

Spring 2024

## **HSS 404-108: Newark Narratives: Art/Culture/Site Literacies**

Jonathan Curley

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# NEWARK NARRATIVES:

## Art/Culture/Site Literacies

TIER112

T 6:00-8:50

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### Course Description

This course is a comprehensive survey of Newark, a combined literature/cultural studies seminar and anthropological field work course designed to explore and map Newark in various disciplines, including literature, history, film, politics, religion, architecture, and sociology. It will be provisional and investigative, based on knowledge accrued and acquired, delving into various possible lines and intersections of inquiry. We will be cartographers of the cosmopolis, generating new insights into the various meanings about cities and city life.

Since the inspiration and conception of this class originated in the work and life of Newark artist **Amiri Baraka** (1934-2014)—in fact, was discussed and designed in tandem with him on the campus of NJIT—the recurring and representative status of his legacy will be a cornerstone to our site-strategic inquiry and sometimes a counterpoint or complement to other voices, other vantages, other angles, and other core components of Newark's artistic and cultural heritage.

*This course has undergone a radical restructuring of form and content in anticipation of this Spring 2023 semester. Invaluable suggestions by Ayushi Shah (NJIT, '24) in one of the sections of Newark Narratives offered in the Fall 2022 semester led to crucial alterations and additions. I am very indebted to her for her invaluable insights and suggestions.*

### Prerequisites/Co-requisites

Prerequisites: [HUM 102](#) with a grade of C or higher, and 6 credits at the 300-level History and Humanities GER with a grade of C or higher; 3 credits at the 300-level may be taken

concurrently as a co-requisite. Restrictions: Registration requires senior standing. The capstone seminars allow students the opportunity to work closely with an instructor in a specific area of the instructor's expertise. Students are required to bring together interests and skills developed in previous courses. Students make in-depth oral and written presentations. A list of capstone seminars is published each semester in the course registration bulletin.

## **Learning Outcomes**

- Cultivate literary and cinematic analysis and deepened interpretation of critical texts
- Explore and engage various historical, political, social, and artistic contexts and sites relevant to both Newark and cities and areas globally
- Acquire ability to use literary narrative as instrument of sociological exploration
- Improve writing skills and evolve perspectives on narrative and the relationships between art, literature, and history
- Become more aware of the interdisciplinary and multifaceted applications of artistic enterprise and life
- Further understanding and empathy for urban communities and the various relevant issues that contribute to a city and a citizenry's strengths, weaknesses, and possibilities
- Connect university community to local urban community
- Foster intellectual and imaginative community and congenial and intensive discussion

## **Requirements**

You are expected to keep up with the reading in the texts and complete all assigned exercises. Classroom participation is essential. The seminar format for this course requires discussion, a constellation of active, energetic voices. If you are not inclined or comfortable at discoursing at length about our various topics, issues, and themes, this course might not be right for you. Participation can also take the shape of various other engagements, including CANVAS forum posts, written commentaries or suggestions, and other input not assigned. ***A full 20 points accounts for participation alone so keep this point of order in mind.***

I will ask that you bring responses to particular texts under discussion each week and compile a weekly writing journal based on your writing experience, classroom reactions, and any other thoughts related to this course and this city. You will be utilizing CANVAS and expected to interact with its contents regularly. Find the link at [canvas.njit.edu](http://canvas.njit.edu).

## **Grading Scale**

A = 90-100 B+ = 85-89 B = 80-84 C+ = 75-79 C = 70-74 D = 60-69 F = 50-59

## **Exam and Exam Make Up Policies**

There are no examinations in this class except for a vital and in-depth examination into experience, city, culture, art, and self.

