

# NEW YORK CITY & THE NATION

A SCHOOL/COMMUNITY CONSORTIUM TO TEACH AMERICAN HISTORY

New York City Department of Education, Gotham Center for New York City History, City Lore, Brooklyn Historical Society, New-York Historical Society, Henry St. Settlement, Historic House Trust

## *Partnering for History Education: The “New York City & the Nation” Experience*



Each year, middle and high school students and their teachers gather to show off their history expertise by competing in the local round of the National History Day Competition: New York City History Day. Students can present their work in the form of exhibits, documentaries, performances, historical papers, and web pages. Local winners compete at the state level, and state winners advance to the national competition held in June at the University of Maryland.

Deepening teacher content knowledge and infusing cutting-edge pedagogy is the vision of the federally funded Teaching American History grant program. The New York City Department of Education was the recipient of two of these prestigious grants: “American Journey” and “Framing History.” In collaboration with the Gotham Center for New York City History, City Lore, Brooklyn Historical Society, New-York Historical Society, Henry Street Settlement, and Historic House Trust, the DOE developed a series of professional development workshops for fourth to eighth grade social studies teachers. This program, *New York City & the Nation*, has drawn on the expertise of renowned historians, experienced educators, and consortium partners. Together we developed **Summer Institutes**, a year-long **Gotham Fellows Program**, and, most recently, a **Teacher Leadership Program**. Throughout the course of *New York City & the Nation*, our goal has been to demonstrate how New York City’s history can serve as a lens for teachers and their students to make sense of the history of the United States. Each of the program’s distinctive components has generated exciting, innovative strategies for bringing content into our schools. (continued)



Martha Cooper

Visiting the Morgan Library & Museum.

Held in July, the *New York City & the Nation* **Summer Institutes** were week-long intensive explorations of American history for elementary and middle school teachers. Historian Mike Wallace, Pulitzer Prize winner for *Gotham* and founder of the Gotham Center for New York City History, kicked off each institute by examining the history of New York City within a global context. On each subsequent day of the institute, different scholars explored specific subjects or eras within this framework. For example, Craig Wilder of Dartmouth College talked with the teachers about New York City's role in financing and abetting the slave trade, and described daily life in the city for enslaved and free African-Americans. Institute sessions also included workshops on the use of strategies such as visual arts, drama, and oral history to deepen classroom learning. New York City Department of Education's Director of Social Studies Elise Abegg and instructional specialist Fran Macko worked with Bank Street curriculum specialist Maggie Martinez-DeLuca to help teachers incorporate the content and strategies they learned into real lessons for their classrooms, and to link these lessons with the New York State Learning Standards. The institute also incorporated site-based learning as participants visited local historical and cultural institutions connected to the content. Each institute culminated with a special event such as an historical boat tour of New York harbor.

During the academic year, the **Gotham Fellows Program** followed a similar framework, while enabling teachers to explore content and pedagogy in greater depth. Fellows participated in monthly seminars that explored the political, social, and cultural history of a particular period, and worked collaboratively to plan units of study for classroom use. During the 2004-2005 year, the 20th-century-focused workshops included a City Lore-led investigation of the uses of oral history to explore the Great Depression and a visit to the Brooklyn Historical Society to explore postwar suburbanization and de-industrialization. Fellow Alison Merkel recounted the effect her own visit to the Brooklyn Historical Society had on her decision to take her Manhat-



**Working collaboratively.**

tan students there on a field trip, "I took them down to the Brooklyn Historical Society because we had done a workshop there, and I just loved the installation they had about *Brooklyn Works*. I knew there would be support once I got there. . . that it was going to be a worthwhile experience, and it would get the kids into another part of the [city]." The following year, our 19th-century focus produced exciting hands-on workshops such as teaching with objects at the South Street Seaport Museum and Henry Street Settlement's exploration of immigration through drama and the use of props. Elise Abegg introduced the Fellows to Understanding by Design and the "backwards planning" method of curriculum development. Evan Lipton, also a Fellow, said working in this way made him retool his lessons, remarking that now, "I start at the end and work my way back to the beginning. I think of the goals I want the students to [achieve]. Everything has a purpose."

With each annual round of *New York City & the Nation*, participant evaluations enabled us to tailor the program to teachers' needs. The **Teacher Leadership Program** was an outgrowth of the expressed desire of teachers in the Institute and Fellows programs to continue their professional growth and share their knowledge with colleagues in a more formal way. Those "graduates" who had received professional development training from *New York City & the Nation* could now apply for a year-long experience during which they would learn techniques for leading professional development workshops and sharing field-tested lessons with their peers. (See the article on the Teacher Leadership Program in this newsletter.)

