

Benjamin M. Looker

Academic C.V.

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Academic Employment

Associate Professor of American Studies, St. Louis University, July 2015–present; Assistant Professor, August 2009–June 2015

- Arts & Sciences Graduate Faculty, PhD Mentor rank (2009–present)
- Undergraduate courses designed and taught: Investigating America: An Introduction to American Studies; The Urban Crisis; Making the American City: Culture, Space, and 20th-Century U.S. Urbanisms; American Decades: Cold War Culture; Senior Thesis Seminar
- Graduate courses designed and taught: Metropolitan America; Jazz, Cities, and Social Movements; The Practice of American Studies; Perspectives in American Studies; The Cultural Studies Movement: Origins and Contemporary Practice; Cold War Cultural Politics and the “American Century”

Teaching Fellow, Yale University, 2004–2007, 2008–2009

Research Assistant, Centre for Urban and Community Research, Goldsmiths College, London, 2001

Education

Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

- PhD in American Studies (December 2009)
Dissertation committee: Michael Denning (advisor), Matthew Frye Jacobson, John Mack Faragher
- MA (May 2005) and MPhil (May 2006) in American Studies

Fulbright Scholar to Canada

- Award to conduct independent research on immigration, the arts, and urban space in Toronto, Ontario (2001–2002)

Goldsmiths College, University of London

- MA (“With Distinction”) in Cities, Globalisation & Culture, Dept. of Sociology (December 2001)

Washington University in St. Louis

- AB (*summa cum laude*), with majors in Urban Studies and in Music (May 2000)

Publications

Books

- *A Nation of Neighborhoods: Imagining Cities, Communities, and Democracy in Postwar America*, Historical Studies of Urban America series (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
Reviewed in [J. Historical Geography](#), [J. Am. History](#), [Ind. Mag. of History](#), [Choice](#), [History of Ed. Quarterly](#), [J. Urban History](#), [Am. Historical Review](#).
- *“Point from which Creation Begins”: The Black Artists’ Group of St. Louis* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2004).
Reviewed in [J. Am. History](#), [J. African American History](#), [J. Royal Musical Assoc.](#), [Choice](#), [AllAboutJazz.com](#), [Mo. Historical Review](#).

Selected articles and essays

- Forthcoming: “Neighbourhood Exceptionalism and Racial Liberalism in the Great Society City: Integration as Civic Showpiece at St Louis’ LaClede Town,” accepted (July 2020) by *Urban History*.
- “Staging Diaspora, Dramatizing Activism: Fashioning a Progressive Filipino Canadian Theatre in Toronto, 1974–2001,” *Journal of Canadian Studies / Revue d’études canadiennes* 53, no. 2 (2019): 423–65.
- “Visions of Autonomy: The New Left and the Neighborhood Government Movement of the 1970s,” *Journal of Urban History* 38, no. 3 (2012): 577–98.
- “Microcosms of Democracy: Imagining the City Neighborhood in World War II–Era America,” *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 2 (2010): 351–78.
- “Exhibiting Imperial London: Empire and the City in Late Victorian and Edwardian Guidebooks,” *Critical Urban Studies: Occasional Papers Series* (London: Centre for Urban and Community Research, 2002).
- Liner-note essay for LP reissue of Black Artists Group, *In Paris, Aries 1973* (Berlin: Rank & File Records, March 2011).

Reviews

- Review of *Believing in Cleveland: Managing Decline in “The Best Location in the Nation,”* by J. Mark Souther, *American Historical Review* 123, no. 5 (December 2018): 1699–1700.
- Review of *Beautiful Terrible Ruins: Detroit and the Anxiety of Decline*, by Dora Apel, *Michigan Historical Review* 42, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 97.
- Review of *Groping toward Democracy: African American Social Welfare Reform in St. Louis, 1910–1949*, by Priscilla A. Dowden-White, *Missouri Historical Review* 106, no. 4 (2012): 245–46.
- Review essay (4,300 words): “Revisiting City and Race,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 33, no. 2 (2003): 171–83.
- Review of *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown*, by Nayan Shah, *Gateway-Heritage* 23, no. 3 (2002/03): 53.

Press pieces

- Contributor of occasional pieces on urban spaces, neighborhood life, and jazz history for St. Louis–area media outlets including the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *Metropolis*, *Marquis*, *The Commonsense*, *Gateway-Heritage*, and others, 2000–2005.

