

ENGL1080.07: Literature Core: Prisoners and Visionaries
Eric Weiskott
Fall 2018, T/R 10:30-11:15
Office hours: T 1:00-2:00 (Stokes S407)

While the United States makes up 4% of the world's population, it imprisons 22% of the world's prisoners. This course takes the prison system as a starting point for investigating literary imagination. Many celebrated writers (Margery Kempe; Queen Elizabeth I; Ezra Pound; Martin Luther King, Jr.) were both prisoners and visionaries. Others (Shakespeare, Octavia Butler) envision the world differently through visions of imprisonment. We will be guided by Michel Foucault's foundational analysis of the modern prison in *Discipline and Punish*.

As part of a special English Department pilot program, this section of Literature Core is paired with Professor Chris Boucher's section, Literature Core: Literature of the Fantastic. Connected by the theme of imagination, the two sections will share some readings and events and come together for reflection sessions twice during the semester.

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at the BC Bookstore)

Mumia Abu-Jamal and Marc Lamont Hill, *The Classroom and the Cell: Conversations on Black Life in America* (Third World, 2012)
Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Vintage, 1995)
William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Peter Holland (Penguin, 2016)
Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (Dial, 2009)

RECOMMENDED TEXT

Octavia Butler, *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (Seven Stories, 2005)

SCHEDULE

Why the prison?

Aug 28 Introduction to literary analysis
Valentine, "In prison"
Aug 30 Abu-Jamal and Hill, *The Classroom and the Cell*, introduction and chapter 5

Before the prison

Sept 4 Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, part 1, chapter 1 ("The body of the condemned")
Sheridan, "Translator's Note," in Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, p. ix
Watch Chomsky and Foucault debate (1971)
([youtube.com/watch?v=mj2VJ7oexKc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mj2VJ7oexKc))
*Discussion post 1 due on Canvas
Sept 6 Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe* (excerpts)
Weems, *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1995-1996)
(carriemaeweems.net/galleries/from-here.html)
Weems, *Mandingo* (2010) (carriemaeweems.net/galleries/mandingo.html)
(Sept 7) Weems exhibition student opening, McMullen Museum of Art (optional)
(Sept 10) Weems, Lowell Lecture, 7:00pm, Devlin 110 (required)
Sept 11 Elizabeth I, "Written on a Wall at Woodstock"

(poetryfoundation.org/poems/44217/written-on-a-wall-at-woodstock)
 Elizabeth I, “Written with a Diamond on her Window at Woodstock”
 (poetryfoundation.org/poems/44216/written-with-a-diamond-on-her-window-at-woodstock)

Dumitrescu, “Poems in Prison”

- (Sept 11) First evening reflection session (exact time and location TBD)
 Sept 13 Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, acts 1-2
 Sept 18 *Tempest*, acts 3-5
 *Discussion post 2 due on Canvas

The body in question

- Sept 20 Abu-Jamal and Hill, *The Classroom and the Cell*, ch. 1
 Charles d’Orléans, “Ballade 8”
 Sept 25 Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, pt. 3, ch. 1 (“Docile bodies”)
 *Discussion post 3 due on Canvas
 Sept 27 Levi, *The Periodic Table*, “Gold” and “Cerium”
 Pound, *Cantos*, 81
 Oct 2 Hisaye Yamamoto, “The Legend of Miss Sasagawara”
 Traise Yamamoto, “Coded Critiques” (excerpt)
 *Paper 1 due on Canvas (1-2 pp.)

Prisons of the mind

- Oct 4 Abu-Jamal and Hill, *The Classroom and the Cell*, ch. 6
 King, “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
 Oct 11 Writing workshop
 Oct 16 Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, pt. 3, ch. 3 (“Panopticism”)
 *Discussion post 4 due on Canvas
 Oct 18 Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, chapters 1-3
 Reading quiz 1 (in class)
 (Oct 18) *Invisible*, 7:30pm, Robsham Theater (for extra credit)
 Oct 23 *Slaughterhouse-Five*, chs. 4-6
 Watch Muhammad Ali on the Vietnam War (1967)
 (youtube.com/watch?v=HeFMyrWIZ68)
 *Discussion post 5 due on Canvas: brief response to *Invisible* (for extra credit)
 Oct 25 *Slaughterhouse-Five*, chs. 7-10
 Required film viewing: *Cool Hand Luke* (1967) (on reserve at O’Neill)
 (Oct 25) Second evening reflection session (exact time and location TBD)

Envisioning culture

- Oct 30 Abu-Jamal and Hill, *The Classroom and the Cell*, ch. 3
 Watch Childish Gambino, “This Is America” (2018)
 (youtube.com/watch?v=VYOjWnS4cMY)
 Paper planning exercise
 Nov 1 Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, pt. 4, ch. 1 (“Complete and austere institutions”)
 Nov 6 Herrera, “Blood on the Wheel”
 (poetryfoundation.org/poems/55752/blood-on-the-wheel)

Lalami, *The Moor's Account*, chapter 1
*Paper 2 due on Canvas (3-4 pp.)

