Syllabus for Discovering Archaeology in New York City

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In this course, New York City is our archaeological site. The period covered is from 10,000 years ago to the beginning of the 20th century and is based on archaeological remains. Its history is both fascinating and mind-expanding as a different perspective on the City emerges in time and space from what is learned. Walking around its various boroughs, students will learn that our modern landscape is vastly different from earlier eras. Along with our gain as a major cultural center, we will assess some losses brought about by the destruction of aspects of the city’s past. In particular, students will come to understand the meaning of stewardship in the context of urban development. At the same time, viewing our place in the city’s 10,000 years of history gives us a deeper sense of time and place and a unity in its shared heritage.

New York is one of the best places in the world to discover the archaeological riches of an urban environment because these remains are all around us. In this course, we will focus on the city’s deep past, known to us from the city’s ecological history, the excavations of prehistorians of the city’s earliest settlements, and from the research of historical archaeologists inclusive of the 20th century. Our goal is to review the complex history of the city known from historical documents, ecologists and archaeologists that have documented alterations of the land and its waterways, the earliest settlements and the clash of cultures as colonialists came to dominate the city’s native peoples and others brought from west and west central Africa, and attempts to preserve the City’s past. The twists and turns of European governments and migrations and efforts to dominate the city’s commerce will also be studied.

The course is divided into three sections:  
September 3 – October 1 – Landscapes and Waterways  
October 6 – November 5 – Prehistoric and Historical Gotham  
November 10 - December 8 – Cultural Heritage and Preservation

Landscapes and Waterways  
In his book, *Gotham Unbound* (2014) The author, Ted Steinberg, calls New York City an “urban giant…the most drastically transformed natural environment in the world.”(2014: xvii). In this first section, we will rediscover the landscapes and waterways that Giovanni da Verrazano and Henry Hudson saw when they arrived here in 1524 and 1609 and then see them as they are today. This fascinating aspect of the city’s past takes us to the beginning of the commercial and cultural center New York City has become.

Prehistoric and Historic Peopling of Gotham

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While many of its earliest remains lie beneath the city’s surface, our information excavations and surveys throughout the city and help us view the city from their perspective. In New York some of what is known can be examined at first hand in museums and a small collection of ceramics housed in the Department of Anthropology at NYU and other remains exhibited and curated in several of the city’s museums. The remains of native settlements (if you squint!) and historic buildings will become visible in parts of the city through field trips.

Cultural Heritage and Preservation

These “bits and pieces” of our past are increasingly disappearing (through development, illicit digging and collecting, and inattention to the city’s history by local governments). In learning about the city’s past, we will study the past and present efforts by its citizens to hold on to the city’s rich history. U.S. Legislation protecting Native American artifacts and lands also will be discussed. Based on these efforts, we will turn our attention to what can be done to preserve the endangered cultural heritage of New York and its diverse cultures and our own responsibilities as stewards of the past and future.

Course Requirements

**One 15-30 minute presentation and discussion. Individual students will be assigned a specific reading or field trip to present to the class. These presentations are meant to supplement aspects of course readings and lectures [15 points] Listed as SL (Student Led).

There also will be a Short Map Test [15 points] on this section of the course drawn from lectures and presentations. October 1.

**One mid-term examination will cover materials introduced during the Prehistoric/Historic Section of the course. This is an essay exam [25 points]. November 3.

**One 10-15 page research paper (250-words, double spaces) and bibliography on some aspect of the course. Students will meet with the professor to agree upon a topic and its scope. The papers will be evaluated based upon the selection of a topic that complements course material, the thesis of the paper, evidence presented and format. The paper is due on December 12th, hard copy in my mailbox in the Department of Anthropology, 25 Waverly Place. [35 points]

**Participation in class is mandatory. [10 points]

**There are two field trips, in addition to walks around Greenwich Village. I would like you to attend both of the field trips. We need to discuss the first field trip to arrange a time when everyone can attend.

Reading Assignments

Assigned readings are listed under each week below. Most are in Unearthing Gotham, Yale University Press, available at the NY Book Store, others are shorter readings on NYU Classes.

