

"The Ghetto": Race, Place and the Ethnographic Impossible

Office hours: by appointment

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FALL 2017

Course Overview

There has been a recent resurgence in explicit academic invocations of "the ghetto" to describe contemporary urban life in 21st century America. Most of these scholarly interventions, from sociology to philosophy, are offered as a space for talking about how race and class continue to get mapped onto concrete geographical spaces in ways that reproduce or even compound social inequities and injustice. Using mostly (though not exclusively) ethnographic texts, this course seeks to unpack the key concepts/themes, theoretical frameworks, political controversies and local activism/activities/organizing that define and over-determine engagements with "the ghetto" as a material and symbolic site of contestation. Several key questions will guide our explorations: Is "the ghetto" ethnographically or analytically accessible? How might one attempt to represent the nexus of racial and class-based vulnerability in newfangled and transformative ways? What kinds of issues tend to get fetishized, vulgarized, or rendered invisible in conventional depictions of "the ghetto" and "ghetto dwellers" who reside there?

Assignments

Reviews (25% of final grade)

Each student will review two texts:

1. Mitchell Duneier's *Ghetto*
2. A documentary film, fictional film, or other popular media content (i.e., *Chiraq*, *Let the Fire Burn*, a season of *The Wire*, *Empire* or *Being Mary Jane*, or an album such as *Lemonade*, *The Black Album*, or *To Pimp a Butterfly*)

*The first review is due **September 29th**. The second review is due **December 12th**.*

Class-Wide Multimodal Project (50% of final grade)

Students will be asked to contribute to a single, class-wide, multi-modal research project on the intersections of race and class in the city of Philadelphia. As part of that collective effort, students will choose from one of the following as the format/genre for their term assignment: short films, audio or written ethnographies, photo-essays/exhibits, and VR tours.

Class participation, especially active listening (25% of final grade)

Required Texts:

Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Aimee Meredith Cox, *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship* (Duke University Press, 2015).

Mitchell Duneier, *Ghetto: The Invention of a Place, the History of an Idea* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017). (Read for book review assignment.)

Laurence Ralph, *Renegade Dreams: Living through Injury in Gangland Chicago* (University of Chicago Press, 2014).

All of these books are available at the Penn Book Store (except for the Duneier).

The excerpts from book chapters are available as PDFs on the Canvas site.

Wednesday, August 30th

Touring “the ghetto”: an introduction to the course

Listen to: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYuC_3IJCFE

Wednesday, September 6th

One version of an overview - a little historical/conceptual context

Read: “Symposium on the Ghetto,” *City and Community* 7 (4): 347-398

Excerpt from Elijah Anderson, *Code of the Street*, “Down Germantown Avenue”

Examine: <http://thepeoplesreport.com/> (Also, read the *Executive Summary*.)

Wednesday, September 13th

Theorizing the scope/scale of “the urban problem”

Read: Excerpt from Carr and Lempert, *Scale: Discourse and Dimensions of Social Life*, “Introduction: Pragmatics of Scale”

Excerpt from Michael Jeffries, *Thug Life*, “From a Cool Complex to Complex Cool”

Excerpt from John L. Jackson, Jr. *Real Black*, “Real Harlemites”

Examine: Maya Stovall, *Liquor Store Theater*, vol 1, no 2: <https://vimeo.com/100002706>

Wednesday, September 20th

Continuing to theorize and re-theorize the “problem”

Read: Excerpt from *Social Policy and Social Justice*, “Urban Food Desserts” and “Work”

Excerpt from Catherine Fennel, *Last Project Standing*, “Across Damen”

Excerpt from Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, “This Battlefield Called Life”

Excerpt from Tommie Shelby, *Dark Ghettos*, “Injustice”

DUE: Initial one-page proposals for multimodal projects, including genre/format.

Wednesday, September 27th

Notions of “community” in the context of never-ending change

Read: Excerpt from Merida M. Rúa, *A Grounded Identity*, “A Female Network of Domestic Workers, Student Allies and Social Workers”

Excerpt from Schlichtman, Parch and Hill, *Gentrifier*, “Tools”

Excerpt from, Derek S. Hyra, *The New Urban Revolution*, “City Politics and Black Protest”

(Due Sept 29th: 1st review.)

Wednesday, October 4th

Stereotypes, Storytelling and the Sociological Imagination

Read: Excerpts from Alice Goffman, *On the Run*, “The Art of Running” and “Appendix: A Methodological Note”

Excerpts from Randol Contreras, *The Stickup Kids*, “Introduction”, “Getting the Shit”, and “Drug Robbery Torture” (Optional: “The Girl”)

In-Class Discussion about our multimodal projects.

Wednesday, October 11th

Services, Rights, and Privileges in the Context of Spatial Vulnerability

Read: Excerpt from Mohammad Abdul Qadeer, *Multicultural Cities*, “The Pluralism of Urban Services”

Excerpt from Damien M. Sojoyner, *First Strike*, “Land of Smoke and Mirrors”

Excerpt from Rashad Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness*, Introduction, Chapter 3 “Carceral Interstice”

Wednesday, October 18th

From Cultural Capitals to Underground Economies

Read: Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect*, pp i-173. first half of the book (the introduction through Chapter 4).

Wednesday, October 25th

From Cultural Capitals to Underground Economies (part 2)

Read: Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect*, pp 174 - 351. second half of the book
In-Class Discussion about everyone’s contributions to collective multimodal project.

DUE: *Overviews of proposed multimodal projects.*

Wednesday, November 1st

Continuing to Dream, Post-MLK and Robin DGK

Read: Laurence Ralph, *Renegade Dreams*

Wednesday, November 8th

Gender, Embodiment, and Agency in the City

Read: Aimee Meredith Cox, *Shapeshifters*

Wednesday, November 15th

Undoing Some Logics of Ghetto Representation?

Student Presentations on Multimodal Projects

Read: Excerpt from AK Asante, *Buck*

Read: Excerpt from Yaa Gyasi, *Homegoing*

Wednesday, November 29th

Undoing Some Logics of Ghetto Representation?, Continued

Student Presentations on Multimodal Projects

Wednesday, December 6th

Final unveiling/submission of multimodal projects.

(DUE December 12th: 2nd review.)