

URBAN STUDIES/HISTORY 210: THE WIRE AND THE CITY

Spring, 2022

Mondays, 1:45-4:45 pm

Spring 2022 Syllabus updated for Preregistration. Subject to change

"There are times when expanding our imaginations is what is required. The radical movement has over emphasized the role of activism and underestimated the role of reflection."

Grace Lee Boggs

Nina Johnson (ninajohnson2010@u.northwestern.edu), and
Michael Nairn (mpnairn@upenn.edu)

Johnson is a sociologist who has written widely on race, class, and gender, while Nairn is a landscape architect and urban planner who specializes in community development.

When John Waters was filming *Hairspray* in Baltimore in 1988, Pia Zadora reportedly complimented the filmmaker on the extraordinary authenticity of the set. "This isn't a set Pia," Waters chuckled. "people *live* here...Of the many story telling goals pursued by David Simon...a priority was to humanize the underclass...Just beneath the drama, *The Wire* is making the case for the motivations of people trying to get by in a society in which indifferent institutions have more rights than human beings.

Rafael Alvarez

The Wire is one of its core "texts." The HBO series has been called a "visual novel" by David Simon, its co-producer, and according to *Slate*, it is "the best TV show ever broadcast in America." Even though *The Wire* was conceived in the late 1990s and its five seasons aired between 2002 and 2008, much of its content is still crucially relevant. At its core, *The Wire* explores the lives of young Black males in Baltimore, the institution of policing, and the uneasy and often unjust intersection between the two groups.

REINFORCE, REFORM, REIMAGINE, AND REMOVE (ABOLISH, and DEFUND) POLICING are current topics that the course explores and contextualizes. While REINFORCE AND REFORM maintain the status quo, REIMAGINE AND REMOVE require that we co-create a public realm with a new set of structures, processes, and functions better equipped to engage contemporary issues. URBS/HIST 210 also engages the ongoing debate about the roles of the carceral state, structural economic, historical and cultural forces, and individual agency that shape the lives of young Black males in urban settings. The course explores policing, residential segregation and its history, the lack of economic opportunity, violence and its resulting community trauma, and healing. The course does not engage with mass incarceration as it is the primary topic of other courses at Penn.

The Wire contains scenes of graphic violence, sexual behavior, and profanity, so be forewarned.

Academic Integrity

Please note that we expect that you will adhere to the strictest standards of academic integrity in all of your work. Students may work together on certain projects, but all written work must be completed individually. Any student who is found to have violated the university's code will fail the class. If you need help in learning how to cite materials, the library has a helpful website at <http://gethelp.library.upenn.edu/PORT/documentation/>

ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Class participation/discussion leading/questions (25%).

Please note that this class is a seminar; its success depends on students' willingness to come to class having completed the reading, watched the appropriate episodes, thought about questions for discussion, and being prepared to participate in class. We ask that you turn off all electronic devices, including laptops, while you are in class.

a. General Requirements:

- i. Students are expected to participate in every class.
- ii. We ask students to submit questions about the reading for discussion five times during the semester. These are due by 8 p.m. the night before class.

b. Guidelines for Discussion Leadership

- a. Each student will select two class sessions during which they will lead the discussion. Group members will meet to prepare material and plan discussion before the assigned class session. In addition to discussing the assigned readings, group members should choose at least one supplemental resource on the internet to share with the rest of the class. The resource should somehow relate to the week's theme. It might be a recent news item, a blog posting, an organization's website, a brief video, etc. It should connect to content that illustrates, illuminates, or in some other way expands on the readings. For your assigned session your group will be responsible for creating a link on our course blog to your resource, a handout, and for leading in-class discussion.
- b. Please make note of the dates you will be leading class discussion *and* your group members and email addresses so that you can meet prior to class to work on the questions and plan how you would like to use class time.

NOTE: Plan ahead! And allow sufficient time for everyone to be able to find a suitable meeting time!

c. Elements of the Group Presentation

- i. Outline -- For each class session, your group should create an outline of the texts that you will use to synthesize the readings and highlight important points for discussion. Possible strategies for writing your outline include (a) identifying and clarifying each author's main argument (b) reflecting on themes that cut across readings, (c) examining the assumptions and evidence that different authors use,

and/or (d) relating the week's readings to other material from the course.

