

HIS 401.02
Filthy Cities

Satisfies: EXP+, SPK, WRTD

Tuesdays, 2:30-5:20pm

Professor Donna Rilling

This class explores ideals of personal, household and community cleanness and consumer items related to it (cosmetics, soaps, baths, dress, homes, etc.) through the early twentieth century. It emphasizes American history, but also incorporates scholarship from other geographic areas. Expectations and ideals regarding dirt, cleanliness, pollution and the like emerge in tandem with processes of identity formation and inclusive group definitions (for example, what is “femininity”? who is “middle class”?) on the one hand, and processes of exclusive labeling (e.g., Who is not white? Who is not moral?) on the other. We also focus attention on related understandings of dirt and disease, and explore the challenges that growing cities faced from human, animal and industrial waste. Assignments include: weekly reading and active participation in discussions of primary and secondary sources; scaffolded elements of an original research paper, the final version to be approximately 12 pages not including citations; and an oral presentation.