

**AML 4453 sec 9100 (Studies in US Literature and Culture)
"The Pen and the Penitentiary": US Prison Literature**

Dr. Jodi Schorb, Assoc. Professor of English

Contact information

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You can also email me using mail in Canvas, whichever you prefer.

Office Phone, Hours & Location (Spring 2020)

Office phone: 294-2875

Office Hours: (Drop in, or advance notice: either is fine)

Wed, 10am-11:30 (In Grad Coordinator's Administrative Office, Turlington 4012 C)

Thursdays, 1pm-3:30 (In Grad Coordinator's Administrative Office, Turlington 4012 C)

If these times are not viable with advance notice you can request a conference on a different time/day, or often, right after class. If I need to adjust these hours (or shift them to my private faculty office), I will post the changes to our Announcements page on Canvas.

Course Description and Objectives

This upper-division English literature course for students interested in both the history of the prison and of prison literature in the United States.

Our readings will be drawn from three areas: historical and cultural history of the prison (primary and secondary sources), literary scholarship (secondary works), and imaginative literature (novels, fiction, poetry, etc) in which the prison or mass incarceration plays a purposeful role, including memoir, fiction, and/or poetry penned by individuals who have been or who are incarcerated.

Our core questions: What transformed the "gaol" into the modern "prison" and what were the literary and social effects of this change? How did the penitentiary "capture" the American literary imagination? How has literature by convict authors circulated in public and to what end? What is significant or notable about how inmates adapted their experience into literature? In what ways does the experience of incarceration grant authority to the subject, shape identity, and (possibly) produce new knowledge?

Beginning in the 1780s, American prison reformers participated in a transatlantic debate about the value and promise of reformatory incarceration. In Unit A, primary and secondary cultural/historical readings help us trace the invention of the penitentiary and debates over the value of capital punishment and solitary confinement, theorize the possibilities of reformatory incarceration, and help give us historical context for understanding the current crisis of mass incarceration.

The new knowledge, debates, and architecture of the prison concurrently influenced the development of nineteenth-century American fiction, in part through what Caleb Smith has named the "Poetics of the Penitentiary"—narratives of rebirth structured upon the convict's civil or virtual death, a literary development we explore in Unit B.

Essays, autobiographies, fiction, and poetry by real prisoners also sought to impact public debates around prisons, punishment and justice; to this end, we will read writing by incarcerated individuals, especially in Unit C, to think about prisoners' contributions to our literary and cultural imagination.

After exploring how the prison became so entrenched in our society (and cultural imagination) the last unit will foreground the question: What would a world without mass incarceration or prisons look like?

Together, the readings will help students understand the significance of the prison in early American thought, literature, and society, while strengthening their reflective and analytical writing.

Our class meets T 8-9, R9 in Mat 115

Note:

You do not need any familiarity with the prison or prison lit, but if this is your first semester in upper-division (level 3,000 or level 4,000 English, do let me know and consult with me ahead of your first assignment with a draft to discuss essay craft and academic writing expectations.) Upper division English courses are not sequenced, and this means students may begin at any time, with any course, once they have passed (or tested out of) the lower-division requirements, so whether this is your first course, or whether you have had many upper-division literature courses, you are welcome here.

Required Textbooks and Materials:

The following books are required; they are listed in syllabus order.

1. **Jack London**, *The Star Rover* (Modern Library): ISBN 9780812970043
2. **H. Bruce Franklin**, ed. *Prison Writings in 20th Century America* (Penguin); ISBN 9780140273052
3. **Austin Reed**, *Life and Adventures of a Haunted Convict*, ed. Caleb Smith, 0812986911 (Modern Library Reprint, paperback, 2017)
4. **Angela Y. Davis**, *Are Prisons Obsolete* (Open Media); ISBN 9781583225813; also available through the UF Bookstore: (<http://www.bsd.ufl.edu/G1C/bookstore/bookstore.asp>)
5. **Octavia's Brood**; Also available online or through the UF Bookstore: (<http://www.bsd.ufl.edu/G1C/bookstore/bookstore.asp>)

