The Public and Publics
Spring 2016
CUNY Graduate Center
Draft syllabus

Course meets: Thursdays from 2 to 4 pm
Room 5383

Instructors:

Setha Low (slow@gc.cuny.edu); Department of Environmental Psychology, Room 6203.16
Office hours: by appointment on Thursdays and Fridays

Amy Chazkel (amychazkel@gmail.com), Department of History, Office: Room 5405
Office hours: Thursdays from 11 am to 1 pm and by appointment.

Course numbers:
ANTH 81500; EES 79903; IDS 81630; PSYCH 80103; and U ED 75200

Description: This interdisciplinary course examines the concept of the public, and the plural publics, as an analytical construct of particular importance in both scholarship and political life. Students will master the classic and more recent theoretical literature on space and place with respect to the designation of public and private. We will also go beyond the literature on shared resources and social spaces to think broadly about major approaches to the common, the communal, and the ordinary. We will critically examine such themes as: state versus private jurisdiction in regulating everyday life; feminist and black public spheres; the history and politics of public education; the privatization of urban public space; and political, social, and legal conflicts over copyright, intellectual property and public scholarship and art. We will pay special attention to a dimension of the study of public life of perennial political relevance as a question of global social justice: the privatization of formerly shared or commonly owned resources—the “enclosure of the commons”—as both a historical process and a present-day phenomenon. Readings will include a combination of theoretical inquiries and case studies drawn primarily, but not exclusively, from the North American, Latin American, and European contexts. Students from all disciplines and geographic specialties will be welcomed.

Futures Initiative: This course is being offered as part of the Futures Initiative: http://futuresinitiative.org/about/. The Futures Initiative advocates greater equity and innovation in higher education at every level of the university. Housed at the Graduate Center and reaching throughout the CUNY community, the Futures Initiative empowers the next generation of intellectual leaders with bold, public, and
engaged teaching and learning. With an emphasis on student-centered practices, the Futures Initiative redefines graduate preparation to include translation of specialized research into the best undergraduate teaching.

As one of the courses selected this year as a Futures Initiative, students in “The Public and Publics” will have available to them certain kinds of support, including:
• The opportunity to participate in a Spring Symposium, to be held this year on April 3.
• Access to the Futures Initiative website, a CBOX-based platform that allows anyone with an account to create discussion groups, customized websites, and more. This can be used for your graduate course as well as for any undergraduate courses you may teach, or for a personal/academic website.
• An embedded Graduate Fellow who can help make connections with the Futures Initiative’s goals, prepare for the Symposium, and assist with technology related to the FI website.
• A standing invitation to all Futures Initiative events, such as the University Worth Fighting For series, which can help you to draw connections between your research and teaching.
• The chance to get involved in HASTAC, a network of 15,000 teachers and learners across the country, where you can blog, share announcements, and build community.
• Connection with the Futures Initiative Peer Mentors, undergraduate leaders at 13 CUNY schools who can help your students succeed in navigating the university.

Our course website: This course has its own page on the Futures Initiative WordPress website. Please make sure that you are signed up with a username and password on http://futuresinitiative.org/. The address for our page is http://futuresinitiative.org/publicandpublics/. Now, at the outset of the semester, our course page is a mere skeleton. Over the course of the semester we as a group will develop uses for the course page as a way of extending and expanding on our in-class discussions, sharing and storing information, collaborating on projects, and planning and organizing. Using the web page, we will work together to produce an extensive Annotated Bibliography related to the course. Other possible uses of the page include operating a blog for the course.

Required books: The following books will be required reading for this course. They are easily available at local or online booksellers, and they are also on closed reserve in our library. In addition to these books, please see the below, week-by-week schedule of the course topics and readings for additional reading assignments, which include articles and excerpts from books.

Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (University of California Press, 2009)

Please note that we will be reading only sections of this book (Editors' Introduction, and the Blackmar, Harvey and Mitchell chapters).


**Required Work:**

I. **Discussion Leader**

At our second class meeting, each student will sign up for one week when he or she will be responsible for directing our class discussion for that day. That means that you will kick off the class with a brief commentary on our assigned readings for that week. This need not be lengthy or formal—10 minutes is sufficient—but should be a serious, carefully and thoughtfully prepared presentation. (In other words, please do not simply speak off the cuff; make sure to think in advance about and plan your comments.) Your introductory remarks should include some open-ended, analytical questions for your classmates to begin our discussion of the material, opening out to a broader discussion of the topic for that week and, ideally, tying these in with our previous readings. Of course, if you can bring in your own research or material that you are covering in other classes, so much the better; feel free to bring in images, artifact, suggestions for further readings, and so on. Throughout our class on the day you are the Discussion Leader, you will be responsible for picking up the conversation when there is a lull or redirecting it as needed. N.B.: The Discussion Leader is required to bring in a one-page handout on the day of the discussion that highlights some of the major points to be raised and any particular thoughts or suggestions for your fellow students. This can take any form you like and can either be written in prose or in outline or bullet-point form.