Prizes, Fellowships, and Grants

Research recognitions

- Recipient, Richard Plant Award, Canadian Association for Theatre Research (CATR), for “best English-language article on a Canadian theatre- or performance-related topic,” July 2020
- Recipient, John Hope Franklin Publication Prize, American Studies Association (ASA), for “best book in American Studies” in previous year, November 2016
- Co-recipient, Kenneth Jackson Award, Urban History Association (UHA), for “best book on North American urban history” in previous year, October 2016
- Recipient, Lawrence W. Levine Award, Organization of American Historians (OAH), for “best book on U.S. cultural history” in previous year, April 2016
- Recipient, Missouri Conference on History Book Award, State Historical Society of Missouri (SHSM), for “best book on any historical topic” by a Missouri resident in previous year, March 2016
- Finalist (one of three) for Jane Jacobs Urban Communication Book Award, Urban Communication Foundation (UCA), July 2016

Teaching and mentoring recognitions

- Donald Brennan Excellence in Graduate Mentoring Award, College of Arts & Sciences, St. Louis University, April 2016
- Emerson Teaching Award, for teachers at all levels in the St. Louis area (two chosen annually from each school district and university), December 2014
- Helen Mandeville Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching in the Humanities Award, College of Arts & Sciences, St. Louis University, April 2014
- Donald Brennan Excellence in Graduate Teaching Award, College of Arts & Sciences, St. Louis University, April 2012
- Finalist (non-recipient) for the 2012 Helen I. Mandeville Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching in the Humanities Award, College of Arts and Sciences, St. Louis University

Grants and fellowships

- Awardee (with Amanda L. Izzo), Scholarship Opportunity Fund research grant, St. Louis University, for project on 1960s–1970s social movements in St. Louis, 2020–2022

- Furthermore Program publishing grant: competitively awarded book-publication subvention from the J. M. Kaplan Fund of Hudson, New York, Fall 2012
- Awardee, Faculty Research Leave Program, St. Louis University. Leave semester competitively awarded from junior- and senior-level applicants across the University, Fall 2012
- Mellon Faculty Development Grants (4x), College of Arts and Sciences, St. Louis University, Fall 2009, Fall 2010, Fall 2011, Spring 2016
- Paul C. Gignilliat Dissertation Fellowship, awarded annually to five of “the most promising graduate students” at Yale University, 2007–2008
- Clarke Chambers Travel Fellowship, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, 2007
- Gerald R. Ford Foundation, Research Travel Grant, 2007
- Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism, University of Notre Dame, Research Travel Grant, 2007
- Yale Club of Philadelphia, Summer Research Fellowship, 2006
- John Enders Summer Research Fellowship, Yale University, 2006
- Ezra Jack Keats Foundation, Research Travel Award, 2006
- Fulbright Award, U.S. State Department, for nine months of independent research in Toronto, Canada, 2001–2002

Selected Lectures, Papers, and Conference Activities

Selected conference and symposium papers

- “Race, Liberalism, and Neighborhood Exceptionalism in the Great Society City: The Case of St. Louis’s LaCledde Town Community,” paper at the Organization of American Historians (OAH) annual meeting, Philadelphia, PA, April 2019.
- “The Constructed ‘Neighborhood Ideal’: Potentials and Pitfalls for Cultural History Approaches to U.S. Neighborhood Research,” paper at the Society for American City and Regional Planning History (SACRPH) biennial conference, Cleveland, OH, October 2017.
- “The Routes of Racial Liberalism: Integration as Civic Showpiece at LaCledde Town,” paper at The Material World of Metropolitan Segregation symposium at Washington University, St. Louis, MO, April 2017.
- “‘A New Kind of In-Town Home Life’: Integration as Civic Showpiece at 1960s LaCledde Town, St. Louis,” paper at the Missouri Conference on History, Springfield, MO, March 2017.
- “Who Are the People in Your Neighborhood? Children’s Texts, Urban Representation, and the Great Society Aesthetic,” paper at *City as Stage, Art as Plan*, Princeton Mellon Initiative symposium, Princeton University School of Architecture, April 2015.
- “A ‘Theology of Neighborhood’: City Spaces, the ‘New Ethnicity,’ and Postconciliar Catholic Communalism,” paper at the American and Canadian Catholic Historical Associations (ACHA/CCHA) joint conference, Toronto, ON, April 2011.

- “‘An Ethnic Walden Pond’: Urban Decentralism, Alternative Technology, and 1970s Community Activism,” paper at the Urban History Association (UHA) biennial conference, Las Vegas, NV, October 2010.
- “Peaceable Kingdoms: Narrating the 1960s Urban Crisis in Stories for Children,” paper at the Popular Culture Association and American Culture Association (PCA/ACA) annual joint conference, St. Louis, MO, April 2010.
- “The ‘Old Neighborhood’: Political Adaptations and Cultural Capital,” paper at the Association of Lutheran College Faculties (ALCF) annual conference, Ann Arbor, MI, October 2009.
- “‘Power to the Neighborhoods!’: The Cultural Politics of Neighborhood Autonomy in the 1970s,” paper at the New England American Studies Association (NEASA) annual conference, New Haven, CT, September 2008.
- “Elementary Republics and Little Platoons: Jane Jacobs’s Localism, White Ethnic Revival, and the 1970s Neighborhoods Movement,” paper at the American Studies Association (ASA) annual meeting, Philadelphia, PA, October 2007.
- “‘Poets of Action’: The Black Artists’ Group in St. Louis,” paper at the Midwest Modern Language Association (M/MLA) annual conference, November 2004.

