

ENGL 2091: Watching the Wire—America’s Other Story
Professor J. Saffold

HBO’s crime drama, *The Wire* (2002-2008) has been lauded as one of the most powerful television programs of all time for its ability to humanize the 1980s urban drug epidemic. Set in Baltimore “Murderland” and loosely based on real events, the show tackles the difficult subjects of urban blight, mass incarceration, the de-industrialization of America, the school to prison pipeline, and the corruption of state and local politics. *The Wire* blurs the line between history and fiction with stunningly impactful results.

While the show has often been considered for its merits as a sociological and anthropological masterpiece—this class will focus on the literary and cultural significance of this work in contemporary American storytelling. Specifically, students will study how the show employed historical events and real people to create iconic characters that would give voice to some of the biggest social issues in the contemporary moment. This class will approach social inequality through a lens of African American narrative depiction and students will learn how historical, economic, and political forces converge to tell powerful African American stories.

Course Objectives:

This class is intended to help students do the following:

- Analyze the relationships between race, class, and crime within various social sectors including law, education, housing, civil service, and state mandated surveillance.
- Consider how race and money have jointly impacted stories about urban living.
- Track how stories are adapted to in various formats including newsprint, full length book manuscripts, and television.
- Research the intersections of hyper-surveillance in Black and Brown urban communities, the need for universal safety, and the difficult effects of urban blight.
- Develop critical thinking/viewing skills through deep analysis of popular television.

In mastering these concepts, theories, and questions, students will gain a deeper understanding about how to navigate diverse society.

Required Text:

The Wire, Seasons 1-5. To acquire the series you should either a) register or sign in to iTunes and purchase the complete series; b) buy the DVDs on Amazon; c) use your HBO GO package to stream it; or d) find used or library copies of the series. **Students are required to have access to the complete series.**

Optional Text:

Simon, David and Edward Burns. *The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood*
ISBN-13: 978-0767900317

Course Assignments:

Course Discussion (20%)

In lieu of meeting (virtually) to discuss *The Wire*, students will be responsible for participating in one open forum discussion per each season of the show (for a total of 5 course discussion posts). Students will be given topic prompts to guide the course discussion but ultimately each student should use the discussion forum to address points for consideration in the story, larger social complexities, or other matters of interest. Students should be considerate of how classmates have already shaped the course discussion by taking care to not post redundant information. Students are encouraged to reply directly to each other in the forum. Each post should be 500-600 words. As you watch each episode consider the following questions in preparation for your posts:

- What did you see as the most important insight or idea from the assigned readings and episodes?
- What are your critical reactions to the readings and episodes (strengths and weaknesses)?
- What issues would you particularly like to discuss in class?

Scoring rubric:

Points	Traits
1	Submitted a post somewhat based on the week's reading. The post may or may not be at least 500 words. Post includes redundancies from earlier submissions and may or may not encourage further discussion of the topic
2	Submitted a post based on the week's reading. The post meets the 500-word count minimum and is free of redundancies from earlier submissions. The submission somewhat encourages further discussion of the topic.
3	Submitted a post that reflects an understanding of the week's reading. The post not only meets the 500-word count minimum, it succinctly and thoughtfully contributes to the course discussion in such a way that encourages further other students to engage.

Newspaper Assignments (60%)

Each student will identify a metropolitan city in the United States (not Baltimore) with a major local newspaper. The chosen newspaper must have a robust metro section with original journalism. After having the city and newspaper approved by the instructor of record, each student will be required to complete a total of five (5) newspaper research assignments.

For each season of *The Wire*, identify the overarching theme or subject therein. **Find 3-5 exposes or article series written between 1980-2010. In 2-3 pages, consider how the author engaged issues of race, class, gender, crime, punishment, and how that may have impacted wider perception of urban issues.**

Final Newspaper Portfolio (20%)

The newspaper portfolio is a final compilation of all five newspaper assignments that includes an introduction and conclusion. In total, the portfolio must be no less than 15 pages (with each newspaper assignment being about 2-3 pages and the introduction and conclusion being an additional 3-5 pages).

Course Grading

A: 90-100
B: 80-89
C: 70-79
D: 60-69
F: 59-0

Academic Honesty

Any instances of academic dishonesty will be addressed according to the University's Academic Honesty Policy (See <https://www.uno.edu/media/15321> for additional information).

Life Happens Policy

Life happens to each of us. If you find you need an extension on an assignment for extenuating circumstances please communicate a week in advance. This policy does not apply to routine life occurrences and should be used sparingly, if at all.

COVID-19 Health-Related Class Absences

Students should evaluate their health status regularly, refrain from coming to campus if they are ill, and seek appropriate medical attention for treatment of illness. Students should notify (via email) their instructors about their absence as soon as possible, so that accommodations can be made. In the event of COVID-19 illness, students should also complete the [Campus Reporting Form](#). Please note that medical excuse may be required at the discretion of the department chair and/or college dean.

Inclusion Policy

Diversity in the academy means that people from all backgrounds have the right to education. This class will seek to endow students with an understanding of certain principles of inclusivity, which in turn enables them to appreciate the diversity of human experience. All class participants are expected to interact with one another in a manner affirming of any individual's identity. Awareness of social stratification, privilege, and current affairs will be necessary throughout this course.

Safety Awareness Facts and Education

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender is a Civil Rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find [the appropriate resources here](#).

