

## English 411: Prison and the Artist

This course will address prison reality and culture and the ways in which prisons are represented to us and to others. Discussions will focus on the works and their implications about personal attitudes and behavior and about social institutions. Expect journals and final projects. There will be no exams.

<p>Fall 2011 Buzz Alexander Office Hours: Weds. 3-4 (3275 Angell)</p>	<p><b>Meeting times:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lecture: Tuesday 1-2, G127 Angell</li><li>• Lecture-Discussion: Thursday 1-3, G127 Angell</li><li>• Film: Tuesday night, 7:00, 1528 CCLittle. There will be a second, optional showing of the required film Wednesday night, 7:00, 1528 CCLittle (we'll compare notes in the first class and see if any of you need this second showing; we can also show it on a monitor in a room in Mason, which would be easier). <i>Note times on the films. Some evenings will last longer than 2 hours.</i></li></ul>
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### Books

At Michigan Book & Supply:

- Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow; Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*.
- Nell Bernstein, *All Alone in the World; Children of the Incarcerated*.
- Geoffrey Canada, *FistStickKnifeGun*.
- J.M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*.
- Ted Conover, *Newjack; Guarding Sing Sing*.
- Helen Prejean, *Dead Man Walking*.
- Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower*.

### Course Pack

At Dollar Bill's, Church Street:

- Robert James Bidinotto, "Must Our Prisons Be Resorts?," Reader's Digest, Nov. 1994, 65-71.
- Jimmy Santiago Baca, "I Am Sure Of It," "Immigrants In Our Own Land," "Like An Animal," "When Life," "So Mexicans Are Taking The Jobs From Americans," "The New Warden," "I Am With Those," "It Started," "How We Carry Ourselves," "There Are Black," "On A September Day" (selections from Immigrants in Our Own Land & Selected Early Poems).
- Lorna Dee Cervantes, "Poem for the Young White Man Who Asked Me How I, an Intelligent, Well-Read Person Could Believe in the War Between Races," from Emplumada.
- Jonathan Kozol, The Night is Dark and I am Far From Home. *Please note that this is a full-length book: give yourself ample time to read it.*
- Charles M. Blow, "The Decade of Lost Children," *New York Times*, August 8, 2011 (I didn't copy out the page – it is a column on the op-ed page).
- Charles M. Blow, "Failing Forward," *New York Times*, August 27, 2011, p. A19.

### Websites:

**Required:** [www.michigan.gov/corrections](http://www.michigan.gov/corrections)

**Helpful, but not required websites:** [www.360degrees.org](http://www.360degrees.org); [www.sentencingproject.org](http://www.sentencingproject.org)

## Schedule

**Note: Please** do not see films on a television set or on your laptop instead of on the large screen, and even if you have seen the films recently, please see them again on the scheduled date, so that you will have the details fully in front of you when you come to discussion.