- ii. In addition to the textual analysis, the outline should also include the following:
 1. A *list* of key concepts, themes or points you identify that cross-cut the readings and films (list and define these. You do not need to identify all main points—but what you determine to be the most important ones—the key concepts that will be the focus of the discussion you will lead in class.)
 2. *Key passages*: Transcribe three to five passages from the readings and explain how they relate to the main points or why they stand out as significant.
 3. *Discussion questions*: List 3-4 thought-provoking questions for discussion in class.
 4. *Link*: Post a link to a resource you find on the internet that illustrates or somehow relates closely to the session's theme and add a discussion of why you find it significant/interesting in relation to the readings and films. This can be a short video on YouTube, a website, a news article, a blog, etc.
 5. (optional) Add reflections, reactions, anecdotes or other related commentary related to the readings that your group would like to share with the class.
- d. Leading in class— Finally, given your additional advance preparation and group discussion you will be expected to lead 60-75 minutes of the class session.
 - i. Presenting your outside source—Your group should prepare a VERY BRIEF presentation to share the external resource you have found and posted to the Discussion Board. This presentation should in some way highlight connections that you see to issues of focus in the readings.
 - ii. Leading discussion—You should have a flexible plan for guiding our discussion through the key elements of the week's readings. Also, be prepared to share your insights about the answers to these questions. Think of creative ways to get discussion going. Do you want students to first discuss in pairs or small groups and then report back? Do you want everyone to address the same question? Do you want to organize a debate? It's a good idea to come prepared with at least four topics to address or questions to pose during the class. Make sure that your questions or topics for discussion are tied closely to the readings and highlight some of what you consider to be key themes or issues. Below are some ideas to help you and your group generate good discussion themes:
 1. Use the reading process and central questions of the course as a guide.

2. Ask questions that are based on specific portions of assigned readings. These might be questions that ask students to discuss their reactions to these passages or to take a position on a controversial topic.
3. Ask analytical questions (usually starting with “why,” “how”)
4. Challenge other students to make connections to previous readings. Be prepared to model with an example of connections you find to be interesting.
5. Share your own personal reactions to one of the readings and ask students to respond.
6. Once you have posed a question to the class, if there is no immediate response, give it some time . . . wait for students to gather their thoughts and respond. If it seems particularly difficult to generate discussion, do not abandon your question and move to the next—take a different angle: for instance, you might allow students to reflect in silence and write a brief response on paper, then ask students to share their ideas.
7. BE CREATIVE!-- Most of all, think creatively about how to engage all the class participants in a discussion and in a process that will lead to greater understanding of key ideas.

PLEASE NOTE: These are the basic responsibilities for groups leading class on a given day. Each class session will be different. This is why each group must meet in advance to plan for the class.

2. Introductory Statement

- Please write a CONCISE statement no longer than 500 words on your current understanding of abolition. What might it look like? Is it possible? Is it a desirable goal? Due: January 14

3. Synthetic papers (60%). We require that you write a synthetic essay no longer than 1500 words each at the end of each module. The first is due on March 4 by 8 p.m., the second on March 24, the third on April 28 by 8 p.m.

- a. Reinforce, Reform, Reimagine, Remove (Abolish and Defund) Policing
- b. Racial Residential Segregation
- c. Imagining a More Just City

TEXTS:

The Wire is available on Amazon Prime and HBO. Articles and other resources will be available on Canvas (ER). The texts below are required. All are available online from the Penn Libraries.

- Derecka Parnell, *Becoming Abolitionists: Police, Protests, and The Pursuit of Freedom*
- Joseph, Peniel, *The Third Reconstruction*, Basic Books, 2022.

