

Topics in Urban Cultures: Space and Place in Contemporary America
26.050.540.01/26.510.533.01
Dr. Kyle Riismandel
T/530-810PM
Conklin 445
Spring 2023
Syllabus

Course Description

This is a reading seminar intended to give graduate students a foundation in the questions, methods, evidence, and modes of analysis related to the interdisciplinary study of space and place (broadly conceived) in America after 1970.

Through critical engagement with secondary sources, students will learn how to research and write about American spaces and places including not only case studies of cities and suburbs but also prisons, cyberspace, office parks, commercial centers, and more.

That work will inform and assist students in researching, writing, and revising their own critical genealogy of scholarship related to the study of space and place. As part of that process, we will work collaboratively to help each other including practice giving and receiving constructive feedback.

Ideally, each student's work will be related to their field of study and stage in their degree program and/or career such as a preparation for Master's essay, capstone, thesis, dissertation, comprehensive field exam, teaching in a particular subject area, etc.

Learning Objectives

- Identify, understand, and critically assess approaches to studying space and place in recent American history
- Practice giving and receiving constructive feedback to become a more effective writer and editor
- Identify, understand, and critically assess through comparison methods, disciplines, or studies of space or place in recent American history

Organization and Structure

This is a readings seminar. That means the bulk of your effort will be in reading and evaluating other scholars' work to understand contemporary scholars' definitions of and approaches and to studying space and place. Week-to-week, you will be reading, taking notes, writing discussion questions, and discussing a monograph.

In addition to our weekly work, over the course of the second half of the semester, you will be constructing a genealogy of a particular approach to studying space and place or the various methodologies employed in analyzing a particular space or place (Atlanta, prisons, schools, etc).

Requirements and Assignments

The foremost requirement is a commitment to making a good faith effort to complete the work of the course. At times it may be difficult, annoying, or even overwhelming, but, graduate courses work best when everyone is working and participating. So, come with an open mind, commitment to yourself, your classmates, and me, and a willingness to be challenged, be lost, be scared, be invigorated, and, ultimately, to learn.

Assignments

- For each reading, you will not hand in but should focus your notetaking on and be prepared to discuss the following:
 - What is the argument?
 - What is the primary approach or methodology/field of study? (e.g. sociology, history, literature studies, etc.)
 - What is the intervention in that field or fields of study?
 - That is, what new knowledge did they create and how does it relate to what others have written on that topic?
 - What primary source evidence is used to make that argument?
 - What are the strengths and weaknesses of this analysis?
- Class Engagement (15%)
 - Class engagement is demonstrated by:
 - Completing required work before class including assigned reading, discussion questions (both generating them and reading them), and any ad hoc work
 - Active participation in class discussions which includes speaking substantively on the issue at hand, active listening to other members of the class, thoughtful responses to others' comments, and asking questions in good faith (no playing devil's advocate)
- Discussion Questions/Prompts (10%)
 - For one reading, you will write a set of 2-4 questions for the class to consider during discussion
 - These will be sent to me and posted to Canvas at least 24 hours prior to class
 - Please see the assignment sheet on Canvas for further instructions on generating engaging and substantive questions
- Reverse Engineering (10%)
 - This assignment asks you to choose one of our readings to “reverse engineer”
 - The goal of this assignment is to understand how a research project on space and place is conceptualized and executed by taking it apart
 - Please see the assignment sheet on Canvas for further instructions
- Genealogy (50%)
 - This is an analytical essay that considers how at least 3 scholars have approached the study of space and place in American history.
 - In your analysis, you will compare how these scholars addressed:
 - The study of a shared particular space or place like a city or shopping mall
 - OR
 - Space and place across different terrain and/or time where one study, for example, might consider the hospital while another takes Detroit as a case study

- You will construct an argument that explains how these works, scholars, and approaches fit together through an analysis of their strengths and weaknesses
- Please see the assignment sheets on Canvas for further instructions
- Draft Feedback (10%)
 - This assignment asks you to read and give written feedback on a classmate's genealogy project draft using a rubric.
 - Please see the assignment sheet on Canvas for further instructions

Late Work

- Discussion questions cannot be submitted late. If you miss your deadline, you will have to choose another book and inform the instructor of your choice.
- The reverse engineering assignment can be accepted late for partial credit.
- Due to the nature of the work for the genealogy project, all parts of the assignment must be submitted on time as there is no logic to submitting a proposal after you have completed an outline or a draft, etc.

Course Policies

Attendance

Graduate seminars work best when we are all present and prepared. However, I recognize that may not always be possible given the ongoing pandemic and other personal obligations. If you have to miss class to attend a university sponsored event, to observe a religious holiday, or due to a documented illness or family emergency, those absences will be excused. Our priorities are always health and family first.

If you do miss class, I encourage you to contact me so that you can get caught up on class material.

Classroom Conduct

In this course, we welcome intellectual inquiry and thoughtful discussion of difficult questions, but hate speech and disrespectful comments will not be tolerated. We must come to class with an open mind, a willingness to learn, and fundamental respect for the humanity of each person in the room and the people we discuss.

Office hours/student appointments

I do office hours by appointment. Please email me if you would like to meet to discuss any aspect of the class, your work or career, or the American Studies program. I find this system works better than set office hours, particularly for graduate students with many overlapping scheduling commitments.

Academic dishonesty

Students are expected to obey the Rutgers honor code. The goal of this course is to evaluate your understanding of course materials and ability to express that understanding. Cheating, plagiarizing or otherwise violating the code of academic integrity not only breaks the trust between professor and student but keeps you from learning course content and improving writing and critical thinking skills. I am here to help so if you are having trouble, do not cheat, ask me for help.

