

Preliminary Web Course Description

*Please note: This is a preliminary web course description only. The department reserves the right to change without notice any information in this description. The final, binding course outline will be distributed in the first class of the semester.

School of English and Theatre Studies

Course Code: ENGL*2130	Course Title: Literature and Social Change	Semester and Year of Offering: W25
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Course Instructor: Julie Cairnie	Course Format: Seminar
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Brief Course Synopsis:

Calendar Description

This course explores the social and cultural work that literary texts perform. Seminars will illuminate such categories as gender, sexuality, nation, race, ethnicity, and class; particular ways in which they are written into a limited number of literary works; and some of the critical debates surrounding our interpretations of those processes. (Choices of approaches and texts will be determined by individual instructors.) Writing- and presentation-intensive course.

Course Description

There is a long, global history of writing inspired by prison experiences, and the relationship between prison stories and social change persists. Those of us on the “outside” harbour several assumptions about the “inside”: cells, bars, buzzers, hardened and dangerous inmates, vicious and unscrupulous guards; and it is often imagined as no place for (white, middle-class and upper-class) women. In this seminar we will read three white women’s memoirs of prison from England, South Africa, and the United States. In doing so we will unpack the relationship between literature and social change, and more specifically the ways in which these activists use their social positions and unconventional experiences to advocate for prison reform, for justice in their larger societies, and for community across race, class, and gender differences.

ENGL*2130 is a key course for English majors and minors that engages with theoretical questions/problems. We will begin the course by defining and comprehending key terms that inform all of our readings: life writing and memoir; prisons and prisoners; race and whiteness; gender and femininities. Our first reading is Angela Y. Davis’s sharp critique of the “prison industrial complex,” *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Be prepared for a high level of theoretical engagement – through assigned readings, class conversations, and your own writing.

Methods of Evaluation and Weight:

<i>Component</i>	<i>Weight (%)</i>
Discussion Questions-led class (collaborative)	15%
Reading Journal (10 pages, double spaced)	20%
Midterm (in person)	25%
Final Exam (take home)	25%
Participation	15%

Texts and/or Resources Required (e.g. Internet access, specific textbook title, lab kit, etc.):

Are Prisons Obsolete? Angela Y. Davis (2003)
117 Days, Ruth First (1965)
Orange is the new black, Piper Kerman (2010)
Prisons and Prisoners, Constance Lytton (1914)

A selection of additional resources (CourseLink)

Information about mode of delivery:

This is an in-person class. Attendance is essential for academic success, as always, and for our collective sense of well-being. It is imperative that we engage with others in a warm, thoughtful, intelligent, and creative conversation about our course readings and the questions/concerns that arise from them.

Final Exam information:

Take-home format