Since its inception, *New York City & the Nation* has hosted four week-long **Summer Institutes** for 200 elementary and middle school teachers, two year-long **Gotham Fellows Programs** for over 50 middle school teachers, a year-long **Teacher Leadership Program** for 21 teachers (each of whom did turnkey workshops for fellow teachers). Through these grant activities, the Department of Social Studies and its partners have reached over 1200 teachers citywide. In addition, *New York City & the Nation* has created a body of resources such as units of study authored by our participants, disseminated e-newsletters with featured lessons by our partner advisors, and launched a special web feature for the program ([www.gothamed.org](http://www.gothamed.org), click on "NYC & the Nation").

The impact of the Teaching American History grant program extends beyond the classrooms of the individual participants. As a result of participating in this program, teachers have deepened their understanding of New York and American history, revamped their approach to instruction, and developed the skills and confidence necessary to become professional developers. The teaching and learning of history in New York City is clearly the winner.

## Preparing American History Leaders: The Teacher Leadership Program

The success of a grant can be measured by its impact on participants, but also by its impact on the larger professional community. The Teacher Leadership Program, part of "Framing History," a federal Teaching American History grant awarded to the New York City Department of Education, was designed to develop a cohort of teachers who would be trained as professional developers. The goal was to build on the strengths of teachers who participated in the previous grant programs, and to ensure the continuity of the program through the citywide dissemination of content and pedagogy. As Bank Street staff developer Maggie Martinez-DeLuca said, "All along we've been asking teachers to examine their own strengths, so it made sense to direct the program toward fostering their continuing leadership."

Twenty-one teachers who completed previous sessions of New York City & the Nation were selected to take part during 2006-07. The program began with a week-long summer institute. The institute focused on the experience of children in nineteenth century New York. With the help of historians, we examined the lives of children through topics such as family life, work, and leisure. At the same time, we studied the elements of and strategies for developing effective professional development connected to the content theme. One memorable workshop focused on walking tours. Led by Adrienne Kupper of New-York Historical Society, we explored historic and contemporary Coney Island. It was on this outing that many of the Teacher Leaders bonded, and began to form small working groups for the coming year.

Returning in the fall, the Teacher Leaders collaborated with each other, staff developers from the DOE and the Gotham Center, and cultural partners to brainstorm ways to develop effective workshops for their peers. Over the course of the year, the Teacher Leaders worked in groups to develop strategies that could be tested and successfully used in the classroom. They worked to match content and strategies, select a target audience, and manage the budget provided for the professional development they would be giving. Three planning sessions were scheduled over the school year that included planning, rehearsing, collecting, and sharing materials within the working groups. Strategies chosen by this year's Teacher Leaders were historical sites and exhibits, historical maps, neighborhood walks, drama, visual analysis, and historic newspapers/political cartoons. Over the course of the planning sessions, the teachers created dynamic, detailed, and informative presentations that offered new ways for their peers to guide their students to "seeing" the history around them. Teacher Leader Mark Semioli shared his motivation, "I was looking for ways to get them involved with things that touch them every day." He wanted to have those he instructed "step into the shoes of people in history."

On April 14, 2007, these Teacher Leaders gathered with all the program's advisors and staff for a day of showcasing the results of their work. Elise Abegg, the Department of Education's Director of Social Studies, welcomed participants to this extraordinary day of professional development workshops led by the Teacher Leaders. "A Picture's Worth 1,000 Words (With Good Strategies!)," which incorporated visual arts resources and period photographs from the Harlem Renaissance, was led by Lynn Tiede, Alison Merkel, Christine Hanna, and Sonia Rivera. They demonstrated how the use of a focusing tool to analyze images in class enables students to notice details and to draw conclusions about the period. Next door, Cherubim Cannon, Mark Semioli, Darlene Smith, and Kate Crowley hosted, "Lights, Camera, Action: Teaching History Through Drama." After a brief warm-up, participants were divided into groups and devised "Tableaux to Life" skits around images from the women's suffrage movement. Each skit was presented to the whole group and included a follow-up activity in which participants were interviewed as the historical figures they played.

*(continued)*

Other workshops covered topics from the local to the international. In “All Aboard: Using Transit Maps and Primary Sources to track the Growth of New York Neighborhoods,” Evan Lipton, Erin Medea, Lindsay Oakes, and Debra Anello displayed subway maps from 1939 and the present to show the relationship between the subway system and neighborhood development in New York. Using the subway maps, photos, and newspaper clippings provided, participant groups collaborated to create panoramas of the histories of neighborhoods such as Flushing and Times Square. Meanwhile Geoff Hayden and Robyn Temple led participants in an exploration of American imperialism in “Using Primary Sources to Teach the Age of Imperialism.” Using strategies such as viewing a film clip that contained a wealth of quotations, writing dialogue for political cartoons, and dissecting headlines and articles from era newspapers, the pair led their colleagues to explore multiple approaches to teaching a single historical subject or era.