Sept. 6	Introduction Film: <u>Monster</u> (Patty Jenkins, 2004, 109 minutes). <i>Assignment:</i> between September 6-22, travel to a local state correctional facility. See below, under Assignments.
Sept. 8	Discussion Wonderfully, we're a relatively small class, so I'd like to combine discussion of <u>Monster</u> with some talk from each of us about what has brought us to this class.
Sept. 13	Lecture/discussion Film: <u>The Jackal of Nahueltoro</u> (Miguel Littin, 1969, 89 minutes). Note: First 5 students alphabetically will turn in journals (see assignments, below).
Sept. 15	Discussion Reading: <i>FistStickKnifeGun</i> and "Must Our Prisons Be Resorts?"
Sept. 20	Discussion Film: <u>The Shawshank Redemption</u> (Frank Darabont, 1994, 142 minutes).
Sept. 22	Film in Class: <u>Handling Aggressive Inmates</u> (AIMS Media, James Skidmore, c 1980, 22 minutes). Discussion <u>Shawshank Redemption</u> and <u>Handling Aggressive Inmates</u> .
Sept. 27	Discussion Films: <u>The Wildest Show in the South</u> (produced by Jonathan Stack, 31minutes); <u>The Farm</u> (Jonathan Stack, 1998, 91 minutes) Reading: <i>The New Jim Crow</i>
Sept. 29	Discussion Guests: formerly incarcerated male prisoners.
Oct. 4	Discussion Film: <u>Nine Hundred Women</u> (Laleh Khadivi, 2000, 73 minutes). Reading: <i>All Alone in the World</i> and Lorna Dee Cervantes "Poem for the Young White Man..."
Oct. 6	Discussion Guests: formerly incarcerated female prisoners.
Oct. 11	Discussion <u>The Woodsman</u> (Nicole Kassell, 2004, 87 minutes) Reading: Poems by Jimmy Santiago Baca.
Oct. 13	Discussion
Oct. 18	Fall Study Break: No class
October 20	Discussion and film in class: selection from <u>Maximum Security University</u> (California Prison Focus, 1999).
Oct. 25	Discussion Film: <u>Precious</u> (Lee Daniels, 2010, 109 minutes). Reading: <i>The Night is Dark and I am Far from Home</i> .
Oct. 27	Possible guests: Gary Coakley from Boysville and a counselor from Vista Maria (these are juvenile facilities, one for boys, the other for girls).

Nov. 1	Films: <u>The Execution Protocol</u> (Stephen Trombley, 1995, 83 minutes); <u>A Kill for a Kill</u> (Rod Williams, America Undercover Series, 1996, 54 minutes).
Nov. 3	Discussion Film: <u>Facing the Demons</u> (Aviva Ziegler, 2000, 57 minutes). Reading: <i>Dead Man Walking</i> .
Nov. 8	Discussion. Films: <u>Interviews with My Lai Veterans</u> (Joesph Strick, 1970, 22 minutes) and <u>Taxi to the Dark Side</u> (Alex Gibney, 2008, 106 minutes). Reading: <i>The Sunflower</i>
Nov. 10	Discussion
Nov. 15	Discussion Film: <u>Through the Wire</u> (Nina Rosenblum, 1990, 77 minutes) Reading: <i>Waiting for the Barbarians</i> .
Nov. 17	Discussion.
Nov. 22	Guest: corrections officer and/or warden or deputy warden Film: <u>Bowling for Columbine</u> (Michael Moore, 2002, 125 minutes)
Nov. 24	Thanksgiving, no class.
Nov. 29	Guest: defense attorney or Natalie Holbrook of American Friends Service Committee or Mary King of Michigan Prisoner Re-entry Initiative. Film: <u>Ghosts of Attica</u> (Brad Lichtenstein, 2002, 90 minutes) Reading: <i>Newjack</i> .
Dec. 1	Discussion
Dec. 6	Discussion Film: <u>Capote</u> (Bennett Miller, 2005, 115 minutes)
Dec. 8	Discussion
Dec. 13	Discussion Evening: creative projects

**Other films available:**

- Profits of Punishment (Cathy Scott, 2000, 60 minutes): international prison market and prison workers. Askwith Media Library.
- Corrections (Ashley Hunt, 2001, an hour?). Prison Industrial Complex. Askwith Media Library.
- Blue End (Kaspar Kasics, 2001, 85 minutes). Scientific use of executed man's body. Askwith Media Library.
- Yes, in My Backyard (Tracy Huling, 1999, 60 minutes). Buzz has it.
- Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Experiment (Ken Musen and Philip Zimbardo, 1991, 51 minutes). Askwith Media Library.
- Inside Out (1985, 85 minutes). Michigan Prisoners' play for incarcerated and other high risk youth. Askwith Media Library.
- Juvies (Leslie Neal, 2004). Excellent film with incarcerated youth. Askwith Media Library.
- High Risk Offender (Barry Greenwald, 1999, 58 minutes). About parole. Askwith Media Library.
- The Last Graduation (Barbara Zahm, 1997). Excellent, moving film about ending of funding for higher education in prisons.
- Also, go to Askwith Library on the UM website, and search for prison films.