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- Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*
- Danielle Sered, *Until We Reckon*
- Thomas Abt, *Bleeding Out: The Devastating Consequences of Urban Violence*

RESOURCE:

Penn Libraries Course Guide

<https://guides.library.upenn.edu/baltimore>

SCHEDULE:

MODULE ONE -- THE CARCERAL STATE: POLICING

January 12: Welcome

Zoom class

- How to read critically
- How to have difficult conversations
- Framing the course:
 - Defining the carceral state
 - Abolishing the existing carceral state
 - Reimagining public safety
 - Declaration of Universal Human Rights
 - Housing and community segregation as a violation of Universal Human Rights
 - Violence in the city
 - Restorative justice and a Healing-Centered Paradigm
 - Reimagining urban justice and the right to the city
- Class exercise
 - Identifying elements of the carceral state
- How to watch *The Wire*
 - Season 1, episode 1 (in class)

Readings (To be completed before class)

- Washington Post Interview with former Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/12/28/krasner-nutter-philadelphia-crime/>
- NPR Interview with Thomas Abt (3 min), <https://www.npr.org/2017/09/27/554057382/harvard-scholar-highlights-unclear-causes-behind-rising-homicide-rates>
- Alec MacGillis, What Philadelphia Reveals About America's Homicide Surge,

https://www.propublica.org/article/philadelphia-homicide-surge?utm_source=sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=majorinvestigations&utm_content=feature

- Black Public Defenders Association, “Disrupting Carceral Systems: BPDA’s Recommendations to the Biden-Harris Administration,” 2021, <http://blackdefender.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/bpda-biden-harris-report.pdf>

If you have not read the following essays, please read before the first class.

- Nikole Hannah-Jones, 1619 Project <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html>
- James Baldwin, “Letter From a Region in My Mind,” *New Yorker*, 1962 (the main essay in Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time*, 1963).

January 14: Introductory Statement due

January 24: The Carceral State

Asynchronous

- Season 1, episodes 2-5

Reading:

- Derecka Parnell, *Becoming Abolitionists: Police, Protests, and The Pursuit of Freedom*

In Class:

- Deconstructing the Carceral State

January 31: The Carceral State:

Locating policing within the apparatus of the Carceral State

Asynchronous

- Season 1, episodes 6-8

Reading:

- Dorothy Roberts, “Abolition Constitutionalism,” *Harvard Law Review*, 2019

In Class:

- An Overview of the Carceral State and the Role of Policing

February 7: Reconstruction and the 13th Amendment

Reading:

- Joseph, Peniel, *The Third Reconstruction*,

Synchronous Session:

- The 13th Amendment
- Reconstruction and Its Aftermath

In Class:

- Ava Duvernay, *Thirteenth*. (On Netflix)

February 14: Policing: Broken Windows and The Destruction of Community Trust

Asynchronous:

- Season 1, episodes 8-10
- Project Implicit, <https://Implicit.Harvard.Edu/Implicit/>

Reading:

- George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson, "Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety," *The Atlantic*, March, 1982 (ER)
- Ben Jones and Eduardo Mendieta, "Introduction: Police Ethics after Ferguson," *The Ethics of Policing*, 2021.
- Angela Davis, "Introduction," *Policing the Black Man*.
- Bryan Stevenson, "A Presumption of Guilt The Legacy of America's History of Racial Injustice," *Policing the Black Man* (p. 3).
- Katheryn Russell-Brown "Making Implicit Bias Explicit Black Men and the Police" *Policing the Black Man* (p. 135).

Reports

- Department of Justice, "Baltimore Police Department-Findings Report," August 10, 2016 (ER) (Executive Summary)

In Class

- The Murder of George Floyd and Policing
- Broken Windows and Its Aftermath

February 21: Policing: Reinforce, Reform, Reimagine, or Replace? The Issues with Reform

Asynchronous

- Season 3, episodes 1-3
- Structural Frustrations: Challenges to Implementing Change, Quattrone Center for the Administration of Fair Justice
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CP68930zN8&list=PLR5Q3wC5nyVkVC9R4yP4IV3N5wvJLmO7z&index=5>
- Dr. Phil Goff and Baltimore Police Commissioner Michael Harrison debate how and when to "defund the police."
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=voEpbEilg7c>

Reading:

- William Finnegan, "How Police Unions Fight Reform," *New Yorker*, July 20, 2020.
- Annette Gordon-Reed, "The Problem of Police Powers for People Living While Black," *New York Review of Books*, June 13, 2020