Teachers learning from each other.

Martha Cooper

The final sessions sent us outdoors to discover new ways of extending students' learning experiences outside of the classroom. Gary Katz, Victoria Schaub, and Kerry Powers began “New York City as Classroom,” by asking participants to recall their own childhood field trips. After a lesson on Gilded Age financier J.P. Morgan, the group walked down the street to examine three rooms in the Morgan Library for signs of wealth. “Neighborhood Scene Investigation,” led by Patricia Urevith, Taralyn Ciarmello, Deanna Springstead-Gonzalez, and Eileen Sanders sent groups to investigate the area around CUNY Graduate Center and the Empire State Building, each focusing on a theme such as buildings, food, signs, or people. Participants collected artifacts like Chinese restaurant menus or took photographs of places and scenes that connected to the theme. These items were used to create posters of the experience upon returning to the building. While the benefits of taking field trips could be listed at the end of each workshop, Victoria Schaub noted one of the best reasons: “Going somewhere offers an entry point for everyone.”

The turnout for the culmination of this unique program was great, and our Teacher Leaders were nothing short of inspiring. One of the group, Christine Hanna, shared her thoughts on the experience, “It’s hard for teachers to find a place to grow, and this certainly has provided the opportunity.” After their three-year journey of professional growth, the Teacher Leaders emerged confident and capable, ready to take their place as American History leaders in their schools and in the city.

## Meet a New York City & the Nation Historian

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Annelise Orleck, one of the many accomplished historians who shared their knowledge and resources with NYC & the Nation teachers, credits a few key people with instilling in her a love for history. Her father's passion for history—expressed in quizzes on the presidents at the breakfast table and other quirky but loving acts—was simply impossible to ignore. Her grandmother and aunt told her amazing stories about New York's garment factories and union drives (experiences, she later realized, that never made it into the history books so she decided to add them herself). And Mr. Bruckner, her high school history teacher, introduced her to the archives. The setting was Brooklyn's public library at Grand Army Plaza. Her topic? Congressional investigations into Ku Klux Klan atrocities during Reconstruction. At the microfilm reader at age 15 she fell in love with primary sources.

Annelise graduated from New York City public schools in Brooklyn, did her graduate work at NYU, and is a member of the history faculty at Dartmouth. She has written three books and edited a fourth. *Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900-1965* (1995) sets the sweatshop and strike stories she heard as a child into a larger historical context. *The Soviet Jewish Americans* (1999) examines the largest Jewish migration to the United States since World War II. Her newest book, *Storming Caesar's Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (2006), explores the War on Poverty through the eyes of the poor mothers themselves. No matter which historical topic Annelise takes on, she strives to present the historical actors as fully fleshed out characters with distinctive voices. For these are Americans whose social position has meant that they are always talked about but rarely get to talk themselves.



Annelise Orleck

Whether teaching history today to undergrads at Dartmouth, or earlier in her career to high school students in the Lower East Side, Annelise has always tried to draw in her listeners by conveying a sense of “time travel” and the personal stories of historical characters. “History is about people,” she emphasizes. Probably nothing has gotten her students as excited, she says, as the times that they have researched characters in history and developed scenarios for role-playing. She asks the thorniest students to play the most colorful characters. Perennial favorites include: Emma Goldman, J. Edgar Hoover, Angela Davis, Oliver North, Theodore Roosevelt, and Martin Luther King, Jr. She also sends her students into the community to do local histories.

Drawing on her own early experiences with history, she encouraged the teachers in the NYC & the Nation seminar to use primary sources with their students and to teach them to think critically about those sources and about every historian's work. She would love to see secondary school teachers incorporating more scholarly books into their classrooms and helping their students to learn from and analyze these works. Her own recent book, *Storming Caesar's Palace*, can be used to teach multiple historical subjects, such as urban growth, women's history, African-American history, twentieth-century history, and the history of health care.

It was Mr. Bruckner at Edward R. Murrow High School who took Annelise from being a history buff to feeling like a historian. It's been her pleasure to work with the succeeding generations of high school teachers who are committed to giving the same gift to their students. Annelise welcomes you to contact her at [annelise.orleck@dartmouth.edu](mailto:annelise.orleck@dartmouth.edu).



