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

Fall 2020
Section A02: 3 Credits, 3 Hours
Instructor: Henry (Hank) Williams, Adjunct Lecturer, English Department
Hank.Williams@Lehman.cuny.edu
On Campus Office Location: Carman 398 (No on-campus meetings for Fall ’20)
Virtual Office: Tuesday 7-8; Thursday 5-7 or by appointment
Course Location: Online + Thursdays: 3:30-4:45 Video session via Zoom
Zoom class session info: Meeting ID: 970 6874 6761 Passcode: 630137

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: weekly posts on discussion board on class website, three 4-5 page papers, online final exam. Detailed descriptions of the assignments and due dates will be handed out in class and posted online.

Attendance and course engagement: There will be weekly discussion questions posted on the course Wordpress site. You will have 14 days from the original post to post a comment and respond to another classmate’s post on the board. I recommend doing your post early in the week then returning later to do a response. You’ll need to do 10 comments/replies over the course of the semester for full points. See instructions on course website for how to do the comments.

The weekly Zoom sessions are there for questions and answers on the reading and/or viewing. Plan to bring a few questions with you or specific things you didn’t understand.

Each week on the course site there will be a short audio intro lecture to introduce key points in the reading/viewing.

Grading:
- Weekly discussion board posts (minimum of 10 posts/replies for full points) = 20%
- Three papers at 20% each = 60%
- Online final exam essay = 20%
- 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 an instruction sheet distributed 3 weeks in advance with exact due dates, format, and grading criteria. PDFs will be posted online under the “Assignments” tab and announcements will be made in the weekly course update on the course Wordpress website.

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
  o follow the simple directions to sign up for e-mail notification of new posts.
  o The password for pages with Readings is 2020. (The same password works for any other password-protected pages on the site.)
  o You can access this from anywhere, including phones and tablet computers and do not need to log-in or use any special software.
• Class text message service by Remind (.com). Sign up at: remind.com/join/urbanwrt or send a text message to 608-467-4328 with the message @urbanwrt

Classroom Policies:

• Remember that communication online is different from in-person. Be considerate when replying to your classmates on the discussion board. It’s okay to disagree—but disagree with someone’s ideas and give proof for why you interpret a reading differently. Stay away from name-calling and personal attacks. Either of those will be removed by me and you’ll get a warning.
• You should have the assigned reading assignment with you during the online Zoom sessions.

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
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/](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](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. They will ship books to your home this semester. Alternately, you can go to the usual online sources. See the Course Books page on the website for details.


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

**Week 1: Course Intro**

Course introduction, expectations, and background.

**Thursday, August 27:** Live Zoom meet from 3:30-4:45 for course overview and intro to next week’s assignment

**Week 2: September 1: Analyzing texts and Juan Flores**

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. PDF file is on website’s Readings page: enter 2020 as the password

**Thursday, September 3:** Live Zoom meet from 3:30-4:15 to cover an approach to reading texts and intro Juan Flores’s essay

**Week 3 Juan Flores and Pedro Pietri**

Finish discussing Juan Flores’s essay. Pedro Pietri interview (PDF); Both files on website’s Readings page: enter 2020 as the password
Thursday, September 10: Live Zoom meet from 3:30-4:15 to finish Juan Flores’s essay and cover the interview with Pedro Pietri

Nuyorican poetry: Pedro Pietri’s *Puerto Rican Obituary* continued.

**Week 4: Pedro Pietri**

Pedro Pietri’s *Puerto Rican Obituary* (PDF). Files is on website’s Readings page: enter 2020 as the password

**Thursday, September 17:** Live Zoom meet at 3:30 to cover Pietri’s interview and selected poems

**Week 5: Miguel Piñero’s Poetry**

Nuyorican drama: Miguel Piñero’s play *Short Eyes* from the *Outlaw* book.

**Thursday, September 24:** Live Zoom meet at 3:30 to cover selections of Pinero’s poetry from the *Outlaw* book.

**Week 6: *Short Eyes***

**Thursday, October 1:** Live Zoom meet at 3:30 to cover Pinero’s play *Short Eyes* from the *Outlaw* book.

**Week 7: *Bodega Dreams* Part 1**

Read first half of Ernesto Quiñonez’s *Bodega Dreams*.

**Thursday, October 8:** Live Zoom meet at 3:30 to cover first half of Ernesto Quiñonez’s *Bodega Dreams*.

**Week 8: *Bodega Dreams* Part 2**

**Thursday, October 15:** Live Zoom meet at 3:30 to cover last half of Ernesto Quiñonez’s *Bodega Dreams*.

**Week 9: *Do The Right Thing***

Film: Spike Lee’s *Do The Right Thing* (streamed from course website under the Video page: password is 2020)

**Thursday, October 22:** Live Zoom meet at 3:30 to introduce Spike Lee’s *Do The Right Thing*

**Week 10: *Do The Right Thing***

**Thursday, October 29:** Live Zoom meet at 3:30 to discuss Spike Lee’s *Do The Right Thing*

**Week 11: *Dutchman***

Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones’s) *Dutchman*.

**Thursday, November 5:** Live Zoom meet at 3:30 to discuss Baraka’s *Dutchman*.

**Week 12: *Soledad***

**Thursday, November 12:** Live Zoom meet at 3:30 to cover first half of *Soledad*.

**Week 13: *Soledad***
Thursday, November 19: Live Zoom meet at 3:30 to cover last half of Soledad.

Week 14: November 24: Holiday—class does not meet

Thursday, November 26: No class meeting

Week 15: Assata

Thursday, December 3: Live Zoom meet at 3:30 to cover Assata.

Week 16: Assata

Thursday, December 10: Live Zoom meet at 3:30 to cover Assata.

Last class meeting. Review for final exam.

Final Exam will be held online during exam week: the week of December 17. Format will be essays and the exam will be comprehensive.