Most other readings are pdf scans on Canvas site (or occasionally ARES library reserves), organized by week in suggested reading order. You will need a pdf viewing app capable of notation, or printer/ink/binder (expect 60-80 pages of pdfs a week on average)

You will need a valid Gatorlink account to access to our course Canvas site (<http://lss.at.ufl.edu>), as well as software able to open files in .pdf format and submit work in .docx (preferred format) or .rtf (acceptable format).

Assignments and Weighting:

Unit A Reading Quiz	5%
Reading Reflection 1	12.5%
Essay #1 (25%), plus peer workshop (2.5%)	27.5%
Essay #2 (25%), plus peer workshop (2.5%)	27.5%
Reading Reflection 2	12.5%
Participation, including occasional short homework, reading discussion Posts, in-class group work, possible pop quizzes, outside events/lectures	15%
	100%

More about Major Essays (55% of grade)

- You will have the assignments at least three weeks in advance
- You will complete two essays. The first will be a 6-8 page essay based on one of the primary texts of interest in Unit B (i.e. Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Reed, etc.). The second will be a 6-8 page essay based on an inmate author of interest from Unit C or that you locate on your own; this paper will require independent reading and some outside research.
- Both essays will be workshopped by peers in class; you will lose points on the "peer workshop" portion of the grade for missing these mandatory workshops with an unexcused absence, and you will also lose points if you come late, come with a too-short draft, or if you fail to give your peers feedback. (On the plus side, you will earn points by coming prepared with a draft, on time, and participating.) (A later assignment handout will explain details)
- You are allowed to bring a draft to my office or to the campus writing center for any assignment, and encouraged to consult with me on your topic or your outline.

Extensions, late penalties and late policies:

Assignments may be graded down one half grade for each calendar day they are late.

If you feel your situation warrants an extension, you can request an extension; however, I reserve the right to deny the request, especially when poor time management, technology failures, recurrent tardiness, recurrent requests for extensions, or frequent lack of class preparation factor into the need for more time.

Late work will be graded but will NOT contain detailed instructor's comments, just a short explanation of the final grade.

Grading Criteria (Letter to Number Conversion):

You'll get a letter grade and numeric equivalent on all your major assignments (and your class participation grade). I will then record that number in my gradebook. This chart is used to convert letter grades to numbers on all assignments. The parentheses include the range of numbers that may apply to the corresponding letter grade. This chart is also used to determine your final grade in the course (no rounding up):

A+	97-100	C+	77-79
A	93-96	C	73-76
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D	66-69
B	83-86	F	65 or under
B-	80-82		

Grading Expectations for Essays:

A-range essays are thoughtful, carefully developed, and clearly presented. They demonstrate strong comprehension of the materials under discussion, clear engagement with course themes and contexts, and offer a sustained reading that successfully illuminates the text or texts under discussion. A-papers are well-organized, well-supported, well-developed, and written in an engaging, polished, and clear prose style.

B/B- papers are solid, competent and capable; they would clearly benefit from **either** more complex development, increased risk-taking (including subtler or more original examples), more consistent explanation or examples, better organization, **or** clearer presentation (structure, prose style, grammar, sentence-level mechanics).

C-range papers are passable and often promising, but have **multiple** key areas that require considerable improvement: a more rigorous topic, a stronger thesis, stronger development of ideas, improved focus (in identifying the issue or guiding the reader through your analysis), fuller explanation of examples, increased risk-taking (including subtler or more original examples), and/or clearer presentation (structure, prose style, grammar, sentence-level mechanics)

D-level papers are not yet adequate; they most often struggle to narrow down a viable topic, or organize and sustain a persuasive reading in readable prose, or they may be off track or present a superficial response to the assignment.

