

ENGL1080.03: Literature Core: Prisoners and Visionaries

Eric Weiskott

TA: Samantha Sharp

Fall 2020, T/R 10:30–11:15am

Office hours: W 10:00–11:00am (Stokes S407)

[COVID-19 contingency: virtual office hours by appointment via Zoom:  
[bccte.zoom.us/j/9227771962](https://bccte.zoom.us/j/9227771962)]

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 (William 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*.

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 and 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?**

- Sept 1 Introduction to literary analysis  
Valentine, "In prison"
- Sept 3 Abu-Jamal and Hill, *The Classroom and the Cell*, introduction and chapter 5

**Before the prison**

- Sept 8 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, part 1, chapter 1 ("The body of the condemned")  
Sheridan, "Translator's Note," in Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. ix  
Watch Chomsky and Foucault debate (1971)  
([youtube.com/watch?v=J5wuB\\_p63YM](https://youtube.com/watch?v=J5wuB_p63YM))  
\*Discussion post 1 due on Canvas
- Sept 10 Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe* (excerpts)  
Required film viewing: *13th* (2016) ([youtube.com/watch?v=krfcq5pF8u8](https://youtube.com/watch?v=krfcq5pF8u8))
- Sept 15 Elizabeth I, "Written on a Wall at Woodstock"  
([poetryfoundation.org/poems/44217/written-on-a-wall-at-woodstock](https://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](https://poetryfoundation.org/poems/44216/written-with-a-diamond-on-her-window-at-woodstock))

- Dumitrescu, "Poems in Prison"  
 \*Discussion post 2 due on Canvas
- Sept 17 Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, acts 1-2  
 Note-taking workshop
- Sept 22 *Tempest*, acts 3-5  
 \*Discussion post 3 due on Canvas

### The body in question

- Sept 24 Abu-Jamal and Hill, *The Classroom and the Cell*, ch. 1  
 Charles d'Orléans, ballade 8  
 Weems, *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1995-1996)  
 (carriemaeweems.net/galleries/from-here.html)
- Sept 29 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pt. 3, ch. 1 ("Docile bodies")  
 \*Discussion post 4 due on Canvas
- Oct 1 Levi, *The Periodic Table*, "Gold" and "Cerium"  
 Pound, *Cantos*, 81
- Oct 6 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 8 Abu-Jamal and Hill, *The Classroom and the Cell*, ch. 6  
 King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail"  
 Watch Dead Prez, "They Schools" (2000) (youtube.com/watch?v=YSWwWdAw-h8)
- Oct 15 Writing workshop
- Oct 20 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pt. 3, ch. 3 ("Panopticism")
- Oct 22 Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, chapters 1-3  
 Reading quiz 1 (in class) [COVID-19 contingency: take-home, open-book quiz]
- Oct 27 *Slaughterhouse-Five*, chs. 4-6  
 Watch Muhammad Ali on the Vietnam War (1967)  
 (youtube.com/watch?v=HeFMyrWIZ68)
- Oct 29 *Slaughterhouse-Five*, chs. 7-10  
 Required film viewing: *Cool Hand Luke* (1967) (available as a DVD at O'Neill)

### Envisioning culture

- Nov 3 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 5 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pt. 4, ch. 1 ("Complete and austere institutions")
- Nov 10 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 12 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](https://youtube.com/watch?v=kGjSq4HqP9Y))
- Nov 17 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pt. 4, ch. 2 (“Illegalities and delinquency”)
- Nov 19 Butler, *Bloodchild*, preface  
 Butler, “Bloodchild” (including the afterword)  
 Genis, “Reading Prison Novels in Prison”  
 ([thedailybeast.com/reading-prison-novels-in-prison](https://thedailybeast.com/reading-prison-novels-in-prison))

**The carceral imagination**

- Nov 24 Abu-Jamal and Hill, *The Classroom and the Cell*, ch. 9  
 Lovelace, “To Althea, from Prison”  
 ([poetryfoundation.org/poems/44657/to-althea-from-prison](https://poetryfoundation.org/poems/44657/to-althea-from-prison))
- Dec 1 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pt. 4, ch. 3 (“The carceral”)  
 Smith, *The Prison and the American Imagination*, epilogue  
 Paper planning exercise
- Dec 3 Melville, “Bartleby, The Scrivener”  
 \*Paper 3 skeleton due on Canvas (1 p.)
- (Dec 6) \*Paper drafts to partner (2–6 pp.)
- Dec 8 Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, chapter 6  
 Kushner, “Is Prison Necessary? Ruth Wilson Gilmore Might Change Your Mind”  
 ([nytimes.com/2019/04/17/magazine/prison-abolition-ruth-wilson-gilmore.html](https://nytimes.com/2019/04/17/magazine/prison-abolition-ruth-wilson-gilmore.html))  
 Reading quiz 2 (in class) [COVID-19 contingency: take-home, open-book quiz]
- Dec 10 Paper workshop/presentations
- (Dec 14) \*Peer review report due on Canvas (1 paragraph)
- Dec 17 \*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 peer review report) 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 anti-Black racism

in 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. 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. Quiz 2 is non-cumulative: it covers only the material since quiz 1.

[COVID-19 contingency: take-home, open-book quizzes.]

### 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 and in a brief (1 paragraph) formal exposition submitted after the last class and graded as part of participation. Students are invited to meet individually with the instructor and the TA 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. Students are expected to complete the peer review process and produce one paragraph summarizing their peer's paper. [COVID-19 contingency: Students are expected to complete the assigned reading. Students who can should attend each Zoom meeting of the class. If the Zoom meeting time, or the Zoom technology, or the need to have a computer and reliable wifi, create problems for you, please speak to me and I will make all possible accommodations. If you fall ill, please speak to me and I will make all possible accommodations. Remember to have your hardcopy course text in front of you. If you never had, or no longer have, one of the texts, please email me and I will help get you a copy. During the Zoom class meetings please keep your attention focused on class as much as possible. I understand this is challenging, and I will be lenient. We're in this together.]

### ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Boston College places great value on academic integrity ([bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/integrity.html](http://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](http://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 MANDATORY 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.