

Fall 2015

ANTH 3090

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ANTH 3090
The Right to the City:
New Orleans Public Culture
MW
3:30-4:45



[Cities should meet] the need for creative activity, for the *oeuvre* (not only of products and consumable material goods), the need for information, the imaginary, and play...The right to the city [is the] right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit...[It is the right] to urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, enabling the full and complete usage of moments and places.

—Henri Lefebvre

Would you like to visit the old section of New Orleans unchaperoned by the usual guide?—Lyle Saxon

& maybe someday when nobody is
checking it out the drummers will come to life in
St. Louis No. 1 at midnight
beating out the secret messages
& all the masks will drop.
jest like we said they would.
secret messages
secret messages of the gods.

--Tom Dent

Course Overview

This course introduces you to the concepts of urban public culture through the lens of New Orleans. We will begin by considering what the “public” is and how the concept of the “public realm” applies to living in cities. With this foundation, we will then begin to consider how publics were, and continue to be, created in New Orleans. Throughout the

semester, we will be listening and learning about all kinds of music as a way of understanding the way that people in the city have participated and made claims to public life.

New Orleans is a city of great cultural diversity. However, the lasting impact of slavery, reconstruction, and *de jure* and *de facto* segregation have shaped public spaces and performances, often separating an incredible array of cultural experiences into categories of “black” and “white.” As we go through the semester, one of our projects will be to carefully unpackage these categories to understand the more cosmopolitan underpinnings of the city.

Moving through the coursework, we will look at how public culture gives us a window into who has a “right to the city.” Who has had access to power? Who has had to fight for it? And how do these struggles continue to shape the cultures of the contemporary city? In addressing these questions, we will also examine how New Orleans history and cultural values are remembered and reconfigured through public culture, while also recognizing that, sometimes, public cultures manifest dreams and “secret messages” that may not be immediately recognizable.

The schedule of readings is nonlinear. We will deal deeply with a select group of topics from a number of angles that move across time. There will be fieldtrips and guest lectures. As you explore the city, you will be asked to consider your own place in and/or outside of it through small writing assignments that you will share with your classmates. Midway through the semester, you will begin working on creating your own public event, which we will host the last week of class.

Texts

- *Congo Square: African Roots in New Orleans*, by Freddi Evans (ISBN: 1935754033)
- *We As Freeman: Plessy v. Ferguson*, by Keith Medley (ISBN: 1455617237)
- *Talk That Music Talk: Passing on New Orleans Brass Band Music the Traditional Way*, by Bruce Barnes and Rachel Breunlin (ISBN: 1608011070)
- Reader online

Grading

- 25% *Take home midterm exam*.
- 25% *Participation*. Participation includes coming to class on time having completed the readings and taken good notes, as well as the small free-writing assignments done in and outside of class around your own experiences in the course and in the city. Participation also means being respectful of other people’s opinions and offering your own thoughts in a constructive way. Consider how you engage the lectures and your fellow classmates, and how much you are talking. Are you contributing to a dialogue? The course is a cell-phone free zone. You will lose participation points if you are texting or surfing the internet in class. If there is an emergency, step outside to respond to a message.

Attendance is mandatory. If you have to miss class for some reason, please contact me ahead of time. Excessive absences will result in the reduction of your final grade. We

usually check email once a day. If you need to reach us sooner, please text Rachel and include your name. In email messages, please address us by name with a friendly greeting, and sign off with your name. Do not write in all caps.

- 30% *Small groups for final event*
- 20% *Take home final exam and final reflection.*

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

August 19-August 26: What is the public? What does it mean in cities?

“Publics and Counter Publics” by Michael Warner

“City Publics” by Sophie Watson

August 31-September 2: The Creation of a Creole Culture

Excerpts from *Building the Devil’s Empire*, by Shannon Dawdy and *Creole New Orleans: Race and Creolization*

Music from Creole CD project from the New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park

Sept 7: LABOR DAY/NO CLASS

September 9-16: Congo Square and Louis Armstrong Park

Congo Square in New Orleans, by Freddi Evans

Fieldtrip to Congo Square

September 21-30: Bayou Road and the Rise and Fall of the Lafitte Public Housing Development

If Bricks Could Talk Film and Book by Spyboy Productions and the Neighborhood Story Project

Walk Down Bayou Road

October 5-14: De Jure and Defacto Segregation in New Orleans

We As Freemen: Plessy V Ferguson, by Keith Weldon Medley

OCTOBER 7: MIDTERM EXAM DUE

October 19-28: The Civil Rights Movement and Music in New Orleans

Part I of *Talk That Music Talk: Passing on Brass Band Music in New Orleans the Traditional Way*, by Rachel Breunlin and Bruce Barnes.

November 2-11: Brass Band Music in New Orleans Across Time

Part I of *Talk That Music Talk: Passing on Brass Band Music in New Orleans the Traditional Way*

November 16-18: Carnival

“Carnival and the Law,” by Joseph Roach

“Playing Dead: The Northside Skull and Bone Gang” by Stephen C. Wehmeyer

“How We Do It” A Collaborative Interview with Fi Yi Yi and the Mandingo Warriors

November 23-25: Preparation for Final Event

Final Week of Class: Final Event TBD

Final Exam: Wed December 9, 3-5 PM

Other important information:

This syllabus offers a general guide to the readings and pacing of the class. The instructor reserves the right to make adjustments to the reading list. Students will be responsible for the changes.

Students with disabilities who qualify for services should see me at the beginning of the semester to talk about necessary accommodations. Remember that you must register with the Office of Disability Services (UC 260) each semester.

Note on academic integrity: Cheating, plagiarism, falsifying identity, and other forms of academic dishonesty undermine the whole reason you are here. If you are having problems with your writing, or are feeling overwhelmed by coursework, please come see me. Check out the UNO judicial code for more information:

www.uno.edu/~stlf/policy%20Manual/judicial_code.pt2htm