# Feature Lesson from *New York City & the Nation*

The Historic House Trust of New York City offered two Neighborhood History Walks of Murray Hill as professional development workshops for teachers participating in *New York City & the Nation*. Teachers explored the blocks near the CUNY Graduate Center, located on Fifth Avenue, between East 34th and East 35th Streets, in the historic neighborhood of Murray Hill. These afternoon walks followed morning lectures in which Pulitzer Prize-winning author Dr. Mike Wallace, Distinguished Professor of History at John Jay College/CUNY, presented an overview of the growth and development of New York City. Evaluations submitted by participating teachers were enthusiastic, stressing that the workshops impressed them with the importance of neighborhood history walks as opportunities for studying primary sources. Several teachers pointed out that neighborhood walks could address the needs of students with different learning styles.

## Neighborhood History Walk: Murray Hill Example

JOYCE MENDELSON, EDUCATION CONSULTANT, HISTORIC HOUSE TRUST OF NEW YORK CITY

### Learning Goals:

- Teachers will become aware of how experiential learning outside the classroom can enrich the Social Studies curriculum.
- Teachers will learn methods for researching the history of a neighborhood and strategies for developing neighborhood history walks.
- Students will gain a deeper understanding and greater appreciation of a neighborhood through research and direct observation.
- Students will practice the skills of comparing historic maps and photos with contemporary images and “reading” the architectural features of a building.

### Essential Question:

How does on-site learning deepen our understanding of history?

### Focus Questions:

How can a neighborhood walk be used as a teaching tool to increase our knowledge of people, places, and events that shaped the history of our city, state, and nation?

What strategies can teachers use to help their students learn about a neighborhood, past and present?

### Warm-up:

We asked teachers to identify and give the location of their schools and come up with one word that best described their school neighborhoods. Answers were recorded on a large chart. They ranged from “busy” to “serene,” “residential” to “commercial,” “boring” to “exciting,” and “homogeneous” to “multi-ethnic.”

A similar warm-up can be used with students to elicit their responses in full sentences, orally and/or in written form.

## PRE-WALK PREPARATION

### Maps:

Teachers compared historic and current maps of Murray Hill to identify changes in the neighborhood from farmland to city, i.e., hills, forest, and cultivated land to the street grid of Manhattan. Neighborhood boundaries were defined.

As a crucial first step towards planning a class walk, we stressed the necessity for teachers to individually explore their school neighborhoods to devise a route that, if possible, would include:

- 1) a diversity of buildings: old and new, small and large, commercial, residential, religious, cultural, civic, etc.;
- 2) a mix of stores, businesses, and restaurants from individually- or family-owned to large retail chains;
- 3) a lively street life with people of different ages, ethnicities, and occupations represented.

### **Teacher Packets:**

Teachers examined individual packets of materials that contained architectural terms and images, background information on the history of Murray Hill, a copy of an 1847 document limiting development in the neighborhood and an 1880s historic photo. Teachers received street maps so they could plot the Murray Hill walk and note their observations of specific buildings.



Martha Cooper

### **Logistics:**

Teachers were informed in advance that this would be an outdoor workshop and were encouraged to wear comfortable shoes and clothing appropriate to the weather. Before leaving the building we asked teachers not to block the sidewalks and cautioned them to obey all traffic safety laws when crossing streets. Although we were to move together as a group, the thirty participating teachers were divided into three sub-groups, each with an advisor to facilitate on-site activities.

### **Materials:**

- Photocopies of primary source documents and historic photos relating to a particular neighborhood
- Chart paper
- Clipboards
- Pencils
- Transparent tape
- Street maps
- Cameras (optional)
- Marker pens
- Blank white paper

## ON-SITE ACTIVITIES

### **Plaques:**

In the vestibule of the CUNY Graduate Center, teachers examined a description of the history of the building and its transformation from a grand department store (B. Altman's) into an institution of higher learning.

A plaque on the southwest corner of Park Avenue and East 35th Street told the history of the Murray farm and an incident that supposedly occurred at the Murray family home in 1776 during George Washington's retreat from Manhattan.

Another plaque on a building on the northeast corner of Park Avenue and East 36th Street described the history of the building, originally an 1898 residence designed by noted architect Stanford White, later occupied by a private club and now co-op apartments.

### **Historic Photos:**

Standing at the entrance to CUNY Graduate Center, teachers compared an 1880s view of Fifth Avenue to the current streetscape. They identified the one remaining building from an earlier era and in their sub-groups discussed changes in the character of the neighborhood from residential to commercial.

