History 630: Modern European and American City Cultures and Politics
Professor Eve Kornfeld
As the central site of modernization, modernity, and modernism over the last four centuries, the European and American city has dominated the world stage. Modern transformations of culture and politics -- from migration to work to play to consumption to identities to revolutions to (de)colonization -- have all centered on the city, which in turn has shaped and contested modernity locally, nationally, and internationally. The protean urban/modern dynamic, touching every aspect of public and private life, challenges scholars to cross traditional temporal, spatial, and disciplinary boundaries. This seminar embraces that challenge. Located at the intersections of two fields with sharply different methods and concerns (cultural and political history) and two quite distinct and separate historical trajectories (European and American history), this course will compare and contrast the histories of the modern city from its birth in the 17th century to its demise or transformation in the 21st century. Using a seminar format, with individual reading assignments carved from the collective reading assignment each week, we shall explore the leading interpretations of the cultures and politics of the modern city in Europe and America and consider whether studying these two fields and continents together might open new questions and perspectives in each. Each student will have the opportunity to lead a seminar discussion; to work within a research group to develop and present individual research on some aspect of modern European, American, or post-colonial city cultures or politics; and to write a seminar paper based on that individual research that might become a chapter of an MA thesis.