"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:


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


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_3JCFE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYuC_3JCFE)

**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/](http://thepeoplesreport.com/) (Also, read the Executive Summary.)

**Wednesday, September 13th**

Theorizing the scope/scale of “the urban problem”


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](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 Identidad, “A Female Network of Domesticics, 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”
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.)