- Barry Friedman, Disaggregating the Policing Function, *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, March 2021.
- Baltimore tried reforming the police. They fought every change.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/baltimore-police-reforms-crime/2020/06/18/7d60e91e-b041-11ea-8758-bfd1d045525a_story.html
- Alex Vitale, “The Limits of Police Reform, Chapter 1, *The End of Policing*, pp 7-33 . 2017.
- Friedman et al., Changing the Law to Change Policing, First Steps: Yale Law Justice Collaboratory, 2021.
- Pew Research Center, “Behind the Badge: Amid Protests and Calls for Reform, how police view their jobs, key issues, and recent fatal encounters between Blacks and Police (2017)

February 28: Policing: Reimagine and Replace (Abolish and Defund)

Asynchronous

- Season 3, episodes 4-7
- Four Paths to Better Policing, Reinforce, Reform, Reimagine, Replace: National Liberty Museum, November 1, 2021.
Listen to the four speakers frame the issues:
Meeting Recording:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/7swMIipflql3rzk-6OzdDcVOpZQL9Uo68DzVwx8G4fTFwQTNWqtf19OHn07izNVv.l6FF6EfU9FTI0nne>
- “Beyond Reform, Reenvisioning the Role of Police,” Quattrone Center for the Administration of Fair Justice
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGXVSg5Ejdl>
- Policing Without the Police
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tf0nEQTLw04>

Reading:

- Amna Akbar, How Defund and Disband Became the Demands, *New York Review of Books*, June 20, 2020
- Monica Bell, Next-Generation Policing Research: Three Propositions, Yale Law Justice Collaboratory
- Meares, Tracey, “Clashing Narratives of Policing? The Quest for Lawful versus Effective Policing and the Possibility of Abolition as a Solution, *The Ethics of Policing*.
- Goff et al, Re-imagining Public Safety: Prevent Harm and Lead with the Truth: A five-step policy plan for policing in America
- New York University Policing Project and Yale Law Justice Collaboratory, “Reimagining Public Safety, First Convening Report.”
- I. Bennett Capers Afrofuturism, Critical Race Theory, and Policing in The Year 2044, *New York University Law Review*, 2020

March 4: Synthetic Essay 1 Due

In the summer of 2020, we witnessed the largest social movement in modern history. The killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd brought the issues of police brutality and the unequal use of force into sharp relief. Millions joined in protest of these killings across the globe. Where are we on this issue now? In your paper, consider the purpose of police (what it is and what it should be), the massive investment of municipal resources into law enforcement, and mechanisms of accountability. Can we reform the institution of policing or must we reimagine public safety and replace the current system of policing?

March 18: Op-Ed Assignment Due

(Yes, this date is out of synch but it's a part of Module One)

The *New York Times* and Fox News have both asked you to produce an op-ed piece for publication. The word limit is 800 words. You must take a stand on the future of policing in our urban neighborhoods.

Module 2: PLACE: RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION

March 14

This week presents an historical overview of housing and neighborhood policies focusing on restrictive covenants that have increased resident segregation in American cities.

Asynchronous:

- Season 3, episodes 8-10
- Douglas Massey, Segregation and Social Inequality
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09kKXCrRmvk>
- The Baltimore Plan, 1953
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0wwk5D_7FE

Reading:

- Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, pp. 1-114.
- City Lab, "After Nearly a Century, Redlining Still Divides Baltimore."

In the News:

- To Help Black Developers, Programs Begin with Access to Capital," *New York Times*, March 17, 2021.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/17/business/to-help-black-developers-programs-start-with-access-to-capital.html>
- New York Times, Seller Financed Deals Are Putting Poor People in Lead-Tainted Houses
- New York Times, "Racial Penalties in Baltimore Mortgages," 2015

Research

- Rugh, Albright, and Massey, "Race, Space, and Cumulative Disadvantage: A Case Study of the Subprime Lending Collapse, *Social Problems*, pp. 186-216. (The basis for the New York Times Editorial. Please read the introduction and discussion to see how research is

translated to the popular press. Familiarize yourself with the methodology of the paper, the kinds of data that were collected, and the analysis performed.)

