lawson, eds., 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 95-112.

20th c. Black Halifax and NFB Documentaries

- Rex Tasker, [Encounter at Kwacha House – Halifax](#), 17 mins., 1967.
- Sylvia Hamilton, [Speak It! From the Heart of Black Nova Scotia](#), 28 mins., 1992.

Military and Anti-military in Halifax

- R.H. Caldwell, "[The VE Day Riots in Halifax, 7-8 May 1945](#)," *Northern Mariner / Le Marin du Nord* 10, no. 1 (2000): 3-20.
- Stephen Kimber, *Sailors, Slackers, and Blind Pigs: Halifax at War* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2003).

Irvings

- Greg Marquis, "[Growth Fantasies: Setting the Urban Agenda in Saint John, New Brunswick, 1960-1976](#)," *Acadiensis* 46, no. 1 (winter/spring 2017): 122-144.
- Jacques Poitras, [Irving vs. Irving: Canada's Feuding Billionaires and the Stories They Won't Tell](#) (Toronto: Viking, 2014).
- Bruce Livesey, "[The House of Irving](#)," dossier of eight articles, *National Observer*, 2016-2017.

Antigonish Movement

- Sandro Dodaro and Leonard Pluta, [Big Picture: The Antigonish Movement of Eastern Nova Scotia](#) (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012).

- Rusty Neal, "[Mary Arnold \(and Mabel Reed\): Co-operative Women in Nova Scotia, 1937-1939](#)," *Acadiensis* 28, no. 2 (spring 1999): 58-70.
- Richard Harris, "[Flattered But Not Imitated: Co-operative Self-Help and the Nova Scotia Housing Commission, 1936-1973](#)," *Acadiensis* 31 no 1 (autumn 2001): 103-208.

Housing Crisis

- Because the housing crisis is so new, there's not very much written about it yet. But the *Halifax Examiner* has a dossier of news coverage called "[Priced Out](#)."

Mi'kmaw business and culture

- Greg Mercer, "[Membertou's moment: How a Mi'kmaq nation found prosperity and a seafood empire](#)," *Globe and Mail* 10 January 2021.
- Harald E.L. Prins, *The Mi'kmaq: Resistance, Accommodation, and Cultural Survival* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Harcourt Brace College, 1996), 19-41, 167-215.
- Handani Ditmars, "[A Multi-Billion Dollar Real Estate Project Is Rising on Native Reserve Land in Vancouver](#)," *Architectural Digest* 29 September 2021.