Generally speaking, it is a violation of the academic integrity code to:

- Use someone else's words or ideas without attribution
- Copy content from someone else's paper, quiz, or exam
- Pay for course assignments to be complete by someone else

The university's policy on academic integrity is available at:

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

Accommodations

If you require an accommodation, please complete the Registration form on the ODS website at <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

For more information, please visit the Office of Disability Services in the Paul Robeson Campus Center, Suite 219 or contact odsnewark@rutgers.edu. I am happy to do anything to help you learn so registering with ODS and having them supply instructors with proper guidance helps me and your other instructors do that.

Grading

- Class Engagement – 20%
- Discussion Questions/Prompts – 10%
- Reverse Engineering – 10%
- Draft Feedback – 10%
- Genealogy – 50%
 - Proposal – 5%
 - Due Mar. 10, 5pm
 - Outline – 5%
 - Due Apr. 7, 5PM
 - Draft – 10%
 - Due Apr. 21, 5PM
 - Final Draft – 30%

Required Texts

- Kemi Adeyemi, *Feels Right: Black Queer Women and the Politics of Partying in Chicago* (Duke University Press, 2022)
- Lawrence Brown, *The Black Butterfly: The Harmful Politics of Race and Space in America*. (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021)
- Benjamin Holtzman, *The Long Crisis: New York City and the Path to Neoliberalism* (University of Oxford Press, 2021)
- Alexandra Lange, *Meet Me by the Fountain: An Inside History of the Mall* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022)
- Peter L'Official, *Urban Legends: The South Bronx in Representation and Ruin* (Harvard University Press, 2020)
- Cameron Logan, *Historic Capital: Preservation, Race, and Real Estate in Washington, D.C.* (University of Minnesota Press 2017)

- Shannon Mattern, *A City is Not a Computer: Other Urban Intelligences* (Princeton University Press, 2021)
- Kyle T. Mays, *City of Disposessions: Indigenous Peoples, African Americans, and the Creation of Modern Detroit* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022)
- Charlton McIlwain, *Black Software: The Internet & Racial Justice from the AfroNet to Black Lives Matter* (Oxford University Press, 2019)
- Louise Mazingo, *Pastoral Capitalism: A History of Suburban Corporate Landscapes* (MIT Press, 2014)
- Mary Rizzo, *Come and Be Shocked: Baltimore Beyond John Waters and The Wire* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020)

In weeks 10 and 11, we will, as a class, choose between two readings:

Week 10

- Lucas Bessire, *Running Out: In Search of Water on the High Plains* (Princeton University Press, 2022)
- Megan Black, *The Global Interior: Mineral Frontiers and American Power* (Harvard University Press, 2018)

Week 11

- Melanie Newport, *This Is My Jail: Local Politics and the Rise of Mass Incarceration* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022)
- Judah Schept, *Coal, Cages, Crisis: The Rise of the Prison Economy in Central Appalachia* (New York University Press, 2022)

Course Expectations/Studying Space and Place

Week 1 – Jan. 17

- Henri Lefebvre, [The Production of Space, “The Plan of the Present Work,” pp. 1-15, 26-46](#)
- Timothy Creswell, *Place: A Short Introduction*, 1-14

Choose Readings for Discussion Questions and Reverse Engineering, Due Jan. 20, 5PM

Unit 1 – Space, Place, Identity, and Representation

Week 2 – Jan. 24

- Kyle T. Mays, *City of Disposessions: Indigenous Peoples, African Americans, and the Creation of Modern Detroit* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022)

Week 3 – Jan. 31

- Charlton McIlwain, *Black Software: The Internet & Racial Justice from the AfroNet to Black Lives Matter* (Oxford University Press, 2019)

Week 4 – Feb. 7

- Kemi Adeyemi, *Feels Right: Black Queer Women and the Politics of Partying in Chicago* (Duke University Press, 2022)

Week 5 – Feb. 14

- Peter L’Official, *Urban Legends: The South Bronx in Representation and Ruin* (Harvard University Press, 2020)

Unit 2 – Space, Place, and Capital

Week 6 – Feb. 21

- Benjamin Holtzman, *The Long Crisis: New York City and the Path to Neoliberalism* (University of Oxford Press, 2021)

Week 7 – Feb 28

- Louise Mozingo, *Pastoral Capitalism: A History of Suburban Corporate Landscapes* (MIT Press, 2014)

Week 8 – Mar. 7

- Cameron Logan, *Historic Capital: Preservation, Race, and Real Estate in Washington, D.C.* (University of Minnesota Press 2017)

Proposal Due: March 10, 5PM

Spring Break March 11-19

Week 9 – March 21

- Alexandra Lange, *Meet Me by the Fountain: An Inside History of the Mall* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022)

Unit 3 – Space, Place, Resources, and Regulation

Week 10 – Mar. 28

Choice:

- Lucas Bessire, *Running Out: In Search of Water on the High Plains* (Princeton University Press, 2022)
- Megan Black, *The Global Interior: Mineral Frontiers and American Power* (Harvard University Press, 2018)

Week 11 – Apr. 4

Choice:

- Melanie Newport, *This Is My Jail: Local Politics and the Rise of Mass Incarceration* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022)
- Judah Schept, *Coal, Cages, Crisis: The Rise of the Prison Economy in Central Appalachia* (New York University Press, 2022)

Week 12 – Apr. 11

- Shannon Mattern, *A City is Not a Computer: Other Urban Intelligences* (Princeton University Press, 2021)

Unit 4 – Baltimore in Comparison

Week 13 – Apr. 18

- Mary Rizzo, *Come and Be Shocked: Baltimore Beyond John Waters and The Wire* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020)

Rough Draft Due Apr. 21, 5PM

Week 14 – Apr. 25

- Lawrence Brown, *The Black Butterfly: The Harmful Politics of Race and Space in America*. (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021)