

The “Gangs” All Here

A TOUR THAT TELLS THE STORY OF GOTHAM'S LEGENDARY THUGS IS SUDDENLY IN GREAT DEMAND.

Until Martin Scorsese's film *Gangs of New York* came out, the only souls who took R. Brian Ferguson's tour of lower Manhattan were students in his Cultural History of the New York Police Department course on the Newark campus. Fanfare over the film, coupled with a casual remark he made to a reporter, led to a story about his *Gangs to Gangsters* tour in *USA Today* and a slew of requests to give tours to other groups.

For Ferguson, a cultural anthropologist who studies warfare and the Yanomami tribe of South America, “the tour shows students the reality of what they've been hearing about all semester. There's a lot more impact to seeing the actual place where a gang fight occurred, or where someone died, than seeing a picture.”

The three-hour trek, which follows Herbert Asbury's 1928 book, *Gangs of New York*, more than the film, includes the former Five Points neighborhood and locations where the Bowery Boys and the Dead Rabbits clashed. Through

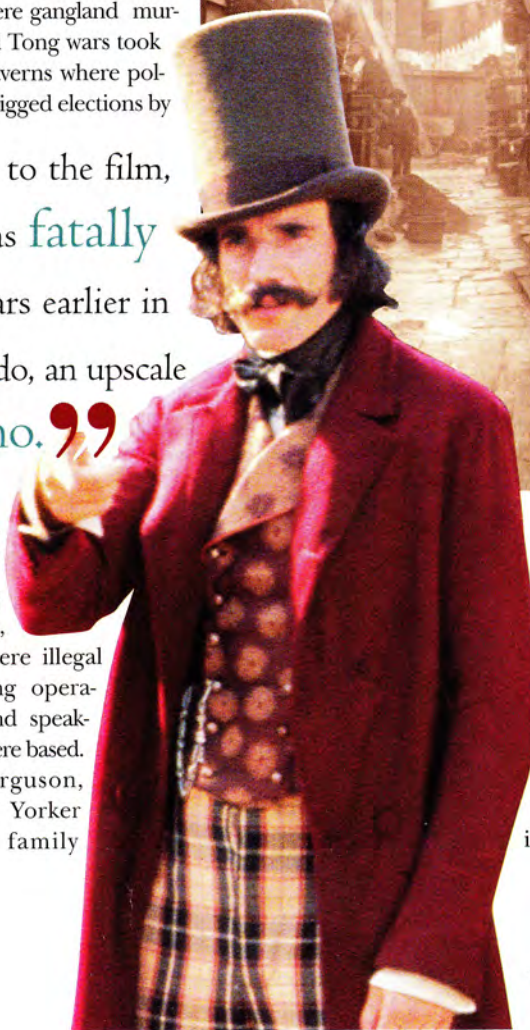
the streets of Chinatown, Little Italy, Soho, and the Bowery, Ferguson points out where gangland murders and Tong wars took place, taverns where politicians rigged elections by

“Contrary to the film, Bill the Butcher was fatally shot six years earlier in a bar that is now Aldo, an upscale shoe store in Soho.”

buying and selling votes, and where illegal gambling operations and speakeasies were based.

Ferguson, a New Yorker whose family

can trace its city roots back to the 1870s, is also intrigued by the evolution of the Mafia's Five Families and weaves stories about “Lucky” Luciano and John Gotti into his walk. “That,” he says, “could fill a tour just on its own.” — *Bill Glavin*



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