
Robert Gregg

Falling Towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal
—T.S. Eliot

"East is east and west is west, and never the twain shall meet"
—Kipling, it turns out, knew Twain quite well!

“For God’s sake open up the universe a little more”
—Salman Rushdie borrowing from Saul Bellow.

My intention in this course has been to provide advanced undergraduates at the University of Pennsylvania with a comparative perspective that enables them to question some of their assumptions about history. One of these assumptions is that “American experience” is somehow unique. That students harbor such ideas is not altogether surprising given that they may have insufficient familiarity with societies outside the United States to decide otherwise, and also have the exceptionalism thesis reiterated to them over and over in academic and political discourses (even when scholars claim that it is now unfashionable). For example, in a recent prize-winning work, Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s, Ann Douglas begins: “I am by trade and calling an Americanist, and I believe, contrary to much current academic opinion, that America is a special case in the development of the West. To say otherwise is, I think, to ignore plain fact.” Douglas continues by describing the nation’s “tangible and unique mission,” there at the beginning, a mission that has contributed to the emergence of an “American psyche.” She goes on to inform the reader, “Americans in the 1920s liked the term ‘America’ precisely for its imperial suggestion of an intoxicating and irresistible identity windswept into coherence by the momentum of
destiny; this generation had little reason to anticipate history's hardest lessons."

Hardly hidden within this "terrible honesty" is the fact that the belief in American uniqueness amounts to a religion. The "Word" is the "plain fact." But the imperial aspect of this religiosity is also evident, and if we stand back from Douglas's attempt to naturalize imperial desire, we can see people attempting to formulate identities of an imperial nature in ways that are not too different from what occurred in places other than New York City. Indians and Britons also liked imperial suggestions of "intoxicating and irresistible identity windswept into coherence by the momentum of destiny." The kicker, of course, is the fact that Britons, Indians, and Americans alike have now faced some of "history's hardest lessons."

And while we wait for these lessons to sink in, we can take Douglas's text and substitute the word "Bombay" for "New York." Not surprisingly, we find that this is not especially taxing. New Yorkers in the 1920s, we learn from Douglas, were endeavoring to throw off the English cultural yoke and embracing African-American culture in the process. In the same decade, Bombayites were attempting to rid themselves of British colonial rule and were embracing cultural forms similar in some ways to those of African Americans. New York's relationship to Washington, D.C. is akin to that of Bombay to Calcutta in the nineteenth century and Delhi in the twentieth. "Diversity" and "mongrelization" are also hallmarks of Bombay, not just New York. Moreover, what makes New York seem distinct can also be used as a characteristic of Bombay. Rushdie can borrow from Bellow without a second thought and can claim that Americans are most likely to be receptive to The Moor's Last Sigh because they are so similar to Bombayites.

But if breaking down exceptionalist assumptions was the course's underlying objective, how did I come to choose these cities—Bombay, London, and New York—to achieve it? "Unreal Cities" has many origins—a poem, a book, an experience, family histories, and probably others. The poem is T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land, a poem that speaks of the coming of "history's hardest lessons" to the imperial, metropolitan landscape (something that Eliot would forget in his later poetry). History, for Eliot, had intervened and turned "unreal cities" (Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria/Vienna, London) into waste lands of despondency and inertia. And if New York and Bombay did not warrant inclusion in such a refined list prior to 1920, they surely did afterward. The postwar world, following H. G. Wells's "War to End All Wars," provided the context for anti-colo-
nial movements, for African-American political and cultural movements, and working-class malaise, which would change utterly all three cities, Bombay, London, and New York.

The course also originated in a reading of John Irving’s *A Son of the Circus*. The novel, set primarily in Bombay, weaves together the lives of Americans, Canadians, English, and Austrians, as well as a wide selection of Indians (Christian, Parsi, Hindu, Muslim), binding together three cities, Vienna, Bombay, and Toronto. The novel resembles a combination of an Inspector Ghose mystery (another work written by a foreigner with almost no experience of India) and a study of the Bombay film industry. The modern becomes traditional and vice versa, everything is unexpected, and altogether a little messy; Bombay is an absolute circus. In spite of a self-described limited knowledge of the city, and his claim that the novel is not really about Bombay, Irving accomplishes the feat of convincing at least one person from Bombay and Pune that he has got it “just right.”