## Assignments

1. You will write a total of 4 six-page journal entries. They will come in on a staggered schedule: that is, beginning in the third week of term, the first five or six students alphabetically will turn in their journals. The following week, the next five or six will turn in their journals, and the week after that, the third group will turn in their journals. The week after that, the first group will again turn in journals. Journals will come in on Thursday and be returned the following Tuesday. See below for a description of journal entries.
2. I would like you to drop by my office hour early in the term. I am very willing to answer logistical questions over email, but very much prefer doing so, and communicating in general, personally during office hours.
3. **Between January 6 and January 22**, you must visit any one of a number of local state correctional facilities (prisons). Visiting means the following: stop, get out of your car, not talking with each other, take the time to observe all you can. Do not drive on any roads that go around the periphery of the prison (very dangerous) and do not walk on the grounds outside the fence; you can stop across the road, you can enter the parking lot. If anyone stops and asks what you are doing, you can simply (and respectfully!) explain that this is a course assignment. If you wish, you can go into the prison waiting room and see if there is any literature you can take - that is, information about the prison, about visiting the prison, perhaps the prisoner newspaper (I'm not sure any of the prisons have these now). Do not take photographs: it is against the law. *You should write about this visit and your observations in your journal.* I have no particular expectations of what you will see or what you will say about what you see; we are interested in *your* thoughts and observations.
4. **By the end of October**, spend *at least one hour on the Michigan Department of Corrections website* ([michigan.gov/corrections](http://michigan.gov/corrections)). I'm interested in learning what you find there. I have listed above some other websites that have useful statistics and analysis. These are not required, but you might find them useful.
5. A ten-fifteen page paper is due by the final day of class; or an equivalent creative project must be ready for presentation or performance on December 14. Films, videotapes, poems, stories, plays, drawings, dances, original music, etc., created during the term are accepted and encouraged as projects (I will help students interested in group creative projects find each other). \*\* The creative projects must be concerned with prison or related issues that come up in class. Other kinds of projects which involve students in activities related to the course are also encouraged. Each individual involved in the making of a film, poem, or other non-term-paper project must also turn in a short informal paper (approximately 4 typed pages), analyzing the experience (initial plans, problems, group process, mistakes, lessons, assessment of completed project, etc.) All such projects will be presented to the class on **December 13**. Reports on research and lectures will not be part of those evenings. History, political science, psychology, and economics type papers will not be accepted as final papers. If you choose to do an interview, whether on paper or on video, for your project, the result must be more than a long, unedited, mechanical project. **PLEASE NOTE: consult with me about your paper or project.**  
\*\* I will take time, perhaps before or right after a film showing on a Tuesday, to meet with those of you who are working on such a project, or an interview, or any other project that might be shown to the class.

## Journals

- Expert film knowledge, professional literary criticism, 'correct ideas,' and so forth are not required. **What will be important is evidence of an effort to come to grips with a specific work or specific issue, to think and feel it out, to single out what is notable and/or significant in it. You are encouraged, too, to reflect on the larger questions and problems suggested by the specific work and by other works in the course. Impressions, judgments, reactions, comparisons, tentative ideas all are relevant if**

**clearly directed at the individual work, at a group of works, at specific related ideas or experiences.**

- Journal entries are not essays, need not be perfectly polished, though a clear hand will be much appreciated.
- Journals will be evaluated (graded), but grades will not be written in the journals (students may, if they wish, request their grades to be included in the journal). I will write comments, respond to specific questions, try to ask you challenging questions, and so forth. Emphasis is placed on dialogue between you and me, both through the journal entries as we respond to each other's questions, ideas, and so forth, and through personal contact.
- Journals are a way of capturing and shaping a film in one's mind before the images fade. It is a good idea to write them as soon as possible after the film. Journals can help shape and define your understanding of a film, a book, and an issue. An entry will run at least six pages on a piece of paper the size of this one with normal handwriting. Keep your entries in a notebook, so that they can come in all together each time.