

Cultural Resistance: The Role of Arts Social Justice Movements

Professor:

Laurent Alfred

Coordinator, Africana Criminal Justice Project

Seminar Location: 758 Schermerhorn Extension

Seminar Day/Time: Monday 6pm - 8 pm

Credits: 4 hours/points

Office Hours: Mondays 5pm - 6pm, in 760 Schermerhorn Extension

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Course Overview:

The growing movement to stem the tide of mass criminalization and incarceration among Black and Latino communities in the US has begun to integrate elements of a radical arts tradition that has been used in a variety of social movements. Using the contemporary anti-prison movement as the primary case study, this course will more generally explore the ways in which the radical arts traditions of music, poetry, film and theater have been influenced by and utilized in a variety of liberation struggles and social justice movements across the African diaspora. Alongside the anti-mass incarceration movement, the course will examine the role of the arts in several historical social justice movements, including, Marcus Garvey's UNIA Movement, the Black and Latino Power Movements and the anti-Apartheid Movement. The course will consider the mutual impact that arts and social movements have on each other. The historical and theoretical materials will be contextualized by guest lectures, discussions, and performances involving visiting scholars, artists and activists.

Requirements and Evaluation:

Students will be expected to attend class regularly, read all assigned materials, regularly contribute to class discussions and small group collaborations, and complete all assignments. Attendance will be recorded and will affect the participation grade.

Grading will be based on in-class participation and the completion of 2 assignments - one individual and one group (see below). The grading will be determined as follows:

In-class Participation	30%
Assignment #1: Annotations and Discussion Paper	40%
Assignment #2: Group Research Project/Presentation	30%

Assignments will be due at the beginning of class on the designated due-date. Extensions will only be granted under extraordinary circumstances, and only when requested prior to the due date. Late assignments will be penalized.

In advance of each meeting, students should prepare and email to the professor at least 3 questions and/or points for discussion which emerged for them in doing the week's assigned readings and/or project. The ideal discussion question or point should seek to deepen the class' engagement with the materials. Discussion points might also explore parallels and links with other materials read and/or discussed in prior meetings.

Course Assignments:

1. Annotations of Historical and Contemporary Arts-Based Expressions:

While academic studies have privileged traditional sources in the study of the current crisis of criminal injustice in the U.S., little research exists on the ways in which arts-based expressions have entered the national dialogue on crime, justice and prisons. As an individual research project, students will write, compile and analyze at least 5 annotations of contemporary arts-based expressions that resist or reflect the current crisis of criminal justice. Students will be provided with a starter list of potential sources for the annotations, consisting of hip hop songs, spoken word pieces, plays, films, and other artistic and media-based expressions (in hip hop publications, for example). Guidelines will be distributed for the format of these annotations. Students will also write and compile 5 annotations on arts-based expressions from a particular historical social justice movement (one covered in the course or not). The resulting body of 10 annotations will be turned in at the end of the semester, along with a 7-10 page paper that discusses and compares the various annotations in the context of the wider societal conditions or social justice movements that they represent. Students will be required to turn in the two sets of annotations at different due dates over the course of the semester (see course schedule).

2. Research on Arts-Based Organizing and Political Education:

As this course explores, arts-based political education has taken a prominent role in the efforts of activists who seek to raise awareness about and organize against the crisis of mass incarceration in the U.S. The use of music, spoken word, visual arts and film has become standard for many community-based organizations seeking to enhance their awareness-raising and mobilization efforts. Yet, little formal research has been conducted to explore and challenge the ways in which arts-based organizing efforts can be most effectively used by organizations who work in opposition to the expanding crisis of criminal injustice in NYC and beyond.

This research component to the course will partner groups of 3 or 4 students with one of five organizations that are actively involved in raising awareness about and mobilizing action against the crisis of criminal injustice in the NYC and/or the country as a whole - The Prison Moratorium Project, The Blackout Arts Collective, Critical Resistance NYC, The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, and the Community Development Alliance. In conjunction with the participating organization, each group

will devise a research inquiry that will explore and challenge how the arts has been or can be more effectively used in future organizing or awareness-raising efforts.