Irving’s novel provided inspiration for me in a couple of ways. First, Irving exposed a city by stepping beyond its boundaries, by linking it to all those people it had sent forth, to Britain, India, and the U.S.A., and by creating a triad of cities conversing with each other, about sexuality, about culture, and about death (by golf club). I found this appealing, because my own recent work has focused on comparative analysis and has endeavored to make connections between histories normally kept far apart. Bombay seemed to be a city where such connections were clearly evident. Second, reading the novel by a self-proclaimed novice reassured me that teaching about Bombay would not require some kind of “authority” on the subject; there are many ways to get Bombay “just right.” It has many histories, and the outsider’s perspective (especially in a city where so many people consider themselves sojourners) is an important one. My intervention, such as it would be, could be valid even though not based on levels of scholarship sometimes attributed to “teachers.” Indeed, if I listened to Salman Rushdie, as Irving appears to have done, the course even needed to incorporate the kinds of inaccuracies reported by Saleem in *Midnight’s Children*. My weaknesses could be converted into strengths. Though I would be imposing structure on the course in terms of readings and assignments, my lack of authority for all three cities would allow space for students to create their own images of them. Thus, in some way, they could bring into question the assumption, embodied in the assumed hierarchy of the classroom, that I am the teacher with “useful knowledge” to impart to my students.
Another source was to be found during a ride in a taxi cab. The trip from Penn Station to 57th Street and First Avenue in a Gujarati's taxi reminded me of an equally unsettling taxi ride from Victoria Terminus, again at the hands of a Gujarati taxi driver. No cultural attribution is intended or justified, but the coincidence jogged the brain from the taxi drivers to other spatial and cultural comparisons. One of these was a walk to a small park on the East Side where many *ayahs*—originating from Jamaica, Trinidad, Korea, and the Philippines, among other places—took their charges so that they could talk to other similarly employed women while the children played together. A conversation with one woman, who had come from San Fernando, revealed a story similar to that of Ann Petry's Lutie, the protagonist in *The Street*. This Trinidadian woman who lived in a Connecticut suburb with her employers' family, cut off from other employed women (they came into their townhouse sometimes at the weekend), faced the harassment of the father and the jealousy of the mother. How different, I asked myself, was this Trinidadian's story, or Lutie's, from those of other women employed by the wealthy and powerful in New York City, London, Los Angeles, Manila, Bombay, Delhi...?

But this course may have a longer history still. I could refer to the inevitable connections for a Londoner who grew up eating many of his meals, other than home-cooked ones, in Indian restaurants, though none of these, need I say it, would have been Maharashtrian (though does that matter, when so many kinds of Indian food are available in Bombay?). But another quirkier connection triggered this course. My two American children, Nikhil and Nadia, while living in the orbit of New York City, have roots of equal depth in London and Bombay. Indeed, two of their long deceased great, great, great grand-uncles knew each other in Bombay and Pune at the turn of this century, one a colonial ruler, the other, perhaps, a collaborator. These were Sir George Clarke, Baron Sydenham of Combe, Governor of Bombay, and the man responsible for sending Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Vinayak Damodar Savarkar to prison (for sedition and murder respectively); and V. G. Paranjpe, the well-known Chitpavan Brahman scholar and Vice-Chancellor of Poona (now Pune) University. Today, one can visit the university's administration building (the former Governor's mansion, where Tilak's supporters assassinated Walter Charles Rand) and find embedded in the wall Clarke's coat of arms. Inside you will find a large portrait of the former university president.