F papers fail to meet the basic criteria of argument, organization, and mechanics, or they fail to respond in any meaningful way to the assignment, **or they contain ANY passages (even sentences) that are plagiarized.**

Grading Expectations for Reflection Papers

A-range: Reflections marked excellent are thoughtful, clearly developed, and clearly presented. They demonstrate clear engagement with the course themes and contexts, strong comprehension of their chosen text(s), and substantive arrangement of ideas that help lay forth, illustrate, and unfold their thinking; they are written in a polished prose style largely free of grammatical and mechanical errors.

B-range: Reflections marked very good are competent and capable, but would benefit from **either** notably more complex development, fuller explanation or examples, increased risk-taking (including

subtler or more original examples), **or** clearer presentation (structure, prose style, grammar, mechanics).

C-range: Reflections are solid or promising, but have **multiple** areas that require considerable improvement: more substantive engagement with the assignment, stronger development of ideas, improved focus (in identifying the issue or guiding the reader through your thinking), fuller explanation of examples, increased risk-taking (including subtler or more original examples), and/or clearer presentation (structure, prose style, grammar, mechanics).

D or below: Off track or inadequate, either because it is too brief, lacks comprehension, is carelessly composed, or presents a superficial response to the topic.

Grading expectations for Course Participation & Preparation:

To earn an "A" for regular participation and preparation, the A level student is **regularly** prepared and engaged. They have their materials handy and are able to refer to specifics in their materials during class. They are able to make connections from the readings and/or build productive discussion from student or instructor ideas. They contribute to the ongoing discussion by responding thoughtfully to others and/or by asking questions that help build useful group understanding. They contribute regularly and are active listeners in group work. They abide by the attendance policy.

B range participants **mostly** meet the above criteria, C range participants **occasionally** meet the above criteria, D range participants **rarely** meet the above, F range participants **fail** to meet the above criteria.

Tip to boost Participation. Maintain and bring Good Reading Notes: Get into the habit of reserving a space in a notebook for a momentary pause and reflection when you complete the day's assignments, jotting down a few informal ideas to jump start class discussion. This will help your participation and preparation immensely.

You might reserve space for: *initial reactions* (things to share at check in; broad responses to the week's readings); *more in-depth reflection points*: these are the things you wish to speak most to in class, or write more about, or to hear others' opinions on (this may include passages from primary or secondary sources that interest you). If you take copious notes or mark up your texts a lot, you will benefit from taking the time to "pull out" a few thoughtful ideas for class or for assignments from the bulk of your scribbles. Same goes for those that aren't prone to copiously mark up your assigned readings.

Grade appeals:

In the unlikely event that a student wishes to appeal his or her final grade, the student should consult Prof. Kenneth Kidd, Director of Undergraduate Studies, kbkidd@ufl.edu, in Tur 4012D. Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.

For more information, catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/

Attendance, Participation, Preparation: I expect you to attend class regularly, rarely missing class.

The success of the class requires your active presence. A strong class doesn't just happen by chance: it involves each of us committing to creating a learning community attentive to each other's ideas, writing, and the readings. For this reason, participation and preparation are essential. I expect you to be here on time, having thought about the readings, ready to speak about things you thought about as you read, and ready to listen and respond when put in groups. Be an attentive listener, and share when called upon. Having an off week is to be expected. But if you have a pattern (i.e. consecutive days) of unpreparedness, or you seem to habitually rely on others to carry the weight of the work and discussion, expect your participation grade to be notably lower than that of your peers.

You are allowed 3 calendar days absences (no explanation needed), although it is unusual for students to avail themselves of all 3. Upon a fourth absence, your participation grade will be lowered up to one letter. Successive unapproved absences (5th, 6th...) will continue to lower your grade. Habitual tardiness (i.e. arriving after attendance recorded) will be marked as absenteeism.