Invited lectures

- “The Cultural Construction of Neighborhood: A Workshop on Cultural Studies Approaches to Urban Historical Research,” invited lecture/workshop for Department of History, Temple University, Philadelphia, February 2020.
- “Race, Liberalism, and Neighborhood Exceptionalism in the Great Society City: Integration as Civic Showpiece in 1960s St. Louis,” invited lecture for Department of History and School of Labor & Employment Relations, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, February 2019.
- “Racial Identity and Stories for Children,” keynote lecture for tenth annual student research conference, Concordia University, Ann Arbor, MI, April 2018.
- “Peaceable Kingdoms and Urban Crises: Constructing the Great Society Neighborhood in Stories for Children,” invited keynote lecture, plenary sessions, Midwest Popular Culture Association, October 2013.
- Invited keynote lecture on urban neighborhoods and cultural representation, Annual Graduate Student Symposium, Dept. of Historical Studies, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, April 2012.
- Invited lecture on music and activism of the Black Artists’ Group (BAG) for NEH Summer Institute “The Sock Hop and the Loft: Jazz, Motown, and the Transformation of American Culture, 1959-1975,” Washington University, St. Louis, MO, July 2011.
- “Visions of Autonomy: Surveying the 1970s Neighborhoods Movement, from New Left to White Ethnic Revival,” invited lecture at The City Seminar, Washington University, St. Louis, MO, March 2011.
- “Big Birds and Big Shots: Re-Imagining the ‘Old Neighborhood’ from *Sesame Street* to Snyder Avenue,” invited lecture hosted by the Yale Club of Philadelphia, March 2007.

- “‘A Singular Expression’: Performance and Cultural Politics in the Black Artists’ Group of St. Louis,” keynote lecture at the symposium/concert-series *Music and Musicians of the Black Artists’ Group in St. Louis*, Washington University, St. Louis, MO, February 2006.
- “Second Viennese School Atonality and Modern Jazz Harmony,” Department of Music Lecture Series, Washington University, St. Louis, MO, April 2000.

Other conference activities

- Co-organizer and participant for roundtable session “The Emergence and State of the Urban Humanities,” American Studies Association (ASA) annual meeting, Atlanta, GA, November 2018.
- Presenter for roundtable session “Cities in History and Literature: Global Perspectives,” Urban History Association (UHA) biennial conference, Chicago, IL, October 2016.
- Plenary Roundtable speaker: “Battleground Midwest: A Conversation with Ben Looker (President, MAASA), David Roediger (President, ASA), and Robert Warrior (President-elect, ASA),” Mid-America American Studies Association (MAASA) biennial conference, Lawrence, KS, March 2016.
- Roundtable panelist for session entitled “The Pruitt-Igoe Myth,” Organization of American Historians (OAH) annual meeting, St. Louis, MO, April 2015.
- Presenter for roundtable session “Neighborhoods Matter: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Why Historians Should Still Study Neighborhoods in an Era of Metropolitan and Global History,” Urban History Association (UHA) biennial conference, Philadelphia, October 2014.
- Co-organizer and participant, “Academic Work in the Age of the Neoliberal University: A Roundtable on Contingency, Casualization, and the Campus Labor Movement,” Mid-America American Studies Association (MAASA) annual conference, Madison, WI, April 2011.
- “‘Microcosms of Democracy’: The Neighborhood Imagined in the 1940s,” invited presentation at symposium/workshop *The Arts in Place*, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY, April 2007.

Selected Service Activities

Professional service

- Executive Board member, Mid-America American Studies Association (MAASA), January 2010–present
- President, Mid-America American Studies Association (MAASA), 2015–2016
- Peer reviewer for the University of Chicago Press, Routledge, Indiana University Press, Temple University Press, *American Quarterly*, *Journal of Urban History*, *Urban History*, and *Missouri Historical Review*
- Selection committee member for Arnold Hirsch Award for Best Article in Urban History, Urban History Association (UHA), Summer 2018
- National Endowment for the Humanities, summer-stipend proposal reviewer, Fall 2017