There are two reasons to provide such background information.
First, living at a time of global migration means that understanding one’s own history requires moving beyond the limits of national narratives. Interpreting United States history, in particular, necessitates focusing on the intersections between people within and without the borders of the nation state, even if only to explain the way in which such intersections have been expunged from historical narratives. Second, cities are so prone to shading and coloring by any author (so that they remain in a state of unreality even as their “psyches” are artfully constructed) that it is important that presuppositions, politics, and underlying purpose be clearly stated—as James Baldwin said, the author must strive towards honesty. The course at the outset, therefore, has to be my imperial ordering of the cities’ myriad histories, my attempt to put Alexandria, Rome, and London back in their “rightful” places, as I would locate them. But once the course is underway, the mixing of texts and the students’ alternate readings of them should, hopefully, lead to new cities and new courses taking shape.

And what is the telos of my own ordering of these myriad histories? It is located around the conflict between “civilization” and “its discontents;” between progressivism and its opposition (now ethnic nationalists claiming the mantle of democracy; now prostitutes, the poor, and immigrants; now the purveyors of commercial culture), with “good” and “evil” hard to discern and creating a record or archive that connects us now with the angels, now with their adversaries. And this, of course, is the language of W. T. Stead, which would resonate throughout the Anglo-American imperium, the angels on one side, the “forces of evil” marshalled against them on the other; the dichotomy as clear to him as the Titanic, on which he drowned, was unsinkable.

But if the course is based upon my imperial ordering of the three cities, and my sense of the meaning of it all is delineated in a clearly political fashion at the outset (the claim, for example, that New York City is not exceptional), how do students find sufficient space to create their own images of these cities? The first answer, as stated earlier, lies in my lack of authority. The second is to be found in the fact that discerning good and evil in the politics of these cities is difficult. What we appreciate about a place now may have its roots in the work of people who, by and large, were more concerned about making trains run on time, than about the people who might benefit from efficient scheduling. Progressives were not always too far removed from fascists. Ethnic nationalists, who often have their own taint of fascism, when placed in opposition to progressives some-
times appeared to be democrats. In this circus, there is a lot of room for a student to create her own sense of the cities.

The last answer is that the proof is in the pudding. We need to consider what students took away from the course. The twelve students who participated in the course were easily the most engaged and engaging students I have come across in my years of teaching. This was not always evident in class discussions, certainly at the outset. One of the things that drew students to the class, the fact that it was different from normal fare, also made some students reluctant to commit themselves to discussions at first. This anxiety seemed to fade, especially when students realized that it was not vital to learn a particular code, language, or history for each individual city. And the students revealed their abilities most clearly in their papers, which were of a uniformly high standard, dealing with a wide range of topics from the Brooklyn Bridge, Tammany Hall, and St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York, to Victoria Terminus in Bombay; from Behramji Malabari’s “rambles” to Jack London’s wanderings among the “people of the abyss” from P. G. Wodehouse’s New York, to Conan Doyle’s London; from Edwardes’s “By ways of Bombay” to Rohinton Mistry’s Firuzsha Bagh.

The following are some brief comments from three of the students: a white American, an American of South Asian descent, and a Sri Lankan. Their ethnic backgrounds are not important except insofar as my own origins and sense of expertise made me decidedly anxious at the outset about how the course might go over with South Asian students. If the three students here are at all representative (but why should they be?) I did not have to worry on that score. The white American student’s words were interesting, though not because he represented other people of similar ethnic background (indeed his comments during the final class, when he indicated that there was too much attention paid to the lower classes in the course, provoked a storm of protest from the other white American students). Although he embraced enthusiastically the spirit of comparative analysis he ended up unmoved in his own politics and sentiments about “home and the world.”

Having said this, this contributing editor to Penn’s conservative journal The Red and Blue found himself questioning some of the libertarian assumptions he brought to the classroom at the beginning of the semester. Although he would have liked to see more readings on the elites and their clubs within each city, he ended up writing a final paper comparing Lionel Trilling and George Orwell, and endorsing some aspects of their socialism. His overall conclusion
about the course was that it was “Very Good, with the potential to be excellent—with a tighter organization and more literature. The class would work better meeting twice/three times a week.”

The Sri Lankan student was favorably disposed towards the course by the end of the semester. At the beginning, though, he had harbored some concerns:

Before taking the course, I thought the class would present the preconceived “character” or “image” of each city, i.e. Bombay—cosmopolitan, dirty, dynamic. This class, in my opinion, attempted to do much more than this. It examined each city during a period crucial in its development as a modern city. During these periods of transformation, we did in fact, learn about commonalities shared in their development, and various ways these cities coped with these changes.