Speak to me in conference if you are facing unusual circumstances that affect your ability to abide by these expectations. Speak to me early in the semester and provide documentation of travel dates if you

are on a university-approved athletic or scholastic team and need the attendance policy adjusted for travel, per university policy.

A handful of group work days are flagged "mandatory attendance": these days you must attend (unless you have an excused absence that day, like a medical note). Skipping these days with an unexcused absence will impact your grade up to 2.5% per major assignment.

If you miss a class, you are responsible for coming prepared to the next class. Therefore, while you do not need to explain your absence to me, you should either contact me or another student before the next class meeting and you should make arrangements to pick up missed handouts, key announcements, or assignments. (Get notes from a fellow student, not me.) Do not show up in class and ask if you missed anything: find that out beforehand, and arrive prepared.

Be conscious of what you can do to facilitate your peers' discussion and your peers' engagement. I value directness (articulating your honest feelings about readings), but also constructive courtesy, which means sharing discussion time so that a conversation can build.

Be conscious of annoying and ineffective behaviors, including unproductive ways of accessing course materials during daily discussion: look at the person speaking; during small group work please wait for break to leave the classroom unless in an emergency; do not use electronic devices for web surfing or checking messages during group work or classtime (wait for break). If you object to an argument, position your critique by offering counterevidence of the claim rather than relying on ad hominem assertions or assumptions about the speaker. In short, commit to helping make and sustain a constructive learning environment.

I prefer you bring hard copies of readings, as this offers better notetaking and faster recall when we discuss the literature, but **I do allow laptops and digital devices for the sole purpose of displaying the specific readings we are discussing** (not social media, not web, etc. no recording any portion of the class, etc.) Likewise, do NOT use your cell phone to access course readings: use a tablet or laptop if you plan to consult the day's readings electronically.

My role, in general, will be to provide relevant background and context for introducing the readings, and for unpacking their significance or importance, then step back, prompting you with questions that help you apply and develop your readings, facilitating the ensuing discussions, and incorporating student ideas into the flow of discussion, to help you come to a fuller understanding and engagement with the text. Long-form lecturing and rote learning are therefore not a prominent part of my pedagogy.

Please speak to me if you are having issues that are affecting your attendance or performance, or if there is something about the class that is bothering you and you feel it could reasonably be addressed/modified.

See also: catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is intellectual theft and fraud. It means passing off someone else's work (including borrowed words and phrases) as one's own. It occurs when one fails to acknowledge the source(s) of ideas, quotations, or information. It also occurs when someone else supplies the content of **any part** of one's paper, even if the person is unknown (i.e. paper bank, essay mill, study website, Wikipedia, a webpage). **When in doubt, cite.** If you have concerns or questions about documenting sources, or wish to report a suspected plagiarism, consult with me in office hour.

Plagiarism does not include incorporating feedback from classroom discussion into your essays, as long as you do not another student to significantly contribute language to, or significantly revise, your arguments. The same applies to consultations with writing center staff.

All students are required to abide by the Student Conduct and Honor Code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see:

<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>

Additional information:

UF Disability Resource Center strives to provide quality services to students with physical, learning, sensory or psychological disabilities, to educate them about their legal rights and responsibilities so that they can make informed decisions, and to foster a sense of empowerment so that they can engage in critical thinking and self-determination.

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>
001 Building 0020 (Reid Hall). For information, call 352-392-8565 or email accessuf@dso.ufl.edu

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester. Please set up a confidential discussion with me before week three to discuss how this may impact your performance and how I can best accommodate your needs.

UF Writing Studio offers UF students help becoming better readers and writers, including study skills sessions, test preparation workshops, and 30-minute sessions of individual help with essay drafts. The website includes multiple resources, including MLA citation guides, annotated bibliography writing guides, and resume guides. The *Writing Studio* is staffed by consultants with extensive writing backgrounds. They are located in 2215 Turlington Hall, and their office phone is (352) 846-1138
<http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-center/>

UF Counseling and Wellness Center offers individual counseling, wellness counseling, couples counseling, problem solving help, CERC crisis services, and other assistance:
<https://counseling.ufl.edu/>
3190 Radio Road; (352) 392-1575 (8am-5pm, Monday through Friday; they also have crisis walk in hours M-F, 9am-4pm)

Online Evaluation Process: Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/students/ Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via ufl.bluera.com/ufl/. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/public-results/.

