

ANGOLA TO SING SING: WRITING ON PRISON WRITING
First Year Seminar (UNIV 197SA)

DePauw University
MWF 12:30-1:30 p.m.
Fall 2015

Professor Rebecca Bordt
Office: 332 Asbury Hall
Office phone: 765-658-4521
Cell phone: 765-720-9638
Office hours: MW 1:45-3:00 p.m (or by appointment)
rbordt@depauw.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Lock-Up. Shawshank Redemption. Orange is the New Black. Prison Break. Oz. Seemingly, Americans have an obsession with prisons. But how accurate are media depictions of life behind bars? This seminar will explore this question by analyzing what prisoners actually experience in prison and document in their writing. Prison life writing is a distinct genre of literature that takes a variety of forms: autobiography, memoir, poetry, letter writing, novels, and journalism. This body of writing is variously and interchangeably referred to as prison literature, convict literature, prison narrative, and, simply, prison writing. Regardless of the specific terminology, prison life writing refers to the writing prisoners do during their incarceration *about their prison experience*.

We will begin by considering why people who are incarcerated write. Is it simply a way of passing time? Do they find it therapeutic? Is it a political act? Is it art? Is it a path toward redemption? Is it any different from why we write? Next we will examine closely six forms of prison writing: nonfiction narratives, letter writing, writ writing, journalism and writing by special populations (women and prisoners on death row). And, finally, we will compare the picture they paint with the version of prison life that we get from mainstream media. Are they the same? What do we learn from prisoners' unique perspective? Along the way, we will pause to tour a couple of prisons.

COURSE GOALS

By the end of the semester you should be able to do the following: 1) identify the range of forms and the diversity in perspectives presented in prison life writing; 2) compare the perspectives of the incarcerated and with representations of prison popular media; 3) understand the importance of reading a text closely; 4) articulate an argument and substantiate it with empirical evidence (both orally and in writing); 5) recognize the complexity of our social world (including prisons) and the value of diverse perspectives; and 6) learn how to be a successful college student academically.

The specific writing goals for all First Year Seminars at DePauw are as follows:

- understand the uses of writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating;
- possess flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proof-reading;
- understand how readers perceive and respond to different forms of writing;
- understand a writing assignment as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, synthesizing, and acknowledging appropriate primary and secondary sources;
- understand the collaborative and social aspects of the writing processes.

I know. This is a very tall order! Please remember that we will be working on these together and you are not expected to have them mastered by the first day.

REQUIRED READINGS

A. The following books are available at the university bookstore and on-line.

Gordon, Robert. 2000. *Funhouse Mirror: Reflections on Prison*. Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press.

Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. 2014. *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*, 3rd edition. NY: W.W. Norton.

Hacker, Diana and Nancy Sommers. 2015. *A Pocket Style Manual*, 7th edition. Bedford, MA: St. Martin's.

Hassine, Victor. 2011. *Life without Parole. Living and Dying in Prison Today*, 5th edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jackson, George. 1994. *Soledad: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press.

B. Additional required readings are available on Course Reserves (“Reserves” link on the library homepage). We will not be using Moodle for this class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Writing assignments. There are 5 writing assignments over the course of the semester of various lengths and importance. We will use class time to write, peer edit, and talk about the process of writing. Details on the writing assignments will be distributed in class.

Paper 1 (1-2 pages)

Paper 2 (2 pages)

Paper 3 (5 pages)

Paper 4 (1-2 pages)

Paper 5 (6-8 pages)

Class participation. You are expected to come to each class session having read and thought about the assigned readings. You are also expected to actively participate in class discussions. At times I will assign individuals to lead discussion. [See Appendix A for more details about my expectations.]

Final exam. There will be a comprehensive, in-class final exam during finals week.

COURSE POLICIES

How grades are calculated. Grades will be determined using the following point and percentage system. In order to pass the course, students must complete all of the assignments.