The comparative aspect of this course seems to have led this student to question, not so much his assumptions about the United States, but rather his impressions and feelings about South Asia. He continued:

I would characterize this class as very good. It was an excellent learning experience as my initial impressions of each city were erased as we tackled a vast spectrum of topics and issues that were pertinent to each city. Also, topics such as prostitution and women’s issues are things that I really don’t think that much about and this class made me pay closer attention to such things especially when they dealt with Bombay, since it is closer to home, I am sad to say.

The American student whose parents came from the Bombay region seemed also to be questioning her assumptions about her former “homeland.” “Well, I am certainly idealizing India much less than I used to. I suppose that’s good. I’ve really learned a lot. This has been one of the best academic experiences I’ve had at Penn—Thank you.”

Before turning to the course outline, I should provide a brief word on my use of movies. I sometimes feel guilty taking up class time with movies—but when I show them outside of class I feel guilty about that too. However, I think they serve some very useful purposes and believe that, provided I introduce them carefully and explain their relevance, they need not contribute to the appearance that I am just enjoying myself too much. Movies can provide information obviously, but more often I want them to allow students to question their sense of history as the accumulation of such information. Movies derived from a particular period can provide a “partial transcript” about that period (for example, The Jazz Singer revealing many things about New York in the 1920s, or Oliver Twist doing the same for both
the 1940s and the 1840s). There is the danger of anachronism in using a recent movie like Bhaji on the Beach to help describe women’s culture at any point during our period. But this anachronism can be useful to highlight the problem of our own locations in relation to “the past.” Finally, showing movies can demonstrate things about the course itself. Showing the movie Bombay was particularly helpful in this regard. I picked up this video from a local Indian grocery in Philadelphia, before the movie was released in the United States. It was obviously a pirated copy, possibly the result of someone holding a hand held video camera in an Indian movie theater. The copy was extremely poor and there were no subtitles. The presentation of this movie, then, required my own instantaneous narration based on my memory of a friend’s free translation of the Hindi dialogue (and her familiarity is with Marathi). In the process, the movie became a cross between a silent movie and an MTV music video (the rough equivalent of showing The Jazz Singer—though the choreography in Bombay, which seems to be a cross between rap and traditional folk dancing, and A. R. Rahman’s music, is far superior to anything in the 1927 movie). Even with my status as misleading guide amply demonstrated, the students still engaged with the movie, appreciated all the messages about communal violence, and realized that in the attempt to break down Muslim and Hindu narratives, the movie was still privileging others.


Robert Gregg
University of Pennsylvania
Spring, 1995

Course Requirements
Two short papers 35 percent—students will write two short (4–5 page) papers based upon a travel account to one of these cities, a novel about one of them, or a monument or building found in one of them. The students should endeavor to pick a different city for the two papers, one of which should be Bombay.
Class participation 25 percent (including leading a section)—class attendance and participation are essential.

A final paper 40 percent—a comparative essay of 10–12 pages concentrating on one of the themes of the course, or other related ones, using these three cities or extending the analysis to another.

Annotated Schedule

Week 1
Introduction
Audio tape: Alec Guinness reading T. S. Eliot’s The Waste Land

What do these encyclopedia entries tell us about the three cities at the turn of this century? How and on what basis are they ranked in terms of the amount of space or consideration given them?

Week 2
Victorian Cities

What are the implications of leaving out American and colonial or imperial cities from a comparative study of Victorian cities? Briggs misses the similarities of his cities to omitted ones, their common ethnic and racial divisions (and the way in which their class conflicts may resemble ethnic and racial conflicts). Here is one student’s reaction to Briggs: “Dry! This was my initial reaction. Upon closer inspection, it revealed that Briggs opposed Mumford’s description of a city as insensate. I think this set the tone for our class which characterized the city as a magnet of transformation and development that generated both positive and negative effects.”

