

Myles Zhang

Urban history and built environment

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I study the history of planning and cities. I have a keen interest in the social [history of the New York metropolitan region](#). I studied architecture and [New York City](#) as a Columbia undergraduate. As a visiting student at Oxford, I researched [medieval history and Amiens Cathedral](#). For my Cambridge Master's thesis, I examined the [history of incarceration](#) and Eastern State Penitentiary. Through writing, art, [digital humanities](#), and community engagement, I aim to introduce new audiences to urban history and to the historic preservation issues facing my community. Name in Chinese: 张之远

Education

University of Cambridge

MPhil – Architecture & Urban Studies, 2019-20

Thesis: Architecture of Redemption? Contradictions of Solitary Confinement

Columbia University

BA Honors – 2015-19 (3.8 GPA)

History & Theory of Architecture major, offered at Department of Art History and Archaeology

Thesis: The Origins of Gothic Architecture at the Church of Saint-Denis

University of Oxford

Visiting Student – 2017-18 (3.8 GPA)

New York City Publications

* peer reviewed

1. *NYC Water Supply History – 2020

Spatial history of NYC water supply and engineering from 1609 to present

Created with assistance from Wright Kennedy and Gergely Baics, [film](#) ⇒

2. *New York Penn Station: Past and Present – 2020

Essay and analysis of old vs. new Penn Station as urban palimpsest, published in

[Heartbreaking Video Shows NYC's Old Penn Station](#), *Viewing NYC*, 15 May 2019 [Film and essay](#) ⇒

3. *Architecture of Exclusion in Manhattan Chinatown – 2019

Essay on how Manhattan Chinatown's geography reflects the historic exclusion of the Chinese

Published in *Asia Pacific Affairs Council Journal* (Columbia Weatherhead East Asian Institute), [link](#) ⇒

4. Manufacturing the Picturesque at Central Park – 2019

Essay analyzes ways city planning produced a contrived image of natural beauty, [link](#) ⇒

5. *NYC Subway Ridership – 2018

GIS analysis of subway ridership patterns over time, created with info from the MTA, featured in

Columbia College Alumni Magazine and [Gothamist](#) in 2019. [Read essay and analysis](#) ⇒

6. A History of Historic Preservation in New York City – 2018

Data analysis of NYC landmarks since 1965 reveals trends and biases in the landmarks preservation movement. Developed with Kenneth Jackson. [Link to essay](#) ⇒

7. *Here Grows New York – 2018-19

Supervised by Gergely Baics and Kenneth Jackson

Here Grows New York animates the development of the city's street grid and environment from 1609 to the present day using geo-referenced road network data, historic maps, and geological surveys. The short film presents a series of “cartographic snapshots” of the built-up environment at intervals of every 20 to 30 years in history. This process highlights the organic spurts of growth and movement that typify New York's and most cities' development through time. The result is an abstract representation of urbanism.

Animation had over [three million YouTube](#) views, earned recognition from the Library of Congress and Columbia Data Science Institute, and was used as teaching aid in urban studies courses at Harvard, The New School, Columbia, and Washington University in St. Louis. [Research and methodology](#) ⇒

Published in:

1. [Animated map illustrates growth of New York City since 1609](#), *Daily Mail*, 6 June 2019
2. [Watch New York City Grow from 1609 to Today](#), *6sqft*, 13 May 2019
3. [Inquiring Minds: Watching New York City Grow, Block by Block](#), *Library of Congress*, 2 May 2019
4. [Here Grows New York](#), *Kottke: Home of Fine Hypertext Products*, 6 May 2019
5. *New Amsterdam History Center*, 1 December 2020
6. [Wikipedia entry](#)

Publications about Prisons

1. *The Old Essex County Jail: A reflection on history – 2021

Forthcoming article in *The Newarker*, spring 2021, traces the history of the old Essex County Jail and the ways this institution mirrors the larger history of the city. [Read](#) ⇒

2. *A Medieval Mask on a Modern Prison: Eastern State Penitentiary – 2020

Submitted for publication in the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*

Paper written with Max Sternberg at Cambridge, analyzes the fortress-like and medieval appearance of Eastern State Penitentiary. More than a purely random choice, the qualities of Gothic attempt to reflect, or fall short of reflecting, the practices of detention and isolation within. [Read](#) ⇒

3. *Architecture of Redemption? Contradictions of Solitary Confinement – 2019-20

Master's thesis at University of Cambridge about Eastern State Penitentiary, [abstract](#) and [video](#) ⇒

Jeremy Bentham's philosophy of Utilitarianism influenced the design and operations of Eastern State in the 1820s. This prison, in turn, preempted Michel Foucault's later ideas about the surveillance state. Beyond architectural analysis, the thesis incorporated nineteenth-century newspaper accounts and visitor descriptions to understand how the prison's location and appearance reflected urbanism and citizenship in Philadelphia.

