

# Environmental Policy, Institutions, and Behavior I I:374:223

## Urban Society & Environment

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### Course Description

“There is no antagonism like the antagonism between Black people and the world.”

Frank Wilderson, a professor and scholar in a school of thought that he and others term Afropessimism, makes this point in his recently published book of the same name. For Wilderson, that antagonism is most acutely expressed as violence, from which Black people have no escape. We have seen repeatedly in terrible images over the past several months and indeed years, that Black people in the United States may forfeit their lives merely for appearing in public. If so, how are we to understand urban environments? That is, if going outside may result in death—directly or indirectly— and Black people cannot actually experience the built or natural world, can it be said that there is an environment? How should we conceive of urban environments that make it impossible for Black people to live, work, or play without the threat of racism?

This course will explore the antagonism between Black people and the world as it relates specifically to urban America. We will consider the fraught nature of environment from a variety of perspectives, historically and in the contemporary moment. The dual crises of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and police and civilian murders of Black citizens have made plain the antagonism inherent in urban environments, but such evidence is widely available. Among the materials we will rely on are: writings including memoir, social science and humanities literature, and print media; photographs, films, and other imagery; archival sources; and publicly available data. Taken together, our investigations will illuminate where the antagonism Wilderson describes resides, how Black people negotiate it, and where we might look for solutions.

### Learning Goals

Students who take the course will:

- Interrogate how and why the environment is antagonistic to Black people
- Uncover social and material conditions in Black urban neighborhoods
- Assess relative change in racial inequalities over time
- Integrate evidence from diverse sources related to inequality and neighborhood context
- Use a variety of methods to analyze and present information

### Course Requirements & Grading

\* All of the below will be administered or handed in through Sakai.

<https://sakai.rutgers.edu/x/jO7amh>

**1. Quizzes (20%):** These short tests will assess the extent to which you are keeping up with

course material. Quizzes might contain multiple choice questions, fill-in-the blank, short answers, and other formats.

**2. Written assignments (30%):** Written assignments will include “problem sets”, response papers, and other activities that ask you to bring analysis to bear on the course materials.

**3. Final exam (50%):** The final exam will be cumulative, asking you to synthesize what you have learned over the course of the semester.

### **Required Readings**

There are two required books, available from your favorite independent bookstore or online major retailers.

1. Perry, Imani. (2019). Breathe: A Letter to My Sons. New York: Penguin Random House.
2. Coates, Ta-Nehisi. (2015). Between the World and Me. New York: Penguin Random House.

Additional readings are either posted on Sakai, or are available electronically through the Rutgers Library or elsewhere, as directed.

### **Course Structure & Schedule**

The course is divided into modules, each tackling a different topic. Some are a week long, others stretch over multiple weeks. Modules will be posted in the Resources folder by Sunday before the week begins. Each module will contain readings, slides, instructions for assignments, and other materials, all of which will be placed in that module’s folder. The specific plan/schedule for each module are outlined in the Module Plan, which tells you what to complete, in what order. As well, Modules will also have a Study Guide to accompany the readings.

As an asynchronous course, you have flexibility about when during the week you complete the work. However, you do need to complete the work for a given module during the time frame that defines it.

Quizzes will be announced at least the week prior.