Why is it that Bombay rather than Calcutta emerged as the leading commercial city in India? Is an explanation to be found in Bombay’s relative independence from the British? The fact that many among its business elite were not English colonials tied in with the government, but were instead Parsis, Jews, Muslims, and some from certain Hindu castes? Might this diversity resemble that of New York City?

What is a “shock city” (described by Briggs) and how might it be useful for understanding these three cities? First there was Manchester, then
Chicago (with London and New York also evidencing shock characteristics), then came Bombay—perhaps?

Additional point to note: The growth of Bombay as a result of the American Civil War, opening up access to the Manchester market for Indian cotton (this can be linked to the awareness among many Anglo-American antislavery advocates that the key to eradicating slavery was the development of cash crops with “free labor” in India).³

Week 3

_The Orientalist gaze?_


_Movie: Oliver Twist_ (1948).

Is Mayhew’s perspective of the poor also “orientalist” (e.g., his categorization and classification of various types—criminal and trustworthy, deserving and undeserving)? Does the movie fit Mayhew’s vision? Is Dickens’s and Alec Guinness’s Fagin (the Jew) similar to the Jews found in _London Labour_? How is the movie shaped by images of Jack the Ripper, and by the fact that it is made immediately following World War II and the Holocaust?

Some students found Mayhew repetitious, despite his first-person accounts, but found _Oliver Twist_ portraying “the often squalid conditions of lower-class life in nineteenth-century London,” a good companion piece. One student wrote of Mayhew, in answer to the question about Orientalism: “I somehow missed the point that Mayhew was essentializing the lower (and upper) class’s behavior—from certain passages, it seemed to me that Mayhew was doing the opposite—attributing their faults to their environment and upbringing rather than inherent nature, and so on.” This astute comment, also articulated during the class, allowed us to consider the ways in which Mayhew fit within the rubric of progressive imperialist, as an advocate of uplift and enlightenment. Certainly the poor, immigrants, and the colonized were not unchangeable; but they were perceived to be different and could be classified accordingly on the basis of ethnicity or criminality.

Week 4

_Civilization and its Discontents, I: Bombay_


_Slides: Illustrations from “By-ways of Bombay”_ (by M. V. Dhurandhar).
How does Edwardes compare with Mayhew? Is Edwardes’s study of Bombay the application of Mayhew’s method with the end of facilitating control of a colonized city? How does Wolpert’s analysis of Tilak and Gokhale reveal the attempts to mobilize one section of the city’s population in opposition to colonial rule? (Much of the action in Wolpert’s work occurs in Poona, since this is a center of Imperial control. But the issues, like control of the plague and age of consent, relate to Bombay also.) One student found the Tilak and Gokhale reading interesting but also “annoying in its characterization of an eastern fanatical tyrant and a westernized, rational diplomat”—a dichotomy that must have resonance for students of nationalism, whether found in the United States or elsewhere.

To what extent do the readings reveal Bombay to be a city divided along the axes of ethnicity and caste? Is this diversity similar to that found in other cities, or is it a product of colonial rule? Edwardes’s and Great-Uncle Sydenham’s accounts of Moharrum and Wolpert’s description of Tilak’s attempts to establish the Gunapati festival may not be so different from the kinds of ethnic and community organizing that will be considered in later readings.

**Week 5**

*Civilization and its Discontents, II: New York*


Charlie Chaplin’s movies describe the city as it is evidenced on *Easy Street* (albeit set in Los Angeles). The church mission, the violence, the bullies, and a police force that has lost control (seemingly a worldwide phenomenon or anxiety), the moral reformer combatting drugs and, with an infusion of that same drug, bringing people back to the church.

Stead is on one side and Plunkitt on the other (notwithstanding Riordan’s handling), stating the case for and against Progressive reform most clearly. Steffens seems to position himself somewhere in the middle. Czitrom provides a recent re-evaluation of the Sullivans, describing them not as corrupt Bowery bosses but as shapers of the modern cityscape—presaging Kathy Peiss’s attempt to take back commercial culture from the monopolist night, returning it to the creative working-class agent.

