

Course Syllabus



Monday 11:00 AM–01:00 PM • 409 Avery Hall

Dr. Sharon Egretta Sutton

[See "Syllabus" under Pages for a formatted PDF]

Course Syllabus

Gumbo Ya-Ya

African American Culture and the Art of Dwelling

Gumbo ya-ya is a creole term that means “everybody talks at once” . . . [It] is the essence of the black musical tradition where “the various voices in a piece of music may go their own ways but still be held together by their relationship to each other.” In jazz, for example, each musician has to listen to what the other is doing and know how to respond while each is, at the same time, intent upon her/his own improvisation. It is . . . an expression of true democracy, for each person is allowed, in fact required, to be an individual, to go his/her own way, and yet to do so in concert with the group—to be an individual in the context of the community (Brown, 1989, p. 925).

Instructor’s Statement

Dwelling is a continuous social activity that shapes, and reshapes, the characteristics of lived space. Because it is a social activity, dwelling is as much about the space outside front doors as it is about the interior space. In short, dwelling is about creating community. Despite their forced migration to the United States, slaves maintained a traditional African worldview of community as harmony not only among everyone in the clan but also among the spiritual and natural realms of existence (Paris, 1998). The primacy of community—and the duties and responsibilities it requires among community members—is reflected in the “gumbo ya-ya” of black musical tradition and other cultural artifacts and in the vernacular space of black enclaves. Excluded from white society, African Americans created spaces apart that offered refuge from oppression, along with opportunities for maintaining cultural traditions.

Out of necessity, African American have historically had a limited footprint upon the earth. In the absence of resources, inhabitants of southern plantation slave quarters and the all-black towns that formed after the Civil War survived by using outdoor space

for gardening and socializing, creating extended kinship networks, sharing resources and skills, and especially by “making do” with what existed. Applied to today’s housing crisis, this survival mode of dwelling “would encourage social interaction and stimulate the prospect for neighborhood empowerment and economic development” (King, 2015, np). It also speaks to climate change and learning to live with the threat of natural disasters. This course challenges students to draw upon African American cultural traditions to undertake individual investigations of the housing crisis.

Course Description

This seminar explores the concept of dwelling (in the sense of inhabiting the earth) in relation to African American culture, inherently defined by the primacy of community. On the one hand, it investigates how race/ethnicity- and class-based marginalization constrains access to adequate housing and an array of educational and economic opportunities. On the other hand, it investigates how black people have been able to transcend such marginalization to carve out unique physical and spiritual dwelling places. Its goal is to stimulate creative thinking about inhabiting the earth in an era of calling for extraordinary social and environmental resiliency.

The seminar combines teacher-directed and independent explorations. The first half of each class has a presentation/discussion session based upon two assigned readings, one related to housing, another related to black culture. The second half is reserved for meetings with individual students to develop independent explorations based upon the directed portion of the class. Two half-sessions and one full session are devoted to students presenting their independent work.

The goal of the independent exploration is to allow students to take a deep dive into a particular aspect of the course content, based upon their disciplinary skills and interests. Projects must be at the intersection of housing and culture, and might possibly take the form of:

- Ethnography, for example:
Oral histories of immigrants describing their experiences of “home.”
- Urban Design, for example:
Mapping of “black space” in a Harlem neighborhood.
- Community Organizing, for example:
Concept for a hypothetical Afrocentric community land trust
- Architecture, for example
Design of a home, house, and haven for Toni Morrison
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This three-credit seminar requires nine hours of work weekly, two contact hours and seven outside of class with slightly more outside time being devoted to developing the independent exploration.

Learning Outcomes

By successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Recognize the barriers to obtaining adequate shelter, nationally and globally;
2. Identify the mechanisms African Americans use to create a sense of “dwelling,” while being a disenfranchised population;
3. Develop an independent investigation of housing as a manifestation of culture; and
4. Present an investigation in a visually compelling manner.

Assignments

Independent Investigation Concept Due 18 February
Informal slide presentation of research question, sources, and work plan.

Preliminary Independent Investigation Due 25 March
Informal slide presentation of a draft of the investigation with work plan.

Final Independent Investigation Due 26 April
Slide presentation of the final presentation with explanatory text as needed.

Assigned Readings / Participation Ongoing
Completion of two readings weekly in order to engage actively in class discussion.

Separate handouts will be provided with requirements for the first three assignments.