4. *Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon – 2019

Digital reconstruction of Bentham's famous (though unbuilt) proposal for a panopticon
Based on Bentham's drawings in University College London archives, [animation and paper](#) ⇒

Medieval History Publications

1. *Notre-Dame de Paris Construction Sequence – 2020-21

Visualization reconstructs the cathedral from c.1160 to present
Forthcoming project with Stephen Murray will be posted to Notre-Dame's official website

2. Senior Thesis on Gothic Architecture – 2018-19

Supervised by Stephen Murray in the art history department, [thesis and presentation](#) ⇒

Thesis examined the origins and stylistic features of the earliest known French Gothic buildings. The story surrounding the twelfth-century construction of Saint-Denis near Paris reveals a tendency to tell history – particularly architectural history – in terms of individual structures when, in fact, the origins of the Gothic style are more complex. By abandoning a Paris and Saint-Denis centric origins story, we can better appreciate the range of local sources from which medieval masons drew inspiration.

3. *Amiens Cathedral – 2015-18

Supervised by Stephen Murray with Work Exemption Program grant (\$2,000)

Amiens Cathedral is introduced each semester to Columbia undergraduates as representative of Gothic architecture, and as a lens through which to teach skills of visual analysis. This digital humanities project and history film instructs over 1,300 students per year.

The objective was to digitize and re-imagine Amiens, “to restore the building to a state of completeness that may have never existed” to quote Viollet-le-Duc. In the model, awkward walls, ugly later additions, and anachronistic features are all removed in order to reveal how masons envisioned their cathedral in the thirteenth century.

[Construction sequence](#) (60K views), [animated glossary](#), and [computer model](#) (4K downloads)

Published in:

1. Stephen Murray's forthcoming book on Amiens Cathedral (Columbia University Press)
2. Columbia University, Art Humanities website
3. *Grundkurs Kunst: Basic Course On Fine Arts* (Vol.3), German language textbook
4. Amiens Cathedral visitor mobile app, French Ministry of Culture
5. [Link to publication on my website](#) ⇒

4. *Burford Church Construction Sequence – 2018

Reconstruction of an English parish church's construction from 1175 to 1475 , [animation](#) ⇒

Other Publications

1. Berlin Evolution Animation – 2020

German language film production

Animates urban growth from 1415 to present day with historic maps, [film](#) ⇒

2. *St. Paul's Cathedral Dome: A Synthesis of Engineering and Art – 2020

Construction sequence and essay analyzes ways the two forces of engineering and art merge in the unified structure of the cathedral. [animation and paper](#) ⇒

3. California Waterscape – 2019

Visualization of the extent of suburban sprawl and water supply infrastructure from 1913 to the present in California. Geo-referenced aqueduct route data, land use maps, and statistics on reservoir capacity based on datasets from the federal government and California Open Data, [film](#) ⇒

4. Eiffel Tower Construction Sequence – 2018

Illustrates construction over two years, [animation](#) ⇒

Curatorial Experience

1. *In Search of the Just City: Rethinking the old Essex County Jail – 2018-19

Six-month exhibit with \$22,000 funding documents Newark's abandoned old Essex County Jail

[View exhibit photos](#) and listen to [curator interview](#) ⇒

- + Exhibit in collaboration with 11 students and 2 professors at Columbia architecture school (Belmont Freeman & Bryony Roberts) became the basis for a 2019 undergraduate studio at the New Jersey Institute of Technology.
- + Interviewed Newark mayor Ras Baraka and former guards for an oral history of this jail, [link](#) ⇒
- + Collaborated with NJ Appleseed and PLANewark to organize discussion panels about the history of incarceration and criminal justice, [event](#) ⇒

In response to the public pressure generated from this exhibit and its thousands of visitors, the New Jersey Institute of Technology is requesting a \$6.5 million grant from the Essex County government to stabilize and reuse the site, ideally as a memorial park to those who suffered there.

