Contemporary Urban Writers
Lehman College English 229
http://urbanwriterscourse.wordpress.com

Fall 2019
Section ZD81: 3 Credits, 3 Hours
Instructor: Henry (Hank) Williams, Adjunct Lecturer, English Department
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Office Location and Hours: Carman 398, Thursday 5-6 or by appointment
Course Location: Carman Hall 350 Tuesdays/Thursdays: 7:45-9 PM

General Description: Fiction, poetry, drama, essays, and other writings by authors examining the personal, cultural, and political dimensions of urban experience past and present.

Detailed Description: This course will be a thematic survey of writers from the last half of the 20th Century to the present focusing on those whose work conveys the urban experience through various genres -- novels, poetry, autobiography -- and in some cases pushes the boundaries of what we consider writing. The focus will be on New York experience viewed in a diasporic sense: as the landing place of immigrants and migrants from the US south, Puerto Rico, and Dominican Republic. A key question we will consider is how the process of adapting to city life, particularly the changes in the time periods covered is conveyed in the works of these writers. We will also ask basic questions such as who lives in the city? What voices are heard and how do various writers articulate their unique experiences? The goal of this course is to become familiar with a few key writers from the New York literary scene from the 1960s to the present and how they relate to the Black Arts, Nuyorican, and hip hop cultural movements.

Requirements: Regular attendance, 3 unannounced pop quizzes, one group presentation, in-class midterm exam, in-class final exam, and three 4-5 page papers. Detailed descriptions of the assignments and due dates will be handed out in class and posted online.

Attendance and Punctuality: Because your participation is crucial to the overall success of the course (Really!), attendance — preferably on time — is important. Please note the following:

- 3 latenesses will be counted as an absence. Lateness is defined as after I officially begin class and take attendance.
- You are allowed 3 absences without penalty. Note that I do not differentiate between “excused” and “unexcused” absences. Do not casually use your absences, then ask to be excused. You get three free absences, period. Treat them as you would sick days at work! After 3 missed classes, your grade will go down: period. Decide accordingly and choose wisely.
- 4 absences will lower your final grade by ½ a letter grade.
- 5 absences will lower your final grade by a full letter grade.
- 6 absences may result in a failing grade.

It is your responsibility to find out what happens in class if you’re absent. Please contact a classmate to get notes and/or important information if you need to miss class and check the course website, which is updated weekly. Do not contact the instructor to ask what was covered in a class you missed.

It is considered polite to let the instructor know if you can’t avoid missing class. Plan carefully. Talk to me if there are unusual circumstances and we can probably work something out, but you should drop this class and register for a section at a better time if you will have problems attending class sessions or will be continually late.

Grading:

- Will be based on an average of group presentation (10%), quizzes (10% total), attendance and participation (10%), papers (3 @ 10% each = 30%), midterm exam (20%), final exam (20%). Note that excessive absences will be subtracted from this final calculation.
Assignments not handed in will be assigned failing grades. Talk to me if you’re having some kind of serious problem completing the work and I’ll try to work out a satisfactory solution. You will be asked to revise and resubmit papers that are unclear and/or have serious structural problems.

Each assignment will have a sheet distributed weeks in advance with exact due dates, format, and grading criteria. Hard copies will be handed out in class and PDFs posted online under the “Assignments” tab.

DO NOT MISS the in-class midterm and final exams. There are no make-up exams except for documented medical emergencies (proof required).

The quizzes will be at the beginning of class and unannounced. There are no make-ups. Be on time and prepared with the reading.

For the attendance and participation grade, you should: show up on time, be prepared with the day’s reading, bring your book to class, and be alert and paying attention.

**Communication:**

- email is the best way to contact me. I will return messages within a day, except for weekends.
- Treat college-related email as professional communication: interact with the instructor and others in the college the same way you would send messages to be read by everyone at work. At a minimum:
  - Write a clear subject line that says exactly what the message is about
  - Identify yourself and which class the message is about (instructors teach a lot of different classes and different sections of the same class)
  - Do not use text-speak: take the time to briefly, but clearly write things out

This course does not use Blackboard. Bookmark the course website [http://urbanwriterscourse.wordpress.com](http://urbanwriterscourse.wordpress.com)

  - follow the simple directions to sign up for e-mail notification of new posts.
  - The password for pages with Readings is 2019. (The same password works for any other password-protected pages on the site.)
  - You can access this from anywhere, including phones and tablet computers and do not need to log-in or use any special software.

**Classroom Policies:**

- Please TURN OFF RINGERS ON CELL PHONES before class. Calls during class time are disrespectful and distract the rest of the class.
- Use of electronic devices (phones, iPads, etc) is not allowed during class. I will ask you to leave the class if you are using any of the above.
- You must bring a paper copy of the day’s reading assignment with you to class.

**Policy on Plagiarism:** In reality, this is a simple proposition. You should do your own work and be sure to properly cite sources for any ideas, words, or thoughts that are not your own or are not common knowledge, even if you are summarizing info you have read elsewhere. I have found that plagiarism primarily happens for 2 reasons: either students don’t allow enough time to complete assignments or they think their work will not be good enough. Reason #1 is not a good one, but you should discuss this with me if you are having time problems rather than resort to cheating. Reason #2 is an even worse proposition. In this class, if you think, make a good effort, and do your best, you will be fine. Your own work will be good enough. If you present work that is not your own, you will fail the assignment and possibly the entire course. Note that college penalties for this can be as severe as expulsion from the college. See policy details here: [http://www.lehman.edu/undergraduate-bulletin/academicintegrity.htm](http://www.lehman.edu/undergraduate-bulletin/academicintegrity.htm)

All violations are reported to the Department of English and college’s Academic Integrity Officer.