Name Changes: The class will address you by your preferred name and pronoun/s. Students can change their display names on Canvas starting Spring 2020; to change your Canvas display name, log onto One.UF and select the directory profile option from the upper right icon. Under the name section, students can select the display name to edit it. **In addition,** To change or Remove a GatorLink username:
<https://itsa.ifas.ufl.edu/account/modifyaccount.shtml>

Sexual Harassment, UF Student Affairs:

The University of Florida is committed to providing a safe educational, working, and residential environment that is free from sexual harassment or misconduct directed towards any and all members of the community. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see:
<https://hr.ufl.edu/forms-policies/policies-managers/sexual-harassment/>

A weekly course schedule of topics and assignments is uploaded as a separate document entitled "Syllabus."

COURSE SYLLABUS

1/1/20

AML 4453, "The Pen and the Penitentiary" (US Prison History and Literature)

This course meets T 8-9, R9 in Mat 0115

UNIT A: THE BIRTH OF THE PENITENTIARY: HISTORY AND EARLY LITERATURE

Week 1

Tu 1/7

- Course Introduction and Policies; Overview of readings and Course Canvas page (abbreviated to "ELS, for E-Learning).
- Brief snapshot: the mass incarceration crisis of today.

"...The prison itself is a problem for thought that can only be unthought using a mode of thinking that does not capitulate to the realism of the present. Can the re-enchantment of the world be an instrument that we use to shatter the realism of the prison? What follows is a series of questions... conversations . . . Will you follow me there, to the place where the breathing walls quietly exhale a low freedom song?
Jackie Wang, The Poetry Center, reads from "The Prison Abolitionist Imagination: A Conversation" (2018)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uekf442Aqno>.

What writing poetry from prison means to inmates, Rafael, inmate and member, Free Minds Book Club
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISoEvhlO-ds>.

R 1/9

Punishment before Penitentiaries: early history and early execution literature.

Print and read from ELS (<https://lss.at.ufl.edu/>) prior to class:

- Secondary literary criticism: **Karen Haltunnen**, "The Murderer as Common Sinner," from *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (1998).
- Early American prisoners in print: an example of a criminal confession gallows speech: **"Declaration and Confession of Esther Rodgers" (1701)**

In early American (pre 1780s), those found guilty of crime were *not* sentenced in prisons to serve time; instead they were publicly punished or fined: common punishments included branding, ear cropping, whipping, and being placed in stocks on the public square. For those convicted of capital crimes, the punishment was execution, most often, by hanging. The two dominant genres of prison literature prior to 1800 were *execution sermons* (defined and explained by Karen Haltunnen in the assigned reading) and *criminal confessions* (also defined and addressed in the above reading) which traced a criminal's descent into crime and recorded their purported final words and warnings to audiences. **Today's reading will help you reflect upon the purpose and texture of the first era of American prison writing.**

Prepare to discuss the following in class:

- What was the role of public punishment? In other words, why was punishment public?
- What role was the condemned to play in this ritual and in the published literature? Locate examples from Esther Rodgers confession to illustrate your ideas.
- And reflect on this today as well as the readings next week: Are there any ways listening to prisoner's last words or reading criminals' published narratives might have unintended effects on audiences, consequences different than what ministers or authorities hoped? In other words, might the earliest prisoner writing be read "against the grain"?

Week 2:

Tu 1/14

The evolving genre of 18th-century criminal confession literature. Print and read from ELS:

- "A Journal of the Life and Travels of Joseph-Bill Packer" (1773) and "The Confession &c. of Thomas Mount" (1791); and the "Life, Last Words, and Dying Confession of Rachel Wall" (1789);** both texts are combined in one pdf file.