Writing assignment 1: required but not graded
Writing assignment 2: 25 points
Writing assignment 3: 50 points
Writing assignment 4: 25 points
Writing assignment 5: 100 points
Class participation (1st half) 25 points
Class participation (2nd half) 25 points
Final exam 50 points

Total 300 points

Final grade: 90% and above = A-, A

80-89% = B-, B, B+

70-79% = C-, C, C+

60-69% = D

59% and below = F

What Letter Grades Mean.

A = Work that goes beyond the requirements of the assignment by adding new insight, creativity and/or particularly thoughtful analysis. Demonstrates a comprehensive command of the course material, an exceptional ability to apply concepts to the real world, and a superior ability to organize and express ideas.

B = Work that meets the requirements of the assignment. Demonstrates a solid command of the course material, an ability to apply concepts to the real world, and good organization and expression of ideas.

C = Work that partially meets the requirements of the assignment. Demonstrates acceptable command of the course material, a basic ability to apply concepts to the real world with some gaps and problems, and moderate skill in the organization and expression of ideas.

D = Work that marginally meets the requirements of the assignment. Demonstrates little command of the course material, minimal attempt to apply concepts to the real world, and limited ability to organize and express ideas.

F = Work that does not meet the requirements of the assignment. Demonstrates no command of

the course material, unable to appropriately or consistently apply concepts to the real world, and insufficiently organizes and expresses ideas.

Late Work/Make-up Work. All assignments are due in class on the dates indicated on the syllabus. Exceptions will be made if I receive in advance an official notification that you will be off campus on university business (e.g., athletic event) or a call from you prior to the due date indicating that you are gravely ill. Out of fairness to the entire class, no exceptions will be made (this includes minor illness, job interviews, weddings, delayed planes, etc.) Unexcused late assignments will be penalized one-half a letter grade for every 24 hour period in which they are late. For both excused and unexcused absences from class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed from your peers.

Extra Credit. None. No exceptions.

Security Measures. Due to past experience, I ask that you keep copies (on your computer and back-up) of your assignments before handing them in. In addition, if you are turning in your work late, do not put it in my mailbox or under my office door. It is your responsibility to contact me and make arrangements to give me your late work in person.

Honor Code. As with all courses at DePauw University, you are bound by the policy on academic integrity. We will be reading and discussing the policy in class. Please read the policy now on your own: <http://www.depauw.edu/handbooks/student/acadlife/app/aip/dishonesty/> Also note that academic dishonesty includes the following: cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, plagiarism, multiple submissions, abuse of academic material, deception and misrepresentation, electronic dishonesty, and carelessness. Each of these violations is described in detail in the Student Handbook. See me if you have any questions about your obligation to uphold this policy. While I encourage you to work together in small groups and discuss the course material among yourselves outside of class, papers and exams should be written without collaboration and should reflect your independent ideas.

Special Accommodations. According to Pamela Roberts, Coordinator of Academic Success and Student Disability Services, “DePauw University is committed to providing equal access to academic programs and University administered activities and reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Amendments (ADAAA). Accommodations are determined on a case by case basis. Any student who feels she or he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability or learning challenge is strongly encouraged to contact Pamela Roberts, Coordinator of Academic Success and Student Disability Services for further information on how to receive accommodations and support: [765-658-6267](tel:765-658-6267). It is the responsibility of the student to share the letter of accommodation with faculty and staff members. Accommodations will not be implemented until the faculty or staff member has received the official letter. Accommodations are not retroactive. It is the responsibility of the student to discuss implementation of accommodations with each faculty and staff member receiving the letter.”

Religious Holy Days and Observances. In accordance with DePauw policy, I am happy to accommodate students who are adherents of a religious tradition and wish to fulfill obligations of that religious tradition on holy days. Please notify me well in advance of any planned absence.

No cell phones or laptops. Please put away and turn off your cell phones. Because this is a discussion-based class, I would prefer that you not use your laptops in class unless I specifically ask you to bring them. This means that you will need to make hardcopies of the readings posted on Moodle and/or bring in notes from the reading.

