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

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

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

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

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wk. Date</th>
<th>Presentation / Discussion</th>
<th>Independent Investigations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11:00–12:00</td>
<td></td>
<td>12:00–01:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Jan</td>
<td>Free Write • Even the Walls</td>
<td>Introductions • Course Overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04 Feb</td>
<td>Right to Culture • Black Space: 1805–1869</td>
<td>Individual Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Feb</td>
<td>The Art of Dwelling • Souls of Black Folk</td>
<td>Individual Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Feb</td>
<td>Segregation • Black Space: 1932–1945</td>
<td>Independent Investigation Concept DUE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Feb</td>
<td>Right to Housing • Black Space: 1949–1955</td>
<td>Individual Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04 Mar</td>
<td>Housing Discrimination • Black Space: 1950s</td>
<td>Individual Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Mar</td>
<td>Kinney Trip</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Mar</td>
<td>Spring Break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01 Apr</td>
<td>Collective Ownership • Black Expression: Quilting</td>
<td>Individual Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08 Apr</td>
<td>Collective Ownership • Black Expression: Dance</td>
<td>Individual Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Apr</td>
<td>Collective Ownership • Black Expression: Music</td>
<td>Individual Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Apr</td>
<td>Final Independent Investigation DUE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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


Week Three

**Monday, 04 February 2019 ———**

**Presentation and Discussion**

**Required Reading DUE**

- Right to Culture
- Black Space: 1805–1869


### Individual Meetings

Week Four
Monday, 11 February 2019 ——

Presentation and Discussion
Required Reading DUE

The Art of Dwelling

Souls of Black Folk


Individual Meetings

Week Five

Monday, 18 February 2019 ——

Presentation and Discussion
Required Reading DUE

Segregation

Black Space: 1932–1945


Individual Meetings

Week Six
Monday, 25 February 2019 ——

*Presentation and Discussion*

*Required Reading DUE*

Right to Housing  


**Independent Exploration Concept DUE**

Week seven

Monday, 04 March 2019 ——

*Presentation and Discussion*

*Required Reading DUE*

Housing Discrimination  


**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


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,
Individual Meetings

Week Twelve

Monday, 08 April 2019 ———

Presentation and Discussion

Required Reading DUE

Collective Ownership

Black Expression: Dance


View on Youtube.com:

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


Black Expression: Music


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