

Topics in Black Studies: Race & Urban Space
21:014:303/ 21:050:488
Thurs 2:30- 5:20 pm, Hill Hall Rm. 115
Instructor: Asha Best, asbest@scarletmail.rutgers.edu

Course Description: The word “urban” has two definitions-- the first has to do with cities, and the other has to do with Black popular culture. This course is about understanding the development of this doubly defined term, understanding the relationships between racialized bodies and urban spaces. Using a mixed bag of tools (such as fiction, film, etc.) we will consider the concepts of race and urban space in relation to youth, representations of the ‘hood, protest, criminality, and other relevant topics.

Goals for students (learning outcomes):

- To understand what it means to say that race and space are both constructed and (re)produced.
- To gain a wider vocabulary and set of references to draw on when talking about contemporary meanings of race, racial representation and place.
- To be able to recognize, critically engage and analyze how race and urban space are examined and/or represented in various genres (historical texts, blog posts, novels).
- To hone the ability to engage in meaningful and respectful discussions, both in class and online.
- To develop writing skills by engaging different types of written assignments (from blogs to lengthier argumentative essays).

What & Where are the Required Texts:

- **Book (at NJ Books):** *The Life & Times of Martha Washington* by Frank Miller & Dave Gibbons (ISBN 1595824820)
- **Films:**
 - *Kids* (1995)- On reserve at Dana and available (for free) on YouTube
 - *Batman Begins* (2005)- Available for purchase on YouTube
 - *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) - On reserve at Dana also available for purchase on Amazon and YouTube
 - *District 9* (2009)- Available for purchase on Amazon Instant Video
- **Articles/Essays (on Blackboard in Course Docs):** Shorter texts will be provided electronically.

Office Hours & Contacting the Instructor: Office hours are held from **1pm- 2pm** on **Thursdays** in Conklin Hall. (If you can't make this time, let me know and we can meet via Gchat.) You will have to make an appointment **to discuss your progress** in the course, **to discuss difficulties** that you are having with course concepts, **to brainstorm about upcoming projects** and papers, etc. **If you want to let me know that you will be absent, you shouldn't email me.** Instead, use Rutgers' (extremely efficient) [Self-Reporting Absences app](#). If you have **questions about assignment due dates** refer to the syllabus first, then touch bases with a peer and (finally) shoot me an email (if you're still a bit cloudy). If you should happen to find yourself emailing me, please **treat our emails like formal exchanges** (no chat-appropriate spellings like “ur” instead of your and please include a greeting such as “Hello Instructor” or “Hi Asha).

A Note to Students with Documented Disabilities: This class welcomes all different kinds of learners and needs. Students with disabilities and/or learning differences should consult with the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, Room 302, Robeson Center to get recommendations and arrange for necessary assistance and accommodations, and be in touch with the course instructor as well.

How you will be evaluated (grading):

40%- Weekly Attendance, In-class Participation & Preparation

In-class participation is comprised of both attendance *and* active engagement in class discussions. To be actively engaged you should be able to make **thoughtful comments** throughout each class session that reflect that you have done the assigned reading and that you can respond effectively in classroom debates about different interpretations of the reading. You should ask questions if you are not sure about how to interpret the reading. I don't consider "playing devil's advocate" to be a sophisticated form of participation so please try to be thoughtful and ground your comments using our course materials.

Active engagement in class discussions involves **listening** to your classmates (and to your instructor). Please keep in mind that it is very difficult to actively engage while you are involved in another discussion on your cell phone, laptop or tablet (or, if you are old-school, by passing notes to one another). Students who are repeatedly engaging in outside discussions (via text, chat, etc) will be asked to excuse themselves and will be marked absent for that session.

Lastly, **take-home assignments** are also figured into your participation grade, as they measure how prepared you are to engage in class discussion.

One unexcused absence (to be used at your discretion **except on the day of the writing workshop**) is allowed over the course of the semester. To indicate that you will be absent you will need to use Rutgers' [Self-Reporting absences](#) app. More than one unexcused absence, tardiness, and leaving early from class sessions will result in a reduction of your participation grade.

20%- Film Critique- Blog Post- Due *either* Feb 27th or Apr 17th via WordPress

After watching **either** *Kids* or *Slumdog Millionaires*, you will be required to submit a film critique in the form of a well written, well curated 3 paragraph (minimum) blog post. (You will need to [sign up for a WordPress account](#) if you do not already have one.) Blog posts **must** include hyperlinks to other web content and relevant images. Additional details about how to craft a blog post will be provided.

20%- 5 pg. argumentative essay- Due Mar 13 by 5 p.m. via Blackboard (under Assignments)

Using only texts from the syllabus, you must craft a well polished argumentative essay. This is an exercise in conventional/ 'academic' writing. Because this type of writing is an area of weakness for some (and an area of strength for others) part of this assignment is about collaboration and includes working through and submitting a draft, peer reviewing the work of others, having your own writing constructively critiqued, and attending the in-class writing workshop on Mar 6th.