COURSE SCHEDULE

The books you have been asked to purchase are identified with an asterisk (*). All other citations can be found on Course Reserves. Marked in bold is what we will be doing in class. Reading should be done in preparation for class (on the day it is listed) even if we will not be discussing it that day.

<p>WEEK 1 August 26, 28</p>	<p>Prisons 101</p> <p>W: Introduction to the course. Get Paper 1 assignment.</p> <p>F: Mini-lecture on U.S. prison system. Summarize reading. Reid, Sue Titus. 2012. "The Confinement of Offenders," Pp. 505-536 in <i>Crime and Criminology</i>. NY: Oxford University Press. (Course Reserves)</p>
<p>WEEK 2 August 31, September 2, 4</p>	<p>M: Paper 1 due. *Gordon, Robert Ellis. 2000. <i>The Funhouse Mirror: Reflections on Prison</i>. Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, pp. xxi-37.</p> <p>W: TBA. *Gordon, Robert Ellis. 2000. <i>The Funhouse Mirror: Reflections on Prison</i>. Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, pp. 39-72.</p> <p>F: Discuss discussion and discuss Gordon book. *Gordon, Robert Ellis. 2000. <i>The Funhouse Mirror: Reflections on Prison</i>. Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, pp. 73-108.</p> <p>* Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. 2010. <i>They Say I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing</i>, 2nd edition. NY: WW Norton, pp. 163-166.</p>

<p>WEEK 3 September 7, 9, 11</p>	<p>Why Prisoners Write</p> <p>M: Discuss readings. Gaucher, Bob. 2002. "Inside Looking Out: Writers in Prison," Pp. 33-49 in <i>Writing as Resistance</i>. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, edited by Bob Gaucher. (Course Reserves)</p> <p>*Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. 2010. <i>They Say I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing</i>, 2nd edition. NY: WW Norton, pp. xvi-15.</p> <p>W: Get Paper 2 in class. Discuss readings. Chevigny, Bell Gale. 2005. "All I Have, a Lament and a Boast": Why Prisoners Write," pp. 246-271 in <i>Writing as Resistance</i>. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, edited by Bob Gaucher. (Course Reserves)</p> <p>*Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. 2010. <i>They Say I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing</i>, 2nd edition. NY: WW Norton, pp. 19-51.</p> <p>F: TBA Huckelbury, Jr., Charles. 2002. "Writing on the Walls: It Isn't Just Graffiti," Pp. 50-57 in <i>Writing as Resistance</i>. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, edited by Bob Gaucher. (Course Reserves)</p>
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<p>WEEK 4 September 14, 16, 18</p>	<p>M: Paper 2 due in class (Bring 2 copies). Peer editing. Hassine, Victor. 2002. "Letter to Joanna," Pp. 58-63 in <i>Writing as Resistance</i>. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, edited by Bob Gaucher. (Course Reserves)</p> <p>W: Revised Paper 2 due. McMaster, Gregory. 2002. "Maximum Ink," Pp. 64-70 in <i>Writing as Resistance</i>. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, edited by Bob Gaucher. (Course Reserves)</p> <p>****11:30 a.m. Lunch with deans before class. Meet as a group in UB Ballroom****</p> <p>F: Get Paper 3 in class. Discuss today's reading in relation to readings for Sept 11, 14, 16. *Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. 2010. <i>They Say I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing</i>, 2nd edition. NY: WW Norton, pp. 55-77.</p>