UNO Counseling Services and UNO Cares

UNO offers care and support for students in any type of distress. [Counseling Services](#) assist students in addressing mental health concerns through assessment, short-term counseling, and career testing and counseling. First-year students often have unique concerns, and UNO Cares is designed to address those students' needs. Contact [UNO Cares](#).

Emergency Procedures

Sign up for emergency notifications via text and/or email at [E2Campus Notification](#). All emergency and safety procedures are explained at the [Emergency Health and Safety Office](#).

Learning and Support Services

Help is within reach in the form of learning support services, including tutoring in writing and math and other supplemental instruction. Visit the [Learning Resource Center](#).

Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity

UNO is an equal opportunity employer. The Human Resource Management department has more information on UNO’s compliance with federal and state regulations regarding EEOC in its [Policies and Resources website](#).

Due Dates at a Glance

Date	Assignment
September 13	Season 1 Discussion Forum Post
September 20	Season 1 Newspaper Assignment
October 4	Season 2 Discussion Forum Post
October 11	Season 2 Newspaper Assignment
October 18	Season 3 Discussion Forum Post
October 25	Season 3 Newspaper Assignment
November 8	Season 4 Discussion Forum Post
November 15	Season 4 Newspaper Assignment
December 2	Season 5 Discussion Forum Post
December 2	Season 5 Newspaper Assignment
December 7	Final Newspaper Portfolio

Reading Schedule:

Week of August 19- 21

Introductions
 Review syllabus
 Watch episode 1: “The Target” / #2 “The Detail”
Optional Reading: Simon, David and Edward Burns. *The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood* (Chapter 1)

Week of August 24- 28

Watch: #3 “The Buys” / #4 “Old Cases” / #5 “The Pager” / #6 “The Wire” / #7 “One Arrest”
Optional Reading: Simon, David and Edward Burns. *The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood* (Chapter 2)

Week of August 31- Sept 4

Watch: #8 “Lessons” / #9 “Game Day” / #10 “The Cost” / #11 “The Hunt”
Optional Reading: Simon, David and Edward Burns. *The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood* (Chapter 3)

Week of Sept 7- 11

Watch: #12 “Cleaning Up” #13 “Sentencing” (end of season 1)
Optional Reading: Simon, David and Edward Burns. The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner- City Neighborhood (Chapter 4)
Season 1 Discussion Forum Post Due September 13

Season 2

Week Sept 14-18

Watch: #14 “Ebb Tide” / #15 “Collateral Damage” / #16 “Hot Shots” / #17 “Hard Cases”/
Season 1 Newspaper Assignment Due September 20

Week Sept 21-25

Watch: #18 “Undertow” / #19 “All Prologue” / #20 “Backwash” / #21 “Duck & Cover” / #22 “Stray Rounds” / #23 “Storm Warnings”
Optional Reading: Simon, David and Edward Burns. The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner- City Neighborhood (Chapter 5)

Week of Sept 28- Oct 2

Watch: #24 “Bad Dreams” / #25 “Port in a Storm” (end of season 2) / #26 “Time After Time” / #27 “All Due Respect” / #28 “Dead Soldiers” /
Optional Reading: Simon, David and Edward Burns. The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner- City Neighborhood (Chapter 6)
Season 2 Discussion Forum Post Due October 4

Season 3

Week of Oct 5- Oct 9

#29 “Hamsterdam” / #30 “Straight and True” / #31 “Homecoming”
Season 2 Newspaper Assignment Due October 11

Week of Oct 12-16

Watch: #32 “Back Burners” / #33 “Moral Midgetry” / #34 “Slapstick” / #35 “Reformation” / #36 “Middle Ground” / #37 “Mission Accomplished” (end of season 3)
Optional Reading: Simon, David and Edward Burns. The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner- City Neighborhood (Chapter 7)
Season 3 Discussion Forum Post Due October 18

Season 4

Week of Oct 19-23

Watch: #38 “Boys of Summer” / #39 “Soft Eyes” / #40 “Home Rooms” /
Season 3 Newspaper Assignment Due October 25

Week of Oct 26-30

Watch: #41 “Refugees” / #42 “Alliances” / #43 “Margin of Error” / #44 “Unto Others” / #45 “Corner Boys” / #46 “Know Your Place”

Optional Reading: Simon, David and Edward Burns. The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner- City Neighborhood (Chapter 8)

Week of Nov 2-6

Watch: #47 “Misgivings” / #48 “A New Day” / #49 “That’s Got His Own” / #50 “Final Grades” (end season 4)

Optional Reading: Simon, David and Edward Burns. The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner- City Neighborhood (Chapter 9)

Season 4 Discussion Forum Post Due November 8

Season 5

Week of Nov 9-13

Watch: #51 “More with Less” / #52 “Unconfirmed Reports” / #53 “Not for Attribution

Season 4 Newspaper Assignment Due November 15

Week of Nov 16-20

Watch: #54 “Transitions” / #55 “React Quotes” / #56 “The Dickensian Aspect” / #57 “Took” / #58 “Clarifications”

Optional Reading: Simon, David and Edward Burns. The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner- City Neighborhood (Epilogue)

Week of Nov 30- Dec 2

#59 “Late Editions” #60 “-30-” (end of series)

Season 5 Newspaper Assignment Due December 2

Season 5 Discussion Forum Post Due December 2

Final Research Portfolio Due December 7