Course Objectives (adapted from Lehman English Department guidelines). Students will:

- Utilize literary terminology, critical methods, and various lenses of interpretation in their writing.
• Learn and use the Modern Language Association (MLA) standard for formatting and documenting sources, which is the standard for the Humanities.
• Interpret and critically evaluate texts of various genres, forms, and historical periods.
• Demonstrate knowledge of the historical context of a work or author.
• Integrate primary and secondary sources into their writing.

Course Goals (adapted from Lehman English Department guidelines). Students will:
• Write analytically and creatively, that is to express ideas clearly and incisively in their writing in ways required both inside and outside of the academy.
• Analyze a broad range of literatures written in English (including representative authors and major literary periods), recognizing their temporal, social, political, and artistic contexts.
• Use effectively a range of writing, reading, and research strategies applicable to multiple disciplines.

Accommodating Disabilities
Lehman College is committed to providing access to all programs and curricula to all students. Students with disabilities who may require any special considerations should register with the Office of Student Disability Services in order to submit official paperwork to instructor.

For more information, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services, Shuster Hall, Room 238, 718-960-8441. For detailed information on services and resources visit: http://www.lehman.edu/student-disability-services/, or email: disability.services@lehman.cuny.edu.

Tutoring Services
Lehman College’s Instructional Support Services Program (ISSP) is home of the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) and Science Learning Center (SLC). Both offer students an array of activities and services designed to support classroom learning. Open to students at any level, there are individual, small group, and/or workshop sessions designed to improve “proficiency in writing, reading, research, and particular academic subject areas. Computer-assisted writing/language tutorial programs are also available,” as well as individual tutors, workshops and tutors.

To obtain more information about the ACE and the SLC, please visit Old Gym, Room 205 or http://www.lehman.edu/academics/instructional-support-services/humanities-tutoring.php or call ACE at 718-960-8175, and SLC at 718-960-7707.

Regular tutoring hours for fall & spring semesters are: M—T 10 a.m.-7 p.m., and Sat. 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Library Tutors are also available in the Library. These tutors offer help with Library resources and computers.

Required Texts: available at the Lehman College bookstore. Alternately, you can go to the usual online sources. All texts are also on reserve at Lehman’s library. You must bring required books/readings to every class and be prepared to discuss them.

Miguel Piñero. *Outlaw: Collected Poetry and Plays of Miguel Piñero*. $19.95

Additional material will be distributed via the course website: http://urbanwriterscourse.wordpress.com

Course outline only: detailed instructions and page numbers will be posted weekly on the course website under the “Course Updates” tab. You must check the site every week to stay current!
Tuesday, August 27: Course introduction, expectations, and background.

Thursday, August 29: Background on Nuyorican movement and the city. Juan Flores’s “The Structuring of Puerto Rican Identity” (PDF on website); Felipe Luciano’s “Jíbaro, My Pretty Nigger” (video); Tato Laviera “AmeRican” (video) Videos linked on website

Tuesday, September 3: Juan Flores’s “The Structuring of Puerto Rican Identity” continued; Pedro Pietri interview (PDF on website)

Thursday, September 5: Monday schedule in CUNY; class does not meet

Tuesday, September 10: Pedro Pietri’s Puerto Rican Obituary (PDF on website)

Thursday, September 12: Nuyorican poetry: Pedro Pietri’s Puerto Rican Obituary continued.

Tuesday, September 17: Nuyorican poetry: Selections from Miguel Piñero, Outlaw.

Thursday, September 19: Nuyorican poetry: Selections from Miguel Piñero, Outlaw.

Tuesday, September 24: Nuyorican drama: Selections from Miguel Piñero, Outlaw.

Thursday, September 26: Nuyorican drama (continued): Selections from Miguel Piñero, Outlaw. First Paper Due

Tuesday, October 1: Rosh Hashanah--No CUNY classes; class does not meet (F 19)

Thursday, October 3: Bodega Dreams. Student Presentation

Tuesday, October 8: Yom Kippur--No CUNY classes; class does not meet (F 19)
Continue reading Bodega Dreams.

Thursday, October 10: Bodega Dreams. Student Presentation

Tuesday, October 15: Bodega Dreams.

Thursday, October 17: Midterm Exam (in class)

Tuesday, October 22: Film: Spike Lee’s Do The Right Thing (in class screening of first half)

Thursday, October 24: Film: Spike Lee’s Do The Right Thing (in class screening of second half)

Tuesday, October 29: Discussion of Do The Right Thing

Thursday, October 31: Baraka’s Dutchman. Student Presentation

Tuesday, November 5: Baraka’s Dutchman.

Thursday, November 7: Soledad. Student Presentation

Tuesday, November 12: Soledad. Second Paper Due

Thursday, November 14: Soledad. Student Presentation

Tuesday, November 19: Soledad.

Thursday, November 21: Assata. Student Presentation
Tuesday, November 26: *Assata.*

Thursday, November 28: Holiday—class does not meet

Tuesday, December 3: *Assata. Third (last) Paper Due*

Thursday, December 5: *Assata. Student Presentation*

Tuesday, December 10: *Assata.*

Thursday, December 12: Last class meeting. Review for final exam.

**Thursday, December 19: Final Exam** will be held according to Lehman’s standard exam schedule 8-10 PM in the regular classroom. Format is 3 essays and the exam will be comprehensive.

DO NOT MISS THE FINAL EXAM OR SCHEDULE ANY TRAVEL OR OTHER COMMITMENTS THAT CONFLICT. MAKE-UP EXAMS WILL NOT BE OFFERED.

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