After reading the conflicts between Clarke/Edwardes and Tilak/Savarkar
in Bombay, an imperial perspective on New York's conflicts emerges. Here a comparison between New York City's police commissioners and Bombay's, their attempts to control public festivals (Edwardes), and shape immigrants' drinking habits (Theodore Roosevelt), is particularly instructive.

**Week 6**

*Migrants, I*


*Movie: The Jazz Singer* (1927).

Students found *The Jazz Singer* compelling "because it illustrated the very common experience of second-generation Americans in their struggle to reconcile their ethnic identity with their new "American" identity. The movie also introduced them to the relational aspects of migration, revealing the significance of blackface in the making of "a jazz singer who can sing to his God" (i.e., rise above the plague of pathology—emasculating). After seeing *The Jazz Singer* it became clearer that Irving Howe evaded relational issues in his rendering of Jewish migration to New York City."

What differences are there between Howe's or Yezierska's descriptions of New York Jews, and Mayhew's descriptions of Jews in London? Do these differences result from real differences among the different populations, or the ability of particular groups to gain control of such images? Here Howe's descriptions of New York's Jewish leaders' attempts to stamp out prostitution within their community are particularly significant.

**Week 7**

*Migrants, II*


Differences are evident between the Irish in these two cities. As with the Jews, are these differences real or those of image and image control? To what extent do Lees and Moynihan, and social historians generally, depart from the descriptions of immigrants first formulated in the imperial mold by Mayhew and Edwardes? "These two readings," according to one student, "provided an interesting comparison between the Irish immigrant experience in New York and in London. I felt New York fostered and reasserted Irish nationalism whereas London did not have the same impact." Is this (and the differences between New York and London Jews) evidence for an American exceptionalism? Perhaps, but then let us remember those Bombay Jews, or consider other population groups in London who might have been able to secure greater mobility because the Jews and the Irish were taking the equivalent
position in that city of the blacks in New York City. No group, and no city, should be taken in isolation.

**Week 8**

*Migrants, III*


*Movie: Disha* (1990) [excerpts].

Sai Peranjpye's *Disha* provides an interesting view of the workplace in Bombay: the unhealthy conditions of textile mills and the connections between Bombay and the Deccan plateau's rural populations. In short, it puts into visual images the analysis in Dandekar's *Men to Bombay*. Dandekar's work, according to one student, provided "a good portrayal of how migration to the city influences the social dynamic of surrounding village life and showed how the first-generation urban migrant feels alienation in both his old and new home."

The disadvantage of this text and the movie is that they are both about the period after independence. However, the systems described were established in an earlier colonial period. Moreover, one of the objectives of the course is to suggest that the "shock" that came to Bombay, came later than those in European and American cities, and was in many respects related to those earlier shocks.

**Week 9**

*Engendering the City, I: London and Bombay*


*Movie: Pygmalion* (1939)

Is Henry Higgins in *Pygmalion* a cross between W. T. Stead and Jack the Ripper? We might get this impression from reading Walkowitz's work. If so, no wonder Shaw was upset at having to change the ending for the movie!

In Walkowitz we see the making of a working class in England that has men being men, and women being women, but only thanks to the work of
Stead and Jack. Gender is not naturalized and neutralized as it is in many other works that consider this “making” of a working class.

The other readings describe prostitutes and pimps clamped down upon by legal authorities. Edwardes’s account of prostitution in Bombay shows the presence of Jewish connections, as in Johannesburg, belying Howe’s claim that Jews were not inclined to get involved in the profession. In all cities prostitution seems to have been a central feature of city life. And van Onselen’s text tells us what New York pimps did in Johannesburg, when the going got too tough in New York City and London.

Two kinds of prostitution were apparent in Bombay, according to Edwardes, the traditional and the commercial, facilitating the naturalization of prostitution in the city. What are the links between nationalism and prostitution, at a time when nationalists in India have “solved” the “Woman Question”? We see Japanese and Arab prostitutes prominent in Bombay, and witness the Turkish government intervening to have the Arab prostitutes removed from the city, just as the Japanese government endeavored to do in its negotiations with the United States. Whether or not the Japanese authorities attempted the same in Bombay is not known.