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<p>WEEK 5 September 21, 23, 25</p>	<p>Nonfiction Narratives</p> <p>M: Mini-lecture on why WE should care about prisons. *Hassine, <i>Life without Parole: Living and Dying in Prison Today</i>, pp. ix-31.</p> <p>W: Discuss Hassine (pp. ix-65). *Hassine, <i>Life without Parole: Living and Dying in Prison Today</i>, pp. 33-65.</p> <p>F: Paper 3 due in class (bring 2 copies) Peer editing. *Hassine, <i>Life without Parole: Living and Dying in Prison Today</i>, pp. 67-95.</p>
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<p>WEEK 6 September 28, 30, October 2</p>	<p>M: Paper 3 revision due in class. Sign up for paper conference with RB this week!! *Hassine, <i>Life without Parole: Living and Dying in Prison Today</i>, pp. 97-119.</p> <p>W: Discuss Hassine (pp. 67-153). *Hassine, <i>Life without Parole: Living and Dying in Prison Today</i>, pp. 121-153.</p> <p>F: Meet in Hubbard Center (basement of UB). Tour and information session by Deborah Jones, Director of Career Services.</p>
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<p>WEEK 7 October 5, 7, 9</p>	<p>Letter Writing</p> <p>M: Final version of Paper 3 due in class. *Jackson, George. 1994. <i>Soledad: The Prison Letters of George Jackson</i>. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, pp. ix-33.</p> <p>W: Mini lecture on prisoners' rights movement *Jackson, George. 1994. <i>Soledad: The Prison Letters of George Jackson</i>. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, pp. 37-76.</p> <p>F: Discuss Jackson letters. *Jackson, George. 1994. <i>Soledad: The Prison Letters of George Jackson</i>. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, pp. 206-266.</p> <p>***prison tour sometime this week***</p>
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<p>WEEK 8 October 12, 14, 16</p>	<p>M: Get and write Paper 4 in class. Bring laptops.</p> <p>Writ Writing</p> <p>W: Mini lecture on jailhouse lawyers. Discuss reading. Belbot, Barbara and Craig Hemmens. 2010. <i>The Legal Rights of the Convicted</i>. El Paso, TX: LFB Scholarly Publishing, pp. 137-161. (Course Reserves)</p> <p>F: Film, “Writ Writer.”</p>
<p>WEEK 9 October 19, 21, 23</p>	<p>Fall break</p>
<p>WEEK 10 October 26, 28, 30</p>	<p>M: Get Paper 5 in class. Discuss sources and plagiarism. *Hacker, Diana and Nancy Sommers. 2015 <i>A Pocket Style Manual</i>, 7th edition. Boston: St. Martin’s, pp. 91-105.</p> <p>W: Meet with Kathryn Millis (reference librarian) in library, Instruction Room A. Bring laptops.</p> <p>Journalism</p> <p>F: Discuss reading. Morris, James McGrath. 2002. <i>Jailhouse Journalism</i>. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, pp. 5-18; 187-196. (Course Reserves)</p> <p>Last day to withdraw from a class—October 30</p>