Evaluation and Final Grade Calculation

Student work will be evaluated as follows:

Independent Investigation Concept	15 Percent
Preliminary Independent Investigation	20 Percent
Final Independent Investigation	25 Percent
Assigned Readings / Participation	40 Percent

Schedule Abstract

Wk. Date	Presentation / Discussion 11:00–12:00	Independent Investigations 12:00–01:00
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2	28 Jan	Free Write • Even the Walls	Introductions • Course Overview
3	04 Feb	Right to Culture • Black Space: 1805–1869	Individual Meetings
4	11 Feb	The Art of Dwelling • Souls of Black Folk	Individual Meetings
5	18 Feb	Segregation • Black Space: 1932–1945	Independent Investigation Concept DUE
6	25 Feb	Right to Housing • Black Space: 1949–1955	Individual Meetings
7	04 Mar	Housing Discrimination • Black Space: 1950s	Individual Meetings
8	11 Mar	Kinney Trip	
9	18 Mar	Spring Break	
10	25 Mar	Right to Economic Security • Black Space: 1950s	Preliminary Independent Investigation DUE
11	01 Apr	Collective Ownership • Black Expression: Quilting	Individual Meetings
12	08 Apr	Collective Ownership • Black Expression: Dance	Individual Meetings
13	15 Apr	Collective Ownership • Black Expression: Music	Individual Meetings
14	22 Apr	Final Independent Investigation DUE	

Schedule Expanded

Week Two

Monday, 28 January 2019 —

Free Write Home, Housing, Shelter, Dwelling
Film *Even the Walls* (27 min.)
Introductions Independent Investigation Interest
Course Overview Requirements, Readings, Schedule, Canvas, Communications

Optional Reading for Film

Klinge, Matthew. "Junk-Yard for Human Junk: The Unnatural Ecology of Urban Poverty." In *Emerald City Book Subtitle: An Environmental History of Seattle*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2007 [Available online at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1npdq8.14>].

Week Three

Monday, 04 February 2019 —

Presentation and Discussion ***Required Reading DUE***

Right to Culture

Black Space: 1805–1869

Gary A. Donaldson, "A Window on Slave Culture: Dances at Congo Square in New Orleans, 1800- 1862," *The Journal of Negro History* 69 no. 2 (Spring, 1984), 63-72 [available online at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2717598>].

Ersine Clarke, "Liberty Hall," "Riceboro," and "Sunbury." In *Dwelling Place : A Plantation Epic*, pp. 1–32. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2005. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Individual Meetings

Week Four

Monday, 11 February 2019 —

Presentation and Discussion
Required Reading DUE

The Art of Dwelling

Souls of Black Folk

Ivan Illich, "Dwelling," in *In the Mirror of the Past*, pp. 55–64 (New York: Marion Bayers, 1984).

Peter J. Paris, "Basic African American Values: Gifts to the World," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 81 no. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 1998): 553-570 [Available online at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41178852>].

Individual Meetings

Week Five

Monday, 18 February 2019 —

Presentation and Discussion
Required Reading DUE

Segregation

Black Space: 1932–1945

Thomas J. Sugrue, "Introduction" and "Sweet Land of Liberty." In *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*, pp. xiii–xxvii and 3–31. New York: Random House Trade Paperback, 2008.

Maya Angelou, "Chapter 1–Chapter 7" in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, pp. 3–48 (New York: Bantam Books, 1971a, or any other edition).

Individual Meetings

Week six

Monday, 25 February 2019 —

Presentation and Discussion ***Required Reading DUE***

Right to Housing

. Black Space: 1949–1955

Dawn Phillips. "Planning for People, Not Profit," *Race, Poverty & the Environment* 20, no. 2 (2015): 78–83 [Available online at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43873236>].

Maya Angelou, "Chapter 1–Chapter 4" in *Singin' and Swingin' and Makin' Like Merry Like Christmas*. New York: Bantam Books, 1971b, or any other edition).

Independent Exploration Concept DUE

Week seven

Monday, 04 March 2019 —

Presentation and Discussion ***Required Reading DUE***

Housing Discrimination

. Black Space: 1950s

Nancy A. Denton, "Segregation and Discrimination in Housing." In *A Right to Housing: Foundation for a New Social Agenda* edited by Rachel G. Bratt, Michael E. Stone, and Chester Hartman, pp. 61–81. Philadelphia, Pa: Temple University Press, 2006 [Available online at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1bw1kqb.7>].