20%- DIY Exam- Due May 8 via Blackboard (under Assignments)

Your final project is to craft an exam that could be used as a 'final' for the course. Based on a template that I will provide, you will come up with 20 'identifications' (key terms, phrases, characters, etc), 4 short answer questions (which may put two or three course texts into conversation or ask for a deep analysis of one text), and 1 essay question that test a student's familiarity, understanding and ability to expand upon course material from the semester.

Note: Assignments submitted past the due date will not be graded.

Academic Integrity Policy: All assignments done for this course must adhere to Rutgers University's [policy on academic integrity](#). Rutgers University treats cheating and plagiarism as serious offenses, and violations of the university honor code will be prosecuted to the full extent that is permitted. All

students must sign off on the “Academic Integrity Agreement” form on the course’s Blackboard site.

Schedule of Readings & Assignments:

Jan 23- Introductions

Due by next class: Read up to pg. 52 of Frantz Fanon’s “Concerning Violence,” watch the film *District 9* (see also Emory’s Post-Colonial Studies site-- focus on “Historical Background” and “Apartheid in Action” sections)

Jan 30- Apartheid Logic

For class on Feb 13th: Romare Bearden’s ‘Rocket to the Moon’ (view image), listen to Gil Scott-Heron “Whitey on the Moon”, listen to John F. Kennedy, “Special Message to Congress on Urgent National Needs,” read George Lipsitz’s “The White Spatial Imaginary” and Kerner Commission Summary Report. Also, **prepare an outline of Lipsitz’s chapter.**

Feb 6- No class

Feb 13- Crisis Management

Due by next class: Due by next class: Read Fiona Ngô “Punk in the Shadow of War,” and **prepare a 5 question mock quiz based on the article (you may include up to two true/false questions).**

Feb 20- Riotous Cities

Due by next class: Watch the film *Kids* (Film Critique **option 1**-- submit via Wordpress by 2:30 p.m. Feb 27th)

Feb 27- Urban Youth/ Contagion

Due by next class: Send 3-5 pg draft of the argumentative essay to your writing group and to me via Google Docs **by Monday Mar 3rd.** You must **read each others drafts** carefully and **complete peer review worksheets** by the beginning of class on **Mar 6th.**

Mar 6- In-Class Writing Workshop

Mar 13- No class- Argumentative Essay (Final Draft) Due via Blackboard by 5 p.m.

Mar 20- Spring Break - Over the break, read “Give me Liberty” in *The Life & Times of Martha Washington*; listen to Slick Rick’s “Children’s Story,” Eric B. and Rakim’s “Juice (Know the Ledge)” and The Pharcyde’s “Runnin’”

Mar 27

Due by next class: Watch the film *Batman Begins* and read Neil Smith’s “Giuliani Time: The Revanchist 1990s”

Apr 3- Security, Control, Order

Due by next class: TBA

Apr 10- TBD

Due by next class: Watch the film *Slumdog Millionaire* and read Ananya Roy’s “Slumdog Cities” (Film Critique **option 2**-- submit via via Wordpress by 2:30 p.m. Apr 17)

Apr 17- Slumdog Urbanisms

Due by next class: Read “State of the Art,” “Martha Goes to War,” “Martha Saves the World” and “Martha Washington Dies” in *The Life & Times of Martha Washington* and **prepare a playlist of up to 5 songs that you would add as a soundtrack to these chapters**

Apr 24- The Post-Apocalyptic City

Due by next class: Clyde Woods “Life After Death”

May 1- Last class (wrap-up & retrospective)

May 8- DIY Final Due (via Blackboard)

Additional Information (that you may actually find useful):

About the course material:

There are many ways to study the relationship between race and urban space. The academic fields of urban history, urban planning, geography, urban theory, sociology (amongst many others) all take varied approaches to understanding this very intersection between bodies and cities.

Our course takes a slightly different approach to critically theorizing race and place. While we are drawing on key questions, concepts and thinkers of urban history, geography and critical race theory, we will be reading an array of genres and creative texts throughout the semester. **If you are interested in foundational works in urban history, I would be happy to suggest a few texts for you to read.**

How to approach the reading & what to take notes on:

- Pay attention to **genre**. Reading a novel is different than reading a blog, and likewise, different than reading a chapter out of a book. Is the text fantasy or is it memoir?
- Look at the **discussion topic** for the upcoming class. How does the assigned text fit into a discussion on youth or violence (for example)?
- **Note specific passages**, page numbers, song lyrics (etc.) that you would like to talk about in class or in your essay assignments.

Campus Resources:

- [The Writing Center](#) - While this is not a “writing intensive course,” there are two assignments that require you to write a substantial amount. Many students struggle with their writing. If you have trouble writing, please consider contacting The Writing Center (located in Conklin Hall).
- [Disability Services](#)- As mentioned on the first page of the syllabus, students with documented learning differences or disabilities should contact The Office of Student Life to request accommodations. They offer many services, including note-taking assistance and scheduling class in physically accessible locations.