“Delinquents”

- Nov 8 Abu-Jamal and Hill, *The Classroom and the Cell*, ch. 8
West, foreword to Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*
Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, introduction
Watch Dead Prez, “Hell Yeah” (2004) (youtube.com/watch?v=kGjSq4HqP9Y)
- Nov 13 Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, pt. 4, ch. 2 (“Illegalities and delinquency”)
- Nov 15 Butler, *Bloodchild*, preface
Butler, “Bloodchild” (including the afterword)
Genis, “Reading Prison Novels in Prison”
(thedailybeast.com/reading-prison-novels-in-prison)

The carceral imagination

- Nov 20 Abu-Jamal and Hill, *The Classroom and the Cell*, ch. 9
Lovelace, “To Althea, from Prison”
(poetryfoundation.org/poems/44657/to-althea-from-prison)
- Nov 27 Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, pt. 4, ch. 3 (“The carceral”)
Smith, *The Prison and the American Imagination*, epilogue
Paper planning exercise
- Nov 29 Melville, “Bartleby, The Scrivener”
*Paper 3 skeleton due on Canvas (1 p.)
- (Dec 2) *Paper drafts to partner (2-6 pp.)
- Dec 4 Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, chapter 6
Kaba and Hayes, “A Jailbreak of the Imagination”
(truthout.org/articles/a-jailbreak-of-the-imagination-seeing-prisons-for-what-they-are-and-demanding-transformation)
“Pope Francis Holds Vatican Mass for 1,000 Prisoners”
(bbc.com/news/world-europe-37890622)
Reading quiz 2 (in class)
- Dec 6 Paper workshop/presentations
- Dec 13 *Paper 3 due on Canvas (5-6 pp.)

GRADING

Discussion posts 10%
Paper 1 (noticing), 1-2 pp. 15%
Paper 2 (analysis), 3-4 pp. 20%
Paper 3 (context), 5-6 pp. 25%
Participation (including attending Weems lecture) 10%
Reading quizzes 10% each (20% total)

OBJECTIVES

You will learn to read literary texts critically and express arguments about them in class and in writing. You will learn to recognize the conventions of the major genres of English literature. You will explore the history and politics of prisons and imprisonment, with focus on the

contemporary United States. Special emphasis will be given to the tasks of analyzing texts closely and crafting persuasive arguments.

ASSIGNMENTS

The Discussion posts should reflect your initial reactions to the course material. They can, but need not, articulate an argument about the material. Discussion post 2 is a brief response to Weems's lecture. Discussion post 5 is an optional brief response to opening night of *Invisible*, worth 1 point of extra credit on the 4.0 scale for the Discussion grade. Papers 1 and 2 should use the reading skills developed in the first half of the semester to pursue coherent arguments about one or more texts covered up to that point. Paper 1 will be assessed primarily for its ability to notice, that is, to identify a significant feature of a text. Paper 2 will be assessed primarily for its ability to analyze a text. Paper 3 stages an extended argument, situating a text in a context and making reference to prior scholarship.

READING QUIZZES

The two reading quizzes will each consist of twenty multiple-choice questions. They will cover the content of the course texts up to that point in the semester as well as the critical vocabulary we are developing to discuss them.

PAPER PLANNING

Students will review each other's prospective topics for Papers 2 and 3, and they will hand in an ungraded skeleton draft of Paper 3. On the final day of class, students will discuss drafts of Paper 3 in pairs and present their partner's ideas informally to the class. Students are invited to meet individually with the instructor during the semester to discuss their writing.

PARTICIPATION

Students are expected to attend each class having completed the assigned reading and/or film viewing. Students should come to class prepared to discuss literary topics and complete brief writing exercises. This is a discussion-based class, and you typically will not need laptops or smart phones.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Boston College places great value on academic integrity (bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/integrity.html). I have a zero tolerance policy for intentional plagiarism. All quotations or paraphrases of sources must be cited parenthetically or in a footnote (examples: libguides.bc.edu/c.php?g=44446&p=281300).

ACCESSIBILITY

If you are a student with a disability seeking accommodations in this course, please contact Kathy Duggan, (617) 552-8093, at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities, or Paulette Durrett, (617) 552-3470, in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities.

TITLE IX REPORTING

Please be aware that as a Boston College faculty member, I am obligated to report to the Student Affairs Title IX Coordinator any case of sexual misconduct that any student discloses to me.