Prepare to discuss the following in class:

- By the time of Joseph Bill Packer, Thomas Mount, and Rachel Wall's confessions, gallows speeches had been popular for nearly a century. Does the form and purpose of the genre feel the same as it did at the start of the century (i.e. 1701, the time of Esther Rodgers's narrative). What appears similar and what seems different? If you notice new developments in the genre, what do you think the impact might have been on audiences?

R 1/16

The End of Public Punishment. Print and read from ELS-Sakai:

- **Benjamin Rush, "Enquiry into the Effects of Public Punishment" (1787)**, ELS. Rush's essay, first delivered as a speech in 1787, is one of the most influential American essays against public punishment.
- **Watch this short (6-minute) video on influential prison reformer Cesar Beccaria, Dr. Margit Averdijk.** <https://criminologyweb.com/beccaria-on-crimes-and-punishments/> Beccaria's essay, "On Crimes and Punishments" (1764) profoundly influenced 18th century attitudes about public punishment and modern criminal justice. Consider how new ideas about how to deal with crime and criminals help us understand late 18th-century reformers like Benjamin Rush.
- Instructor will review the process for the Reading Quiz next week.

As you read Rush's essay, flag areas of interest for discussion. And as you read, keep a running list of Rush's main objections to public punishment. After this, synthesize a brief answer to the following 2 questions: *Why does Rush feel public punishment increases crime, rather than the inverse? What system does Rush propose near the end of the essay, and why does he feel it will be a better solution?* Bring these notes to class to share in group work (have notes that are visible that you can refer to, to demonstrate preparedness).

week 3

Tu 1/21:

This is our capstone week on the birth of the penitentiary.

Reading Quiz Due at the start of class.

These two secondary articles are written by contemporary historians (David Rothman and Norman Johnston); Rothman provides a historical overview on the wide changes that took place in American Prisons starting in 1789 and Johnston offers a more detailed history of America's most famous penitentiary, Eastern State Penitentiary (also known as "Cherry Hill"), in Philadelphia. You should strive to absorb the history described in these first 2 pieces, as future readings will often refer to this history; the quiz will help you absorb relevant information.

All readings located in ELS Canvas, suggested reading order:

- **David J. Rothman**, "Perfecting the Prison: United States, 1789-1865" (1995) from the *Oxford History of the Prison*
- **Norman Johnston**, "The World's Most Influential Prison: Success or Failure?" (2004)
- **Charles Dickens, from *American Notes* (1842)**. Charles Dickens was one of the most famous writers to ever tour Eastern State Penitentiary; his account caused a firestorm of controversy. What did Dickens most pay attention to, and most reflect upon, in his published account of this much-acclaimed experiment in Enlightened prison reform?

R, 1/23

Theorizing the transformation of punishment.

- Read **Michel Foucault, excerpts from *Discipline and Punish*, ELS.**

Today's reading comes from the most influential work of critical theory on the prison, Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975). Foucault begins by juxtaposing two scenes only 80 years apart: the public torture of Damians and a timetable for penitentiary inmates, and asks us to think about the significance of these two very different approaches to punishment. In these excerpts, Foucault—using examples mostly from European history—explains the importance of the execution ritual, the difference between early public punishment and later private punishment (by which scholars mean imprisonment in penitentiaries, which were not invented until around 1790), and the significance of "gallows" (or criminal confession) literature. While colonial American hangings were more sober than Foucault's more violent European examples (as Haltunnen explained in the earlier reading), Foucault's arguments about the symbolic importance of public punishment continue to shape how we interpret the purpose of public punishment, and how we explain the significance of the rise of the prison.