In Class

- Redlining
- HOLC

March 21: Place: Residential Segregation and The Baltimore Ghetto (Part 2)

Asynchronous

- Season 3, episodes 11-12
- Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Penn Urban Studies Annual Lecture 2019
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXvpWxacuNY&t=9s>
- Matthew Desmond, Evicted
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6HPUyFd2b8>

Reading:

- Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, pp. 114-215
- Derek Hyra, et al. "Contextualizing Gentrification Chaos: The Rise of the Fifth Wave"

March 27: Synthetic Essay Two

Many argue that desegregation is a failed project, citing coordinated patterns of resistance between and among various public and private stakeholders and institutions. Is desegregation necessary? Is it possible to pursue reinvestment in neighborhoods to stave off gentrification absent the goal of desegregation?

March 28: Eva Rosen on Housing Vouchers

Asynchronous

- Season 4, episodes 1-3

Reading

- Eva Rosen, *The Voucher Promise*, 2020. (selections)
- Eva Rosen, "Horizontal Immobility: How Narratives of Neighborhood Violence Shape Housing Decisions," 2017

MODULE THREE: THE CASE FOR ABOLITION: VIOLENCE AND COMMUNITIES

April 4: Poverty, Inequity, Lack of Opportunity, Shame and Isolation

Asynchronous

- Season 4, episodes 4-6

Reading:

- Thomas Abt, *Bleeding Out: The Devastating Consequences of Urban Violence*
- <https://thehill.com/opinion/criminal-justice/402367-to-reduce-urban-violence-lets-consider-the-real-causes-not-guns> (an alternative viewpoint from the right)

In Class:

- The Interrupters
- Eva Rosen, The Gordon S. Bodek Annual Lecture

April 11: Violence: Poverty, Inequity, Lack of Opportunity, Shame and Isolation

Asynchronous

- Season 4, episodes 7-9
- Ava Duvernay, *When They See Us*, Parts 1-2.

Reading:

- Thomas Abt, Bleeding Out: The Devastating Consequences of Urban Violence
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, Everyday Violence in Baltimore, The Atlantic (ER)
- Giffords Law Center, A Case Study in Hope: Lesson's From Oakland's Remarkable Reduction in Gun Violence, 2019

In Class:

- TBA

April 18: Emerging Adulthood and Community Trauma

Asynchronous

- Ava Duvernay, *When They See Us*, Parts 3-4
- Season 4, episodes 10-12.

Reading:

- Danielle Sered, *Until We Reckon*, pp. 1-128
- Tina Rosenberg
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/03/opinion/gun-violence-personal-deterrence.html>
- National Network for Safe Communities, Group Violence Intervention An Implementation Guide
- Leah Sakala et al. Improving Emerging Adults' Safety and Well-Being, Urban Institute, 2020.

In Class:

- TBA

April 25: Emerging Adulthood and Community Trauma (Part 2)

Asynchronous:

- Reimagining Justice, The Vera Institute.
<https://www.vera.org/research/reimagining-justice>

Reading

- Danielle Sered, *Until We Reckon*, pp. 129-251
- Shawn Ginwright, "Shifting from Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement,"

- Pro Publica, The PTSD Crisis that is Being Ignored: Americans Wounded in Their Own Neighborhoods.

One who attempts to improve existing systems of justice [universities] is very likely to become preoccupied with removing current deficiencies. Unfortunately, getting rid of what one does not want does not necessarily yield what one does want. This is apparent to those who get rid of television programs they do not want by changing channels. They have a high probability of getting programs they want even less. Therefore, effective design of a new justice system [university] must be directed at getting what one wants, not at getting rid of what one does not want.

Russell L. Ackoff

April 29: Final Paper Due

David Simon has decided to update The Wire to make it more relevant in 2020. Much has changed in Baltimore in the 20 years since he and the other writers conceived it. Freddie Gray, gentrification, Black Lives Matter, conversations on abolition, reparations and other issues have arisen in those years. He is interested in how the carceral state has changed since the original series. Specifically, he is interested in presenting to viewers what a reimagined criminal justice system and policing that serves all Baltimore citizens might look like in the years 2030 -2040. He asks you to provide a précis for a pilot of a four (4) episode. Which issues have changed or become more or less important since the early 2000s? What new issues have emerged? What type of narrative best expresses them?