Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2013 Volume II: Immigration and Migration and the Making of a Modern American City

Introduction

Cities, whether small or large, comprise an indelible part of the American landscape. This seminar provided eleven New Haven teachers the opportunity to study the complicated processes of U.S. urban formation through the histories of nineteenth- and twentieth-century immigration and migration patterns. To anchor our examination both geographically and chronologically, the seminar focused on three key U.S. cities – New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles – to provide different examples of migration, settlement, and urban/metropolitan formation across time and space. The seminar also aimed to introduce teachers to a range of primary sources that would enrich the histories of migration and urban formation: photography, films, newspaper articles, cartoons, and maps.

The seminar began by examining the phenomenal growth of antebellum New York City as a result of Western European immigration streams and regional rural to urban migration that included the harrowing escapes of fugitive slaves such as Harriet Jacobs in search of freedom. We paid particular attention to the Five Points neighborhood in Lower Manhattan as a racially and ethnically diverse neighborhood that would change following the violent expulsion of African Americans following the 1863 Draft Riots. This first week set the discussion framework for the following weeks by challenging us to see the ways in which the histories of different migrant groups constantly overlapped, intersected, and diverged in the city. The following weeks focused on understanding how diverse groups of European immigrants and African American migrants encountered the growing metropolis from engaging in public spaces such as Central Park, popular cultural amusements such as Coney Island, or established religious institutions such as the Catholic church to forge their own identities and communities as ethnic Americans. We also studied the responses of social reformers to deal with the rising numbers of migrants and wide range of social, political, and economic concerns.

Following our study of New York City, we moved to Chicago to examine more closely the First Great Migration of African Americans from the South from the 1890s to the end of the First World War that occurred at the same time of large scale Eastern European immigration and settlement to that city. Looking at the business practices of Chicago employers and real estate agents helped make clear the ways in which European immigrants and African American migrants experienced the City of Big Shoulders differently. As the former found opportunities for socioeconomic mobility in the city's industries over time, the latter experienced racial discrimination and violence as evidenced by the 1919 Chicago Riot. Moving to early-twentieth-century Los Angeles brought into focus Asian and Latino migration histories. Our study of the twentieth-century formation of the Los Angeles metropolitan area also made clear the ways in which this city developed differently from the older U.S. cities we had studied. The automobile and, more importantly, the freeway systems that enabled car travel created exclusive suburbs throughout Greater Los Angeles that practiced new forms of class- and race-based exclusion and segregation. The seminar concluded by looking at urban decline and redevelopment

following World War II even as immigration re-opened with the 1965 Immigration Act and created new demands on cities.

The seminar emphasized the importance of understanding how the migration histories of the groups of people studied varied greatly as a result of policies, laws, and social and cultural practices. We spent time looking at the ways in which historic understandings of racial difference codified in laws and concretized in daily practices created structures of exclusion that shaped the migration histories of African Americans, Asians, and Latinos differently from European immigrants. For example, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Asian exclusion laws greatly limited the migration of Asians to the U.S. The 1924 Immigration and Naturalization Act similarly created national origins quotas that greatly restricted European immigration. As a result, employers sought out African American, Latino, and Filipino workers to satisfy their labor needs. Restrictive covenants placed on property deeds across the U.S., however, limited the possibilities for housing and mobility for non-white groups. By examining these histories of exclusion in the context of cities such as Los Angeles, the Fellows began to see the ways in which the experiences of African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans intersected across ethnic and racial lines. In addition, we examined the community formations of different groups of immigrants and migrants and saw the ways in which these communities could also be fractured along lines of class and gender.

The eleven curriculum units that grew out of the seminar reflect the hard work of middle-school and high-school teachers from a diverse range of subjects (Spanish, French, history, English, visual art, and music). Each Fellow included new materials encountered in the seminar and explored ways to help his/her students connect to this largely unfamiliar history. Many made use of local New Haven history to introduce the themes explored in the seminar. The Fellows have also wrestled with satisfying the relevant Common Core standards and curricular guidelines for their grades and disciplines and have come away with some fantastic curriculum units. These units cover a wide range of topics: music making and consumption as linked to histories of migration; visual representations of Irish immigration and the Potato Famine; family history and neighborhood history as migration history; the poetry of migration; the intersecting histories of African American and Latino culture; French Canadian immigration; popular American literature and migration, and reading American urban landscapes to understand the layering of migration and urban histories. We hope that these units will help diversify, deepen, and broaden the ways students will engage with U.S. urban history and immigration and migration history.

Mary Ting Yi Lui