- As you read two excerpts from this brilliant yet quirky philosopher, try to explain in your own words how execution becomes, according to Foucault, a "truth-producing" event. What (per Foucault) is the primary purpose of **public** punishment? What is the role/job of the prisoner on the scaffold? (And do any moments or passages from the criminal confession literature we read come to mind as useful examples or illustrations of Foucault?)
- And what are the biggest shifts or changes that occurred after punishment became private (i.e. after Western nations like England, France, and America shifted away from public executions and public torture, in favor of incarceration in penitentiaries.)

- **Unit A Reflection is due by Friday, 1/31 at 11:55pm to ELS.** Answer the following in 5-6 pages (double spaced, standard font, standard margins):
- **What, for you, are the most significant things to recognize and be mindful of about why the prison was invented, why public punishment fell out of favor, and whose interests these changes most served or most benefitted? Draw on a few primary and/or secondary readings from the first unit to contextualize and to illustrate your claims.**
- This is not an essay; it is a reflection based on the first unit of the course. While not an essay, use the assignment to demonstrate your comprehension and engagement with the assigned readings that you found most useful.

UNIT B: IMAGINED PRISONS: THE PRISON IN THE 19th CENTURY LITERARY IMAGINATION

"[When we] see the prisoner as a metaphor, [we often] don't see Auburn system and its silent laborers. Living and dying inmates fade from view—but if we reverse this transmutation, we might perceive new dynamics in the formation of our own conceptual vocabulary. . . . Ultimately at stake is how deeply, and often secretly, real captivity influences the ongoing imagination of freedom" (Caleb Smith, "Emerson and Incarceration" 208-09).

The tangible, historic prison influenced the 19th century literary imagination, but it takes critical work to "unearth" the historic prison's effects, presence, and meaning in these texts. In this unit, we will consider reformer's hope that, as prisoners' voices moved into a private sphere of restricted communication and restricted visibility, fiction would emerge as a potent realm of representation and discipline. Thus, fiction (as a literary genre) became crucial to understanding how the prison circulated in the 19th century cultural imaginary.

This unit explores how influential American artists—Poe, Melville, Thoreau—drew from this available cultural history of the prison, seized on its possibilities, associations, and debates, and used it to help craft their literary plots and themes.

Week 4: *Mid-Semester Essay assigned.*

Tu 1/28

Read (in suggested order):

- Edgar Allen Poe, "The Pit and The Pendulum" (1842),** ELS; along with
- secondary literary criticism by Jason Haslam, "Pits, Penitentiaries and Penitentiaries: Reframing the Detained Subject" (ELS). Haslam argues that we can read Poe's tale as a critique of private punishment and the new modern penitentiary. Prepare to unpack and debate the persuasiveness and utility of Haslam's arguments.

R 1/30

- Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience" (1849),** ELS.
- Secondary literary criticism, from **Victor Brombert, *The Happy Prison*,** ELS.

Reminder: **Unit A Reflection is due by Friday, 1/31 at 11:55pm to ELS.** See box above.

Week 5

R 2/4

- Begin **Herman Melville, *Bartleby the Scrivener; A Story of Wall-street* (1856),** ELS

R 2/6

- Finish Melville, *Bartleby the Scrivener*,** together with
- Caleb Smith's** secondary scholarship, "Prisons and the Poetics of Living Death" (2008), ELS

Week 6

Tu 2/11

- Read Edgardo **Rottman, "The Failure of Reform, United States, 1865-1965."** ELS
- Begin Jack London, *Star Rover*** (book)

R 2/13

- Star Rover*, continued, **first half of book (through chapter 14).**

Week 7

2/16-2/18, Special event: Museums Challenge, <https://www.museumchallenge.com/>.

Possible inmate film screening Sunday 2/16, *The Woolly*, 5-7 pm, to be confirmed;

Extra Credit Class Event (Recommended Attendance): Monday 2/17, 4-5pm, Museums Challenge Keynote lecture by Sean Kelley, Senior VP and Director of Interpretation, Eastern State Penitentiary Historical Site.