Friedman’s Nation article and its rejoinders illustrate the pitfalls of writing about prostitution without any historical and/or comparative framework. Describing the prostitution and potential AIDS epidemic as “India’s Shame” is certainly problematic and, as some students complained, orientalist.

Week 10

Engendering the City, II: Sport and Masculinity


No course on the Victorian and post-Victorian city can be complete without a discussion of sport. James’s “prolegomena” describes the role of W. G. Grace in the propagation of cricket and places Victorianism at the center of the empire.

Cashman’s work on India focuses especially on Bombay, where cricket gained its earliest foothold among the Parsis. What emerges from Adelman, and from the history of baseball generally, is the fact that it is the spread of the New York game throughout the United States. Just as London was fostering the romantic image of the pre-industrial Grace, New Yorkers (later joined by promoters from Boston and Chicago) were inventing the pastoral tradition of the game created on the Elysian Fields.
Week 11


\textit{Movie: Bhaji on the Beach} (1995)

"Girls just wanna have fun" at Coney Island or at Blackpool. What are the repercussions of this fun? How far can we romanticize this bottom-up cultural formation? In New York there is a great deal of latitude to do so (justifiably or unjustifiably). For Indian women there doesn't seem much to romanticize in Birmingham or Blackpool. Is this difference part of an American exceptionalism? Or is a trip to the beach prior to marriage today precisely the thing that will be romanticized tomorrow? Should "girls having fun" at Coney Island not be detached from the larger social pressures to conform to ethnocultural and class practices that may be coercive in equal proportion to the liberality of the independence gained in the outing?

Even if exceptionalism or difference is found here, it is certainly important to explore the significance of the fact that gender and women's roles in society are seen as determinants of difference. These were focused on as markers of significance by bourgeois and imperial writers as they assessed the people with whom they came into contact.

Week 12


\textit{Salaam Bombay} can be related back to Walkowitz and her discussion of Stead's "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon." This is another analysis of prostitution. The selling of virgins, as in Stead's day. \textit{Salaam Bombay} also links up with debates about images of the city. "The movie portrayed a side of Bombay," according to one student, "that often is ignored in the South Asian culture I come from which often ignores this darker side. I have never been exposed to this thus my idealized conception of India is somewhat cracked. Bombay, like any other city, experiences drug abuse and vice." Was not the complaint about Mira Nair's movie that it gave such a negative picture of the city? Weren't many overseas Indians offended by it? How do such images take form and what weight should be given to other more rosette images? Such questions are discussed in "Polyphonic Voices" outlining the kinds of differences that exist between the Bombay as "hell" image provided by such novelists as Dishpande and Desai, and the more multilayered characterizations of Rushdie (however bleak) and Mistry, among others. Clearly gender is an important aspect of such discussions.
Week 13
Counter-culture?
*Patel and Thorner, eds., Bombay, 210–24
Movies: Light of Asia (1926); Aarya (1951) [excerpts]
Documentary Film: Midnight Ramble (1994)

As its title suggests, Huggins’s chapter from The Harlem Renaissance incorporates an imperial perspective ready-made for comparison. The questions that arise from this text are: What is the nature of authenticity in a world of patronage and cultural commodification? What is oppositional culture, and how can artists create art and literature that is counter-hegemonic? What is the role of the audience, simultaneously sympathetic to the artist and his or her notions of "the primitive" and hostile to questions of the political, civil, and economic rights of those he or she might represent? And how might these questions be transferred to the more obviously colonial landscape of Bombay? Douglas’s work provides an interesting discussion of the interaction of different ethnic groups in and around Harlem.