The primary guideline for this research project is that the findings be useful for the participating organization in their future arts-based organizing or outreach efforts. In the tradition of activist and deeply engaged academic studies, this research project should seek to utilize your academic training and skills in order to contribute to community-based organizing efforts.

While this charge that the research be helpful to specific organizing efforts of the participating organizations is most fundamental, there are two other basic guidelines. The research should:

- Focus on arts-based organizing or awareness-raising efforts that the organization you work with has or is planning to conduct.
- Incorporate a diversity of research methods - the research should utilize traditional academic sources (review of academic literature, analysis of statistics, etc.), but must also incorporate a more hands-on component such as interviews with young people, observations at an event, polling, or a controlled experiment or pilot project

Each group will present their research findings in a 20 minute presentation and a written report. Further guidelines on the class presentations and summary of findings will be distributed.

Seminar Readings:

The seminar makes use of several books and a course packet containing book chapters and articles. The course packet is available for purchase at Copy Quick (Amsterdam b/w 119th & 120th) All of the required texts can be found at Butler Reserves and have been ordered for purchase through Labyrinth Books.

Required Texts:

Martin, Tony (1983). *Literary Garveyism: Garvey, Black Arts and the Harlem Renaissance*. Dover: The Majority Press

Mauer, Marc (1999). *The Race to Incarcerate*. New York: New Press

Neal, Mark Anthony (1999). *What the Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Public Culture*. New York: Routledge Press

Van Deburg, William (1991). *A New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975*. Chicago: U. Chicago Press

Vincent, Ted (1995). *Keep Cool: The Black Activists Who Built the Jazz Age*. London: Pluto Press.

Course Schedule:

Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are contained in the course packet.

Part I. Introduction to Arts and Activism

Discussion on the legacies and uses of arts in the African context; Focus on debates about the role of the arts in social justice struggles; Discussion on the potential of arts in social justice movements; Introduction to the crisis of mass incarceration

Week 1 (9/8/03) **Discuss:** "A Debate on Activism in Black Studies"

Week 2 (9/15)

Read:

- * "The General Nature of African Art" by Leopold Senghor
- * "The Criteria for Negro Art" by W.E.B. Du Bois
- * "Negro-Art Hokum" by George S. Schuyler
- * "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" by Langston Hughes
- * "Art or Propaganda?" and "Youth Speaks" by Alain Locke
- * "The Hip Hop Artist and the Racial Mountain" by Bakari Kitwana
- * "Politics With Soul" by Adam Ma'anit
- * "Even Our Enemies Deserve Music" by Jeff Chang

- * "Facing the Demon Head On: Race and the Prison Industrial Complex" by Manning Marable
- * "Slangin' Rocks...Palestinian Style: Dispatches From the Occupied Zones of North America" by Robin D.G. Kelly

Week 3 (9/22)

Read:

- * "On National Culture" by Frantz Fanon
- * "Culture and Colonization" by Aime Cesaire
- * "National Liberation and Culture" by Amilcar Cabral
- * "The Struggle for Negritude" by Leopold Senghor

- *Race to Incarcerate* by Marc Mauer (Chaps 1 &2: pp 1-41)
- * "Big Bucks From the Big House: The Prison Industrial Complex and Beyond" by Christian Parenti

Part II. Arts and Marcus Garvey's UNIA Movement

Review of political/protest art during the Harlem Renaissance/Jazz Age; Overview of the significance of Garvey's UNIA Movement; Focus on the role of poetry and music in the UNIA movement

Week 4 (9/29)

Read:

- * "Introduction: Marcus Mosiah Garvey, 1887-1940" by Tony Martin
- *Literary Garveyism: Garvey, Black Arts and the Harlem Renaissance* by Tony Martin (chapters 1-4, skim chap 3)
- *Keep Cool: The Black Activists Who Built the Jazz Age* by Ted Vincent (chapters 1 - 4, skim chapters 2 & 3)

Week 5 (10/6)

Read:

- *Literary Garveyism* (chapters 6-9)
- *Keep Cool* (chapters 5-7)