Toni Morrison, "Chapter 1–Chapter 7." In *Home*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012.

Individual Meetings

Week Eight

Monday, 11 March 2019 —

Kinney Trip—NO CLASS

Week Nine

Monday, 18 March 2019 —

Spring Break—NO CLASS

Week Ten

Monday, 25 March 2019 —

Presentation and Discussion

Required Reading DUE

Right to Economic Security

Black Space: 1950s

Rachel G. Bratt, "Housing and Economic Security." In *A Right to Housing: Foundation for a New Social Agenda* edited by Rachel G. Bratt, Michael E. Stone, and Chester Hartman, 399–424. Philadelphia, Pa: Temple University Press, 2006 [Available online at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1bw1kqb.24>].

Toni Morrison, "Chapter 8—Chapter 17." In *Home*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012.

Preliminary Independent Investigation DUE

Week Eleven

Monday, 01 April 2019 —

Presentation and Discussion

Required Reading DUE

Collective Ownership

Black Expression: Quilting

James Meehan. "Reinventing Real Estate: The Community Land Trust as a Social Invention in Affordable Housing." *Journal of Applied*

Floris Barnett Cash. "Kinship and Quilting: An Examination of an African-American Tradition," *The Journal of Negro History* 80,

Social Science 8 no. 2 (2014): 113–133
[Available online
at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43615193> (Links
to an external site.)].

no. 1 (Winter, 1995): 30-41[available online
at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2717705> (Links

Individual Meetings

Week Twelve

Monday, 08 April 2019 —

Presentation and Discussion Required Reading DUE

Collective Ownership

Gabriela Rendón. “Envisioning Public
Cooperative Housing.” *Stages Journal* no. 2
(2014) [Available online at
[http://www.biennial.com/journal/issue-
2/envisioning-public-cooperative-housing](http://www.biennial.com/journal/issue-2/envisioning-public-cooperative-housing)]:
Unnumbered.

Black Expression: Dance

Angela Fatou Gittens, “Black Dance and the
Fight for Flight: Sabar and the Transformation
and Cultural Significance of Dance from West
Africa to Black America (1960-
2010),” *Journal of Black Studies* 43, no. 1,
Special Issue: 1960s Africa in Historical
Perspective (January 2012), 49-71 [available
online at
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23215195>].

View on Youtube.com:

Urban Bush Women: Walking with 'Trane
2015
(5:30 min).

Shelter by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar (Alvin Ailey)
(2:51min).

Individual Meetings

Week Thirteen

Monday, 15 April 2019 —

Presentation and Discussion Required Reading DUE

Collective Ownership

Amanda Huron. "Creating a Commons in the Capital: The Emergence of Limited-Equity Housing Cooperatives in Washington, D.C." *Washington History* (01 Oct 2014): 56-67 [Available online at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23937720> (Links to an external site.)].

Black Expression: Music

Larry Neal, "The Ethos of the Blues," *The Black Scholar* 3, no. 10 (Summer 1972): 42-48 [available online at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41206840>].

Langston Hughes, "Songs Called the Blues," *Phylon* 2, No. 2 (2nd Quarter 1941) 143-145 [available online at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/271782>].

Individual Meetings

Week Fourteen

Monday, 22 April 2019 —

Final Independent Investigation DUE

Presented in class on 22 April

Posted on Canvass by 05:00 PM by 26 April

Course Logistics

Communications

Readings

This course has three types of readings: literature writing by African American authors, scholarly articles about African American life, and scholarly articles about housing/dwelling. Except for two pieces of literature, the readings are available as PDFs that are posted on Canvass or you may access them online through your Columbia University Library account (all Web addresses are provided). The two pieces that are not available in this manner are widely available and can be purchased for a few dollars online or at a local book store. Please plan ahead to secure these pieces.

Canvass

All handouts will be posted on Canvass in a folder entitled “Assignments.” Most of the readings will be posted in a folder entitled “Readings.” In addition, students must post their completed assignments (slide presentations) in a folder entitled “Student Work.” No assignments should be submitted via email.

Email

Students should check their email at the end of the day on Friday for matters arising about the class. You may feel free to email me at any time if you have questions or concerns about the class or other matters in your academic life.

Contact Information

Email: sesut@uw.edu

Cell: 206.383.6052

Office Hours: By appointment