Midnight Ramble describes the development of race movies in the 1920s and 1930s, focusing especially on the work of Oscar Micheaux (whose Body and Soul (1924) starring Paul Robeson might be an alternative to the documentary). It makes for an interesting comparison with the opening chapter of Indian Film, that describes the origins of the work of Dada Saheb Phalke in Bombay, and the two Indian silent movies from which excerpts can be shown. The manner in which Bombay has developed the largest movie-producing industry in the world is interesting in light of the documentary’s description of the ways in which Hollywood extinguished the race movie. Another interesting comparison that emerges is that between the liminal position of the Parsees in Bombay, who were crucial in the development of Bombay’s movies, and that of the Jews in New York.13 Finally there is the context of racial oppression that underlies the development of both race movies in the United States and Indian movies in Bombay. It is significant that much of the imagery of The Birth of a Nation (1915), which spurred such hostility and creativity among African Americans, found its way into many London-produced Indian movies like Korda’s Drums (1938) and the Anglo-American The Lives of a Bengal Lancer (1935).
Week 14
Post-Colonial Cities


Imaginary Homelands serves as a short cut to Midnight’s Children, Satanic Verses, and The Moor’s Last Sigh, and is a vehicle to empower students to voice their own impressions of these three cities. And Bombay (West Side Story or Romeo and Juliet set in contemporary Bombay): Is all that ethnic violence something new or something old? Is Mumbai the city of the future, the location for Blade Runner (1982), and Brazil (1985), the place that incidents in Brixton, South Central L.A., and Crown Heights desperately attempt to recreate—“history’s hardest lessons”? Or, is Mumbai a city that has yet to die that benign Whiggish death? Shock city forevermore, to be joined by old and new? Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Birmingham, Barcelona, Milan, Los Angeles, Miami, Manila, Havana, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Tokyo. Unreal.

Notes
1. This course is dedicated to Pramod Kale without whom teaching it would not have been possible. He “knows” many cities, and acquainted me with readings that allowed me to connect these large dots on the map. I also owe a great debt to Madhavi Kale who conceives of Britain imperially, much to my simultaneous discomfort and pleasure, and who encouraged me to view the United States similarly. I am also grateful to Michael Zuckerman, David Ludden, Antoinette Burton, Ian Christopher Fletcher, and Monica van Beusekom for their comments and encouragement. Finally, I am very grateful to the Penn students who participated in this course.


3. But, unrecognized by Eliot, with each collapse (at least in the post-lapsarian universe we inhabit) new unrealities and national identities would take root. As Douglas notes, the decade of the 1920s was a pivotal moment in the formation of an “American psyche.” Although she would replace the indefinite article with a definite one (“an” to “the”), it is nevertheless the case that the Harlem Renaissance that projected African-American culture into the American mainstream was in part a product of the postwar world, as were the labor tumults of 1919 and the red scare. As such, the 1920s “American psyche” was built on the rubble of an earlier one. For a blunter analysis of the postwar world, see Ezra Pound’s High Selwyn Maidbery.

4. Irving, A Son of the Circus (New York: Random House, 1994). The circus metaphor is a particularly appropriate one. As one biographer of W. T. Stead noted, the 1880s were the heyday of P. T. Barnum in England; see Frederic Whyte, The Life of W. T. Stead (New York: Houghton & Mifflin, 1925). Barnum’s circuses and museums appropriated ideas, objects, animals, and peoples from the non-western world, and packaged them for metropolitan audiences. Moreover, the fact that Barnum called his Bridgeport, Connecticut home Iranistan and designed it to resemble Brighton’s Regent’s Palace (a building in turn borrowing from Muslim architecture), was no coincidence. Irving’s focus on an Indian circus, therefore, represents a transnational cultural migration of sorts, a return in commercial and parodic form to Bombay.
5. A rumor (one that I may have started myself) has it that the success of A Son of the Circus has led Irving to consider reworking some of his old classics. The more obvious title changes are The World According to Gunapati, Opium Den Rules, Mantra for Owen Meany, and Hotel New Delhi. Setting Free the Babus, a study of decolonization, is certain to retain aspects of an earlier, less enlightened period, while The Water Method Man and The 158-Pound Marriage will retain their titles and some of their subject matter.


10. An alternative to Howe’s work might be Anzia Yezierska’s The Bread Givers (New York: Persea Books, 1984 [1925]), or the short stories in Hungry Hearts (Salem: Ayer, 1984 [1920]) that are stronger on issues of gender than World of Our Fathers (in spite of this title), and as fiction provide a break from the texts assigned in the course.