**Keep in mind that CANVAS will both complement, supplement and, at times, correct the syllabus in terms of timetables, scheduled speakers, field trips and content.**

### **Field Work Project**

You are required to undertake Field Work in preparation of ONE of TWO final projects that will help construct and map your understanding of the city. This labor will also help you understand the logic of how we theorize and imagine Newark in relation to some of the key ethical and aesthetic issues of this course. Your approach can be flexible and multi-disciplinary and should include at least 2-3 relevant interviews. All interview subjects should be either residing in Newark or working in its borders. No interview subject should be affiliated with NJIT or Rutgers-Newark. I encourage you to immerse yourself in the urban community and its urban environment. Literary focus is not necessary. However, as you should be establishing connections between the course particulars and the realities you encounter beyond campus. You can explore art, culture, history, music, architecture, sports, civil rights activism, housing and commercial realty, education, power companies, grassroots organizations, rehabilitation centers, et cetera. Please consult with me about your ideas and I shall offer intensive oversight throughout your project.

The structure of this project will consist of:

- an abstract/introduction of your subject and reasons for pursuing it (2-3 pages)
- a transcription of entire or partial interview or link to audio files or other embedded web-based
- a 5-7 page discussion of your vision, methodology, conclusions, change or deepening of perspective, the necessity of your work and its potential use-value, relationship to this course and its possible enhancement of its pedagogical underpinnings

### **Final Project**

The Final Project can be either a substantial extension of your mid-term paper (10-12 pages) or a non-text-based work (with supplementary explanatory notes concerning its creation) relating to this course and your experience in it. Some examples include (and are not limited to): video diaries, site photography, music, poetry sequences, short stories, paintings, filmed excerpts of various texts, statistical analysis of City Hall budget, comparisons of local public and charter schools, restaurant guides, historical demographic trends, real estate studies, and on and on. We will devote considerable time to discussing and developing these projects.

### **NJIT University Code on Academic Integrity**

*“Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at:*

*<http://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf>*

*Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. **Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university.** If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at [dos@njit.edu](mailto:dos@njit.edu)*

## Grade Breakdown

Class Participation (includes attendance)	20 points
Weekly writings	20 points
Mid-Term Essay	25 points
<i>American Pastoral</i> Commentary	10 points

## Fieldwork Project

or

Alternative Final Project 25 points

## Required Texts & Tickets

Baraka, Amiri. Poetry and Drama (available online)

Roth, Philip. *Nemesis* (Vintage: 978-0307475008)

Roth, Philip. *American Pastoral* (Vintage: 978-0375701429)

[illegible]

+ Supplementary Materials will be utilized as well as we undertake critical, creative, and conceptually exciting projects using various artistic media and technologies to bolster our notions and representations of this course and its directives.

[illegible]

### \*\*\*\*Important Public Service Announcement\*\*\*\*

This course is a deep-immersive ethnographic course of study. As a result, we will find ourselves visiting various sites, being visited by some incredibly insightful NJIT and Newark-based individuals, and embarking on an odyssey to known and unknown destinations. Scheduling these events and interactions will occur throughout the semester. As a result, there is an element of contingency in the calendar, conditions, and trajectories of our exploration. I will notify you the at least the previous class about a development affecting the next class.

## Calendar/Course Outline

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We begin our descent into our destination of Newark—including the downtown area but spreading throughout the city expanse—through poetry, perhaps an unlikely entrée into the physical, mental, and political structures of a city but perhaps giving access to the city through the most meaningful means—the roundabout, the detour, the oblique, the subterranean and also the authentic, the urban trumpet, cosmopolitan trumpet, story’s siren, narrative’s necessary intrusion into the realm of the insensate.

How do we make connections between art and society on the following levels:

- Psycho-geographical
- Materialist
- Tradition & Culture
- Spatial location; metaphysical conceptions of space and place
- Multidisciplinary artistic and non-artistic exercises (such as....?)

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## Week 1 (1/16)

Introduction: “We Embark on the New Ark of Newark: Sites & Sights to Be Shone”

**Virtual Class visit by Newark Filmmakers Marylou and Jerome Bongiorno**

## Week 2 (1/23)

Documentary *Revolution 67* (2007; Directors Marylou and Jerome Bongiorno) for this class.