II. **Final Paper**

Your work in this course will culminate in a final paper of approximately 15-20 pages on a topic of your choice related to the theme of the class. We instructors will be glad to work with students to help them design a paper topic suited to their own broad interests and concerns.

*Please note that this term paper assignment has three parts:*

1. **annotated bibliography**, due on week 5 of the semester (March 2)
2. In class on week 8 (March 23) you should submit a **paper prospectus**: a short essay (approximately one to three pages in length, double-spaced with 12-point font) describing the expected topic of your paper, making at least a preliminary argument
about the scholarly importance of your chosen topic, and citing at least three scholarly works of history that you intend to use as sources; in addition to these three works, we strongly encourage you to submit a longer bibliography so that we can give you the best possible feedback and suggestions about where your paper is headed. If you are drawing on primary material/field research data/archival sources, please explain what those sources are and how you expect them to support your analysis.

3. The final paper itself is due on May 29 and may be submitted in our boxes (one copy to each instructor, please) as a hard copy or sent electronically to both of us as an email attachment. As the deadline draws nearer, we will distribute handouts that will help you with this essay and will provide complete instructions and guidelines for its submission. We will devote some time in the last three class sessions for each student to present his or her paper project to the class. Please note that at our class meeting on April 6th, you will need to select the day on which you are presenting (May 4, 11 or 18). On the day of your presentation, you will need to post your comments and/or a draft of your paper on our webpage for circulation to your classmates.

Conference:
As part of this course, we will hold a public conference related to the course’s theme. The conference will take place at the Graduate Center throughout the day on March 30 (precise starting and ending time to be confirmed, but probably from 10 am to 6 pm), a day when we would normally have class. Please plan to attend as much of the conference as possible. We have already secured a confirmation from the distinguished geographer Don Mitchell, an author whose work we will be reading and an important scholar of the topic of the “public and publics,” as a keynote speaker at the conference. The room is booked and the date set aside, but much of the planning will be in your hands. There will also be space for students in this class to present their work in progress on a volunteer basis, and also to participate as chair or commentator on various panels.

The following is a day-by-day schedule of topics we will cover in class and the corresponding readings assigned for each day.

All readings other than the five books listed above are either articles or book excerpts and are either freely available online (in the library’s e-journals, for example) or will be distributed electronically to the class at least a week prior to the class on which we will discuss it.

**Week 1, February 2**
Introduction: Histories of commons, property, and public rights

**Reading:**
Peter Linebaugh, *Magna Carta Manifesto*

**NOTE:** Please come to the first class meeting having read the Linebaugh book.
**Week 2, February 9**
Rights-Based Publics, “Public Rights,” and the Politics of Exclusion

Readings:

**Week 3, February 16**
History of Discursive Publics and the Rise of the Bourgeoisie

Readings:

**Week 4, February 23**
Counterpublics

Readings:


Week 5, March 2
Public Art and Other Forms of Public Expression

Readings:


Week 6, March 9
Affect, Media, and Revolution

Readings:


Week 7, March 16
Sound as Forming Publics

Readings:
Marina Peterson, Sound and the City (2010), Introduction and Chapters 1 and 4.
Daniel Bender, Duane Corpis, and Daniel J. Walkowitz, Editors’ Introduction to “Sound Politics: Critically Listening to the Past,” Radical History Review, issue 121 (January 2015).

Week 8, March 23
Environment as Forming Publics

Readings:
Selections
SELECTION OF SHORT READINGS (TBA), from unpublished book manuscript
http://www.metropolitiques.eu/Making-sustainability-public-The.html

Week 9, March 30 CONFERENCE

Week 10, April 6
Territory and Enclosure, Revisited: The Politics and Privatization of Public Space

In class: sign up for final presentations

Readings:
Selected readings from the *Radical History Review*. Issues 108 and 109 (exact readings TBA)

*NO CLASS ON APRIL 13, SPRING RECESS (APRIL 10 – 18)*

*NO CLASS APRIL 20 (CLASSES FOLLOW A MONDAY SCHEDULE)*

**Week 11, April 27**
Education as forming publics

**Readings:**
To be collectively researched and decided upon by the class.

**Week 12, May 4**
TOPICS AND READINGS TO BE DETERMINED IN DELIBERATION

**Week 13, May 11**
TOPICS AND READINGS TO BE DETERMINED IN DELIBERATION

**Week 14, May 18**
TOPICS AND READINGS TO BE DETERMINED IN DELIBERATION