Campus committee participation

- Member and secretary, American Association of University Professors (AAUP), SLU chapter, Spring 2013–Spring 2018
- Global and Local Social Justice Program Advisory Board, St. Louis University, January 2013–May 2016
- Library Dean review and reappointment advisory committee, Provost’s Office, St. Louis University, Spring 2017
- Micah Program Advisory Board, St. Louis University, August 2009–present
- Urban Project Workshop Team, St. Louis University, August 2009–May 2012
- Faculty affiliates committee for Diversity and Global Citizenship learning community, St. Louis University, Fall 2017–present
- Faculty Advisory Group for Des Peres Hall Learning Studio Design, Center for Teaching Excellence, St. Louis University, August–December 2010
- Mellon Faculty Development Grants Selection Committee, College of Arts & Sciences, St. Louis University, September 2009–May 2011
- Faculty Council, College of Arts & Sciences, St. Louis University, Fall 2010–Spring 2011, Spring 2012, Fall 2015–Spring 2016, Spring 2017–Spring 2018, Spring 2019, Spring 2020–Spring 2021
- American Studies Department search committees for faculty positions in African American Culture (2010–2011), Ethnic Studies (2010–2011), and Transnational Studies (2013)
- American Studies Graduate Admissions Committee, annually March 2010–March 2020

Selected community events, public talks, and media

- Speaker and discussion moderator at event “BAG: A Celebration of the Black Artists Group with Oliver Lake,” Ferring Jazz Bistro, Jazz St. Louis, April 2016
- Lecture at event “Change Is a Sound: Free Jazz and Collective Practice in Political Movements,” Luminary Gallery, St. Louis, October 2015
- Guest speaker, U.S. Naturalization Ceremony, Thomas F. Eagleton Courthouse, St. Louis, August 2015
- Lecture at the St. Louis Public Library, Schlafly Branch, on the Black Artists’ Group of St. Louis, July 2010
- Radio appearances to discuss jazz history on WPFW-FM (Washington, D.C., 2008), KWMU-FM (St. Louis, 2006), and KDHX-FM (St. Louis, 2005 & 2012)
- Lecture based on book *Point from which Creation Begins*, “Books & Coffee” series, Concordia University, Ann Arbor, MI, March 2006
- Organizer of symposium/concert-series “Music and Musicians of the Black Artists’ Group in St. Louis,” Washington University, February 2006. Named “Best Local Music History Event” for 2006 by St. Louis weekly *The Riverfront Times*.

- Lecture on music and the Black Arts movement in St. Louis, Missouri History Museum book event, November 2004

Graduate Advising

Doctoral dissertations advised

- *In progress*: Michael Brickey, "Disconnected and Disaffected: Energy Insecurity and the Struggle for Climate Justice in St. Louis, Missouri" (working title)
- *In progress*: Elizabeth Eikmann, "From Footnote to Foreground: St. Louis and the Visualizing of Race and Gender, 1857–1920" (working title)
- Katharine Piatchek, "'You're Too Smart for That!' The Representation of the American High School Teacher in Postwar Public Policy and Popular Culture" (defended July 2017)
- Brandy Boyd, "Keep Your Chin Up and Your Skirt Down: Female Country Artists' Struggles for Respectability within the Nashville Music Industry, 1953–Present" (defended April 2015)
- Brian Greening, "Representing New Orleans: Race, Space and Visibility in the Crescent City since 1965" (defended February 2014; under contract with Louisiana State University Press)
- Jaclyn Kirouac-Fram, "'Yellow Rolling Cell Blocks': The Urban Bus and Race in the United States" (defended April 2013)

Doctoral dissertation committee memberships (non-chair role)

- *In progress*: Cicely Hunter, "Blaring Silence: The Silent Protest of 1917 and Its Historical Influence on Activism" (working title)
- *In progress*: Kimberly Cowan, "Teaching Mary, Training Martha: Catholic Education for Girls in St. Louis, Missouri, from Suffragette to Rosie the Riveter" (working title)
- Bryan Winston, "Mexican Corridors: Migration and Community Formation in the Central United States, 1900–1950" (defended July 2019)
- Mark A. Koschmann, "Finding Their Footing in the Changing City: Protestant and Catholic Congregations Adapt to the New Urban Environment in Post–World War II Chicago" (defended May 2018)
- Nicholas Porter, "Professional Wrestling in the United States, 1877–1920" (defended November 2018)
- Melissa Ford, "A Bible in One Hand, a Brick in the Other: African American Working Women and Midwestern Black Radicalism during the Great Depression, 1929–1935" (defended April 2016; under contract with Southern Illinois University Press)
- A. Bayard Clark, "Forgotten Eyewitnesses: English Women Travel Writers and the Economic Development of America's Antebellum West" (defended April 2013)

Other graduate advising

- Cohort advisor for incoming American Studies graduate-student class, 2010–2011, 2014–2015, 2017–2018, 2020–2021
- Field director for numerous PhD comprehensive exam committees
- Member of various MA thesis and MA portfolio-paper committees