For this class, familiarize yourself with some of the websites at the top of our CANVAS Page and be ready for some deep discussion. We shall also discuss *Revolution 67* post-screening.

Begin reading Philip Roth's *Nemesis* and have it completed by 2/22

### Week 3 (1/30)

Introduction: "Amiri Baraka & Newark: The Transformations of a Life and a City"

Read Introduction to *SOS Poems 1961-2013*

(found here:

<http://www.yourimpossiblevoice.com/preface-s-o-s-poems-1961-2013-amiri-baraka/>) & I will introduce the Poet and Poetry in each class of Amiri Baraka; we will also discuss and share poetry in general.

### Week 4 (2/6)

Amiri Baraka: The Legend Begins

#### 1. The Bohemian Poet

"Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note"

"In Memory of Radio"

"The Bridge"

"Vice"

"The New Sheriff"

"Notes for a Speech"

+ *Dutchman* (one act play available online)

### Week 5 (2/13)

Documentary Screening: *The Rule* (2014; Directors Marylou and Jerome Bongiorno).

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Is Fiction not True? Historically inaccurate or non-existent? What is the difference between a truthful narrative and a fabricated one (is there a difference?)? How can art at times clarify or intensify our relationship to reality? *American Pastoral* is both the exquisite and exhaustive

centerpiece of this course and a contemporary classic of literature. Its interrogation and critique of our (pre)conceptions of narrative, America, Newark, and how we can view the lives of others or fail to comprehend the vast complicated layers of ourselves and others are sharp and yet inconclusive. How can we establish criteria for novelistic narrative's ability to animate, clarify, illuminate, and deconstruct our lives?

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## Week 6 (2/20)

Continued discussion of *The Rule* and Inaugural discussion of Philip Roth and *Nemesis*

## Week 7 (2/27)

Continued discussion of *Nemesis*

## Week 8 (3/5)

Roundtable Discussion and Discussion of *American Pastoral*  
(Read to AT LEAST page 113)

### **Final Project Proposal Due**

Week 9      \*\*\*\*\* Spring Recess March 11-March 19 \*\*\*\*\*

## Week 10 (3/19)

Discussion of *American Pastoral* Discussion of *American Pastoral* (Read to AT LEAST page 283)

## Week 11 (3/26)

### **Mid-term Essay due by class time**

### **Baraka Continued:**

#### 2. Poet in Transition

“Balboa, the Entertainer”

“A Contract. (For the Destruction and Rebuilding of Paterson)”

“An Agony. As No”

“Short Speech to My Friends”

“The Politics of Rich Painters”

“ A Poem for Democrats”



“Duncan Spoke of a Process”

Documentary *Rust* (2021; Directors Marylou and Jerome Bongiorno)

## Week 12 (4/2)

*American Pastoral* (Read to approximately page 350)

Documentary: *Why Is We Americans?* (2020; Directors Udi Aloni & Ayana Stafford-Morris)

Baraka Materials: Listen at:

***Sounds:***

<http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Baraka.php>

View at: ***Sights:***

www.youtube.com

## Week 13 (4/9)

*American Pastoral* (Finish)

Roundtable Discussion

## Week 14 (4/16)

Amiri Baraka Continued

3. Poet as Black Nationalist

“Black Dada Nihilmus”

“Political Poem”

“The Liar”

“A Poem Some People Will Have to Understand”

“Tone Poem”

“Numbers, Letters”

“Black Art”

“Poem for HalfWhite College Students”

4. “Poet as Marxist Revolutionary”

“When We’ll Worship Jesus”  
“Reggae or Not!”  
“Wise 1- Wise 4”  
“I Am”

Roundtable Discussion about Amiri Baraka and Reflection

Be ready to share your creative/critical homage to/takedown of Baraka (details to follow)

Week 15 (4/23)

**Field Work Project Due in Class**

Last Day of Class

Our Final Seminar Session

**FINAL RESEARCH PROJECT DUE BY 5pm Friday, May 3rd**