Part III. Arts and the Black Power Movement

Discussion on the nature of the Black Power Movement as a cultural phenomenon;
Discussion on the impact of Black Power cultural dynamics on wider American culture
Focus on the works and significance of the Black Arts Movement

Week 6 (10/13)

Read:

- * "Introduction" from *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) & Black Power Politics*
- *New Day in Babylon* (introduction, chapters 1-2, chapters 5-6; skim chapters 3-4)

Turn in Group Research Inquiry and Methods

Week 7 (10/20)

Read:

- * "Chapter 1: Groundwork" from *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) & Black Power Politics* by Komozi Woodard
- * "The Black Arts Movement" by Amiri Baraka
- * "The Black Arts Movement" by Larry Neal
- *What the Music Said* (chapters 1-2)

Part IV. Freedom Songs and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle

Focus on freedom songs in the South African anti-Apartheid struggle; Discussion on the role of theater; Overview of the *Chimurenga* music of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle

Week 8 (10/27)

Read:

- * "Some African Cultural Concepts" by Steve Biko
- * "The Melody of Freedom: A Reflection on Music" by J. Gwangwa and F. van Aurich
- * Excerpts from *Where is the Way: Song and Struggle in South Africa* by Helen Kivnick

In Class Viewing of *Amandla!: A Revolution in Four Part Harmony*

Turn in 1st Set of Annotations

-----No Class November 3-----

Week 9 (11/10)

Read:

- * "Miriam Makeba: 'The Click Click Girl'" by Frank Tenaille
- * "Mahlathini, 'King of the Groaners,' and Johnny Clegg, 'The White Zulu'" by Frank Tenaille
- * "Thomas Mapfumo and the Ancestors' Mbira in Zimbabwe" by Frank Tenaille
- * "Towards New Cultural Relations: A Reflection on the Cultural Boycott" by C. Braam and F. Geerlings
- * "The Anatomy of Resistance in South African Theater" by Maishe Maponya

Guest Discussion with Lee Hirsch, filmmaker of *Amandla!* (tentative)

Part V. Hip Hop, Spoken Word and the Crisis of Criminal (In)Justice

In depth overview of the crisis of mass criminalization and incarceration in African-American and Latino communities; Focus on the growing use of the arts - especially hip hop and spoken word - to organize young people in opposition to the prison industrial complex and wider crisis of criminal injustice; Discussion on the rise, fall and rise of conscious or message hip hop

Week 10 (11/17)

Read:

- *Race to Incarcerate* (chapters 3-12)
- * "Imprisoning Women: The Unintended Victims of Mass Imprisonment" by Meda Chesney-Lind
- * "Felon Voting Rights and the Disenfranchisement of African Americans" by Uggen, Manza and Behrens
- * "Race War: Policing, Incarceration and the Containment of Black Youth" by Bakari Kitwana
- Article on political prisoners in the US (to be distributed)

Week 11 (11/24)

Read:

- * "The Hip Hop Revolution" by Manning Marable
- * "Prophets of Rage: Rap Music and the Politics of Black Cultural Expression" by Tricia Rose
- * "Making the Strong Survive: The Contours and Contradictions of Message Rap" by Ernest Allen, Jr.
- * "Activism in the Hip Hop Generation: Redefining Social Responsibility" by Bakari Kitwana

Guest Panel Discussion on Arts and Anti-Prison Activism, with representatives from The Blackout Arts Collective, Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, and the Prison Moratorium Project (tentative)

Turn in 2nd Set of Annotations

Week 12 (12/1)

Read:

- * "Understanding the *New New Black Poetry: Orality Visuality, and the Spoken Word*" by Meta DuEwa Jones
- * "The Be Bop, the Bam, and the Hip Hop" by Sonia Sanchez
- * "Problem Child" by Bryonn Bain

Week 13 (12/8)

Prepare for Final Presentations; Complete Group Written Assignment

Final Group Presentations

Revised Annotations and Discussion Paper due by Friday, December 12th by 5 pm - Drop in my box in 758 Schermerhorn.