### **Street Signs:**

Street signs were noted as clues to the history of the neighborhood. Numbered streets and avenues resulted from the Commissioners grid plan of 1811. Madison and Lexington Avenues were added in 1846. What is their connection with U.S. history?

### **Mapping:**

Throughout the walk, teachers traced the route and marked locations on their individual maps.

### **Observations:**

Teachers took notes on their impressions of the streetscape: size and use of buildings; comparisons between older and newer structures. They noted types of businesses, government, and commercial signs, as well as street life, including workers, pedestrians, and traffic.

### **Sketching and photography:**

Teachers analyzed individual buildings: materials, design, and ornament. They sketched and photographed architectural elements like doors, windows, and roofs.

## REFLECTION

Teachers shared their impressions of the character of the neighborhood: commercial, residential or mixed use; socio-economic make-up, ethnicity, street life, and types of buildings.

Teachers stressed the importance of neighborhood walks to motivate students to carry out independent research and develop creative projects.

Teachers talked about neighborhood walks as an interdisciplinary approach to trace the growth and development of a neighborhood.

Teachers discussed their school neighborhoods and the feasibility of developing neighborhood walks as a culminating project for a unit of study.



# “New York City & the Nation” Partners

**Brooklyn Historical Society** ([www.brooklynhistory.org](http://www.brooklynhistory.org)) is a museum, library, and educational center dedicated to encouraging the exploration and appreciation of Brooklyn’s rich heritage. Using Brooklyn as a backdrop, BHS curriculum materials and programs explore the building of America from Revolution to modern day by studying the people, places, and events that shaped its growth. **Contact:** Amy DeSalvo, Education Coordinator, 718-222-4111 ext. 237, [adesalvo@brooklynhistory.org](mailto:adesalvo@brooklynhistory.org).

**City Lore** ([www.citylore.org](http://www.citylore.org)) is a cultural organization located on Manhattan’s Lower East Side whose mission is to document, preserve, and present the living cultural heritage of New York City. Education is central to our mission and informs all of our programs, both school and community-based. **Contact:** Anika Selhorst, Schools Program Director, 212-529-1955 ext. 303, [anika@citylore.org](mailto:anika@citylore.org).

**Gotham Center for New York City History** ([www.gothamcenter.org](http://www.gothamcenter.org)) sponsors programs to make the city’s rich history more accessible to a broad public, and Gotham’s educational programs take that mission to the city’s public schools. The Center’s educational website GothamED ([www.gothamed.org](http://www.gothamed.org)) pools the talent and energy of teachers and scholars, as well as educators from the city’s cultural institutions, to promote and support quality history instruction. **Contact:** Julie Maurer, [gothamed@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:gothamed@gc.cuny.edu).

**Henry Street Settlement** ([www.henrystreet.org](http://www.henrystreet.org)), one of the nation’s oldest settlement houses, is an important social and educational service provider to residents of the Lower East Side and the city at large. The Abrons Arts Center’s Arts-in-Education Program provides students with hands-on experiences in the creation and appreciation of the visual, performing, literary, and media arts. The program’s team of educators and teaching artists collaborate with the New York City Department of Education to integrate the arts into the school curriculum. **Contact:** Nellie Perera, [nperera@henrystreet.org](mailto:nperera@henrystreet.org).

**Historic House Trust** ([www.historichousetrust.org](http://www.historichousetrust.org)) operates in tandem with the City of New York/Parks & Recreation to support houses of architectural and cultural significance spanning 350 years of NYC history. Education programs at Trust houses are designed to reinforce in-school instruction in a variety of curriculum areas for a wide range of grades and are directly linked with NYS Learning Standards. **Contact:** David Mandel, [david.mandel@parks.nyc.gov](mailto:david.mandel@parks.nyc.gov).

**New-York Historical Society** is home to both New York City’s oldest museum and one of the nation’s most distinguished independent research libraries. NYHS educators collaborate with teachers to make the Society’s resources an extension of the classroom by tailoring school programs to the classroom curricula. **Contact:** Adrienne Kupper, [akupper@nyhistory.org](mailto:akupper@nyhistory.org).

**The Social Studies Department at the New York City Department of Education** has worked with and guided teachers in the development of curricular units of study, organized and run multiple professional development workshops, seminars, and institutes throughout the city, and supported teachers of social studies of all levels. All the work of the department is designed to support teachers and students in inquiry-based social studies instruction that includes multiple perspectives and critical thinking. Web site: [www.nycsocialstudies.org](http://www.nycsocialstudies.org) **Contact:** Elise Abegg, Director of Social Studies, [eabegg@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:eabegg@schools.nyc.gov).

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