Week by Week Topical Schedule and Readings
Landscapes and Waterways

Week 1 – 9/3 - The Archaeology of New York City – An Introduction to Prehistory – New York’s Deep Past – and Historical Archaeology – 17th century to the Present.

Readings: Cantwell and Wall, Chapters 1, 2, Digging in New York, pp. 3-32. The two chapters are required for this week, but throughout the semester read the rest of the book. And read chapters again when assigned in specific weeks.

Week 2 – 9/8-9/10. Looking Backward at the Transformations of the American Landscape, Native and Colonial Views and the Pre-settlement of the North American Landscape.

Readings: Ted Steinberg, “Can the Port Authority Save the Planet?” [if you want to see more try books.google.com/books?isbn=147671247, Part 1.; find it at Gotham Unbound: The Ecological....New York; google.com book.]
Cantwell and Wall, be sure to read the assignments listed in Week 1, 9/3

“Building the City, Chapter Thirteen”, In Cantwell and Wall
“Urban Backyards” Chapter Fourteen, In Cantwell and Wall

“Feds Announce Funding”

Week 5 – 9/29-10/1. Readings: “Oystering along the Hudson” In Cantwell and Wall, pp. 54-57;
“The Land and Sea Around Them:” In Cantwell and wall, pp. 86-92 –
“Can Oysters Save New York City Harbor” – New York Academy of Sciences

October 8th, lecture by Ted Steinberg (if you are interested) – Center for the Production of Knowledge, 20 Cooper Square, Fifth Floor, 6 – 8 p.m.

Prehistoric and Historical Archaeology

Week 1 – 10/6-10/8. The Creation of a New World and A Forager’s Paradise.
Readings: Cantwell and Wall, Chapters 3 and 4: The Paleoindian Period (11,000-

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10,000 B.P.; Settling Down in the Archaic (10,000-3,700 B.P.).


Week 2 – 10/15. The Funerary Pyres on Long Island, Transition, Early and Middle Woodland periods
Readings: Cantwell and Wall, Chapter 5, 6, 7, 8.


Week 3 – 10/20 -10/22. Readings: Cantwell and Wall, Chapters 9, 10

Week 4 – 10/27 – 10/28. Readings: Cantwell and Wall, Chapters 11, 12

Week 5 – 11/3 – 11/5 Urbanism and the Post-Revolutionary City – Mid-term Essay Exam November 5
Readings: Cantwell and Wall, Chapters 11, 12, 13, 14; pp. 188-276
E. J. Lenik, Cultural Contact and Trade in Prehistoric Staten Island, pp. 25—32
S. Baugher, Trade Networks in the Colonial and Federal Period, pp. 33-37
J. Cotz, Class and Ceramics as Trade Indictors, pp. 38-45.

Cultural Heritage and Preservation

Week 1 – 11/10-11/12 – Geoarchaeology in New York City

Week 2 – 11/17-11/14 –Readings: “We were Here: The African Presence in Colonial New York, chapter Sixteen”, in Cantwell and Wall, pp. 277-294

Week 3 11/24-11/26- - Archaeology, Stewardship, Cultural Heritage and Preservation, and Minding the Environment

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Killion, Introduction, pp. 3-28 and A view from the trenches, pp. 133-150
Contemporary NAGPRA issues: [http://www.nps.gov/nagpra](http://www.nps.gov/nagpra)
Sanderson, Muir Webs: Connecting the Parts, pp. 171-209

Week 4 – 12/1 – 12/3 Student Papers – Accessible Suggestions [plenty more].

Jeffersonian Conceptions on a Native American Future.
Environmentalism, Origins and the “Noble Savage”, pp. 3 -116.
New York Preservation Archives Project –
Landmarks Commission Projects on line.
Preservation and National Park Service
UNESCO Heritage Sites.

Week 5 – 12/8 – New York Food and Feasting

• **A CHRONOLOGY FOR GOTHAM**
  – PALEOINDIAN – 11,000 – 10,000 B.P.
  – ARCHAIC – 10,000 – 3,700 B.P.
  – TRANSITIONAL – 3,700 – 2,700 B.P.
  – EARLY AND MIDDLE WOODLAND – 2,700 – 1,000 B.P.
  – LATE WOODLAND – 1,000 – 400 B.P. +
  – HISTORICAL PERIODS