<p>WEEK 11 November 2, 4, 6</p>	<p>M: Research theme and Bibliography due in class.</p> <p>W: Discuss reading. <i>The Angolite</i>, 2004. Volume 29, issue 4/5 (Skim) (Course Reserves) <i>The Cell Door</i> http://www.lairdcarlson.com/celldoor/01301/ (Skim)</p> <p>F: Discuss reading. Wright, Paul. 2002. "The History of <i>Prison Legal News</i>: The Samizdat of the American Gulag," Pp. 80-89 in <i>Writing as Resistance</i>. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, edited by Bob Gaucher. (Course Reserves) <i>Prison Legal News</i>. 2015. Issue 26. Number 8. https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/issue/26/8/ (Skim)</p>
<p>WEEK 12 November 9, 11, 13</p>	<p>Women's Writing</p> <p>M: Mini-lecture on women in prison. Discuss reading. Lawston and Lucas (eds). 2011. <i>Razor Wire Women</i>. NY: SUNY Press, various essays. (Course Reserves)</p> <p>W: Discuss readings. Solinger, et al. 2010. <i>Interrupted Life</i>. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, various essays. (Course Reserves)</p> <p>F: Film, "What I Want My Words to Do to You."</p> <p>***prison tour sometime this week***</p>

<p>WEEK 13 November 16, 18, 20</p>	<p>Writing from Death Row: Mumia Abu-Jamal</p> <p>M: Paper 5 draft due in class. Mini-lecture on Mumia Abu-Jamal.</p> <p>W: Discuss reading. Weinglass, Leonard I. "The Trial of Mumia Abu-Jamal," pp. 169-185 in Abu-Jamal. 1996. <i>Live from Death Row</i>. NY: Avon. (Course Reserves)</p> <p>F: Deborah Jones, Hubbard Center will lead class. (RB at a conference)</p>
<p>WEEK 14 November 23, 25, 27</p>	<p>M: Discuss reading. Wright, Julia 1996. Preface, pp xiii-xxv in Abu-Jamal, Mumia. <i>Death Blossoms</i>. NY:Litmus Books. (Course Reserves) Abu-Jamal, Mumia. 1996. <i>Death Blossoms</i>. NY:Litmus, various essays. (Course Reserves)</p> <p>W: No class (Thanksgiving break)</p> <p>F: No class (Thanksgiving break)</p>
<p>WEEK 15 November 30, December 2, 4</p>	<p>M: Film, "Framing of an Execution."</p> <p>W: Discuss reading. Abu-Jamal, Mumia. 1996. <i>Live from Death Row</i>. NY: Avon, various essays. (Course Reserves)</p> <p>F: Paper 5 due in class. Recordings of Abu-Jamal's essays.</p>

<p>WEEK 16 December 7, 9, 11</p>	<p>M: Discuss reading. Johnson, Robert. 2013. "A Few Words on the Last Words of Condemned Prisoners." <i>Journal of Prisoners on Prison</i> 22(1): 112-121. (Course Reserves)</p> <p>W: Course evaluations. Self-evaluations. Bring 6 quotes that have a unifying theme from the following website to present to the class. Texas Department of Corrections. <i>Executed Offenders' Last Words</i>. http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/death_row/dr_executed_offenders.html</p> <p>F: Semester wrap-up.</p>
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<p>FINAL EXAM WEEK</p>	<p>Final exam, Monday, December 14, 8:30-11:30 a.m.</p>
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APPENDIX A CLASS PARTICIPATION

Expectations

An important component of this class is discussion. There are different kinds of contributions you can make to discussion, all of which you are expected to work on over the course of the semester. None of these are possible without coming to class each session having read the assigned readings:

1. Attentively listening to your colleagues, in order to build on what has already been said;
2. Asking colleagues to clarify unclear contributions;
3. Summarizing key ideas that have emerged during the discussion;
4. Articulating an answer to a posed question;
5. Raising questions that help advance discussion;
6. Offering an original idea related to the topic of discussion;
7. Drawing on evidence (social scientific data, personal experience, popular culture) to either support or challenge ideas;
8. Constructively critiquing an idea offered in the readings or by a class member (including me);
9. Pointing out how various comments complement each other or are at odds;
10. Playing "devil's advocate."

I want to stress that we will be working on these skills. You are not expected to have these perfected by the first day of class or even by the end. All I am asking is that you make a good faith effort to practice them. My job is to provide a safe and non-threatening atmosphere that, hopefully, will facilitate discussion.

Ground Rules

1. Come to class on time, so discussion is not interrupted.
2. Come to class having read all the readings.
3. Address each other when speaking, rather than directing comments to me (unless, of course, you are referring to something I said or want to direct a comment or question specifically to me).
4. Understand that contributing more does not necessarily mean better. The best contributors are usually those who are the best listeners. I ask that people contribute regularly and meaningfully. Dominating discussion and or not being sensitive to the direction of the discussion are just as problematic as not saying anything at all.
5. Take to heart, especially those who have difficulty speaking up in groups, that there is no such thing as a stupid question or comment.
6. Respect silences. Some people become anxious when there is a lull in the conversation and feel compelled to say something just to fill the silence. Periodic silences are appropriate. For example, they give more reserved people the opportunity to jump in. Or, they can give the group a chance to think about what has been said and how various comments relate to each other. On occasion I will actually call for reflective periods of silence.
7. Personal information that people share in class should not be discussed outside of class.