2. *Newark Metamorphosis: A Pictorial History – 2016-17

Postcard comparisons of the city's decay and urban renewal from 1916 vs. 2016

Historic images are selected from the Newark Public Library's postcard collection. All new photos were taken in 2016 from the same angles of view. A visual analysis of the changes shown accompanies each comparison. Exhibited by the [Newark Public Library](#) and accessible as [interactive map and exhibit](#) ⇒

Research Positions

1. Friends of Notre-Dame de Paris – 2020

Creates open source computer model and cathedral construction sequence for publication 2021
With historian Stephen Murray

2. Teaching Assistant at University of Cambridge: Department of Architecture – 2020

Undergraduate supervision in Max Sternberg's "Modern Medieval" history class, [presentation](#) ⇒

3. Graduate Representative on Faculty Board – 2019-20 (elected)

University of Cambridge: Department of Art History & Architecture
Relayed graduate student concerns to faculty

4. Center for Spatial Research at Columbia University Department of History – 2018-19

Geocoded census records to visually reconstruct NYC's demographic shifts from 1850 to 1920
Mapping Historical NYC project with Wright Kennedy, Mae Ngai, and Gergely Baics

5. Archival Assistant at Newark Public Library – 2017-19

Restored and digitized 600 historic maps spanning 250 years [for library's digital collections](#) ⇒
\$12,000 spent toward map digitization grant
Organized *Newark Evening News* photo archive

6. Research Assistant at Columbia University: Department of Art History & Archaeology – 2016-19

[Construction sequence](#), [animated glossary](#), and [computer model](#), supervised by Stephen Murray
Work Exemption Program grant (\$4,000), [project](#) ⇒

7. Director of Community Service: National Residence Hall Honorary – 2016-19

Elected to organize community-service events for Columbia undergraduates

8. Media Center for Art History – 2018

Worked at the Media Center for Art History on public humanities initiatives to introduce new audiences to art history through emerging technologies, [work sample](#) ⇒

9. Intern at International WELL Building Institute – 2016

10. Intern at Studio for Urban Architecture & Design – 2016

Surveyed historic varnish factory in Newark for adaptive reuse
Work Exemption Program (\$3,000), [report](#) ⇒

Fellowships and Awards

- 1. Dr. James C. Egbert Memorial Scholarship Fund – 2016-19**
Named scholarships awarded to top 15% of undergraduates
- 2. Meyer Schapiro Book Prize for Excellence in Art History – 2019**
Columbia University: Department of Art History & Archaeology
Awarded by Stephen Murray and Barry Bergdoll
- 3. Data Art Contest Winner – 2019**
Data Science Institute at Columbia University
Best data visualization in computer science department for 2018-19 year
[View submission ⇒](#)
- 4. Oxbridge Scholar – 2017-18**
One of 15 per year Columbia sends to Oxford
Financial aid and \$4,000 travel grant
- 5. The Hudson School, high school valedictorian – 2015**
- 6. New Jersey Scholars Program – 2014**
One of 39 selected from 300 applicants (declined due to a scheduling conflict with below)
- 7. Telluride Association Summer Program – 2014**
One of 64 selected from 1,200 applicants worldwide
All-expenses-paid six-week humanities program at Cornell and the University of Michigan

Interviews about my research

- 1. [Old Jail Could Inspire Youth to Stay Out of Prison – but Only If It Survives](#)**
Jersey Digs, 24 July 2020
- 2. [Profile Article of Myles Zhang](#)**
Jerseyology, 2 October 2019
- 3. [“You can't recreate history”: the preservation of the old Essex County Jail with Myles Zhang](#)**
Pod & Market, 13 September 2019
- 4. [Architectural models: engaging with space](#)**
Central Auction News, 23 August 2019
- 5. [Featured Artist](#)**
Ratrock Magazine, 5 March 2019
- 6. [When a Student Blogger Enters the World](#)**
The Edublogger, 18 August 2018
- 7. [Architect and Artist Myles Zhang Imagines the Buildings Around him in Watercolor](#)**
Study Breaks, 5 April 2017
- 8. [Sketching the Streets: Columbia's Own Flâneur](#)**
The Columbia Daily Spectator, 20 September 2016
- 9. [Myles Zhang Puts Columbia University in a Box](#)**
Bwog, 10 April 2016

Community Engagement [View more online⇒](#)

Web Designer at New Jersey Appleseed Public Interest Law Center – 2017-20

- + Managed website design and publishing to legal blog, [link ⇒](#)
- + Developed computer simulations about zoning for partner organization PLANewark, [link ⇒](#)
- + Created interactive maps about extent of surface parking, [link ⇒](#)

Website designer at Mazo for Congress – 2019-20

Designed website for Eugene Mazo, candidate for U.S. Congress in NJ's 10th district

Newark Water Group – 2011-19

- + Fought corporate privatization of city's public water system, [activism ⇒](#)
- + Collected signatures for referendum against privatization and spoke at Newark City Council
- + Analyzed geo-data on lead contamination in water pipes for Brendhan O'Flaherty, [link ⇒](#)