2/18 Finish *Star Rover* (instructor will suggest some embedded sub-stories/pages that you can skim through to focus more on the conclusion)

2/20 **Essay #1 PEER WORKSHOP. BRING 2 COPIES OF A LEGIBLE, WORKING DRAFT. MANDATORY ATTENDANCE.**

Essay due to ELS by 2/21 (Friday) by 11:55pm. (essays will be graded and returned in 3 weeks)

UNIT 3: PRISONERS AS ARTISTS AND INTELLECTUALS

"...The flourishing of prison libraries fueled a radical practice of reading among prisoners. An increasing number of prisoners used prison libraries to fulfill their own reading desire, which often focused on developing their racial and class consciousness, rather than complying with state-defined rehabilitative goals" notes Megan Sweeney, *Reading is My Window: Books and the Art of Reading in Women's Prisons* (2010), 39

Week 8

Tu 2/25, from ***Prison-Writing in 20th-Century America*** (book)

- Introduction to book, 1-17 by H. Bruce Franklin
- Autobiography of an Imprisoned Peon (1904), 21-
- Jack London, "Pinched" and "The Pen" (1907), 38-
- Agnes Smedley, "Cell Mates" (1920), 63-
- Kate Richards O'Hare, *Crime and Criminals* (1921), 73-

R 2/27, *The Movement and The Prison*, sections from *Prison-Writing in 20th-Century America* (book)

- Malcolm X, 147- but also read...
- George Jackson, 155-
- Jack Henry Abbot, 187-
- Assata Shakur, 201

SPRING BREAK

Week 9

3/10 Instructor will Review Essay 2 instructions

- Begin **Austin Reed, *Life and Adventures of a Haunted Convict*** (book)

This recently recovered and authenticated account by Austin Reed is the first full-length memoir by an African American prisoner, written near 1858, drawn from his incarceration in Auburn penitentiary, which followed his incarceration in one of the nation's first juvenile homes. Reed's manuscript was never published in his lifetime. It made its debut in 2016. It gives us a chance to hear an inmate make sense of their life in their own words, and try to craft a life into a genre (or in this case, a many genres) that might be legible to 19th-century readers.

3/12 Continue ***Life and Adventures of a Haunted Convict***.

Week 10

Tu 3/17

- Etheridge Knight, *Poems from Prison* (1968), Franklin 230-
- Misc selections from "The Literary Renaissance" section in Franklin (TBA)

R 3/19 Small group discussions (in preparation for Essay #2, on inmate author of your choice)

Week 11:

Tu 3/24 Understanding Mass Incarceration Today: Michelle Alexander, "The New Jim Crow" (article version), ELS

R 3/26 Peer work on Essay #2, **Bring 2 copies of your current essay. Mandatory Attendance.** Course wrap. Please complete the online evaluation.

UNIT D: ABOLITIONIST VISIONS

Week 12:

Tu 3/31

- Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete***, book
 - Bring your informal reactions and questions about today's reading to launch group exchange and discussion.

R 4/2 (TBA, possible flex session), likely topic: Restorative Justice reading & video.
Instructor will review final reflection assignment in class.

Essay #2 Due by Friday 4/3, 11:55pm to ELS

Week 13, Speculative Futures

Tu 4/7

- Mariame Kaba, "Justice"** (short story)
- Octavia's Brood*** (book), selections TBA

R 4/9

- Continue reading from ***Octavia's Brood*** (book), selections TBA

Week 14, Graphic Visions

Tu 4/14 Finish ***Octavia's Brood*** selections, plus Abo-Comix (Various), ELS*

R 4/16, Abo-Comix (Various), or possible flex/makeup day.

Week 14, Speculative Futures

Week 15:

Tu 4/21 (last day of class), bring short reflections for final discussion

UNIT D Final Unit Reflection Due Sunday 4/26-by 11:55pm.