Call for Papers

Urban Belonging: History and the Power of Place

A conference organised by the Centre for Metropolitan History, School of Advanced Studies, University of London and the Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester

13-14 January 2017, Institute of Historical Research, Senate House, University of London

There is a paradox at the heart of the city. On one hand, the ‘urban’ has been conceived as a space where strangers and the rootless can interact and congregate, freed from the bounded constraints of rural communities. Yet, in practice, cities have historically also generated new forms of belonging, community and identity - from the city-states of Ancient Greece or Rome to medieval and early modern guilds and parishes, and, more recently, modern ethnic ‘ghettos’ or ‘gaybourhoods’. For many people across the world, the experience, perception and reality of urban-formed identities has and continues to trump other categories of self-definition.

Such diverse forms of belonging, spawned and nurtured by the city, have seldom been subjected to sustained and systematic scholarly scrutiny. Stepping into this breach, this international conference, jointly organised by the Centre for Urban History (Leicester) and Centre for Metropolitan History (London), seeks to connect, from a variety of temporal and spatial vantage points, the multiple histories of urban belonging.

We seek to explore:
1) What forms of belonging have cities made possible, and how have these changed across time and place?
2) How has belonging been articulated in political discourse, cultural ritual, and spatial practice?
3) In what ways do ‘modern’ manifestations of urban belonging and identity differ from ‘pre’ and ‘early modern’ forms?
4) To what extent do forms of urban belonging reflect the workings of categories such as gender, class, nationality, race, and sexuality?
5) How have ideologues or organisations negotiated or rejected the challenges of integrating new communities or ‘outsiders’?
6) How have those deemed to be ‘foreigners’ or ‘outsiders’ responded to attempts to keep them out of the city?
7) As bounded cities of the past give way to globalised urban agglomerations in the present, have old forms of urban belonging disappeared?

We invite 20-minute papers on these themes from any historical period or geographic locale, and encourage comparative work. Abstracts should not exceed 250 words, and should be sent to Dr Tom Hulme at tom.hulme@sas.ac.uk by 14 October 2016.

The conference will take place over two days, 13-14 January 2017, at the Institute of Historical Research (Senate House, University of London). There will be a registration fee of £40 (which covers lunch on both days). An evening reception on the 13th will be sponsored by Urban History journal. A limited number of bursaries are available for postgraduate and ECR travel and registration (within 3 years of PhD and not-in-post); following abstract-acceptance, speakers should contact Dr Tom Hulme