

The Anti-Racist Classroom

Writing about Race and Place



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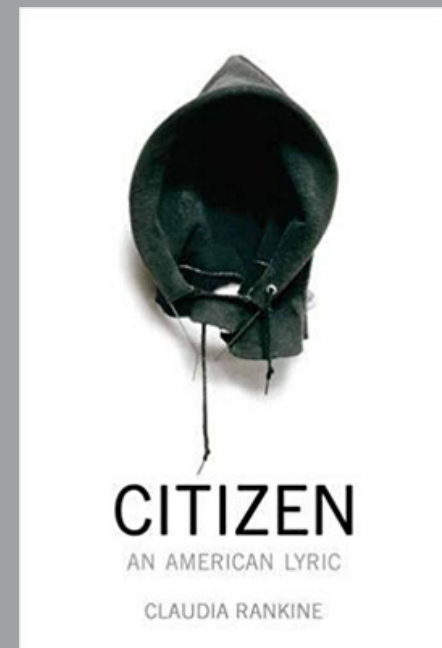
Writing Center

Franklin College of Arts and Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

"The Politics of Space"

- The following assignment comes from UGA graduate student and FYC instructor Jacob Sunderlin.
- After a class reading of Claudia Rankine's 2014 *Citizen: An American Lyric*, Sunderlin's students investigate the history and meaning behind a location of their choice.
- Jacob's assignment invites critical thinking about both race and space, while also encouraging students to experiment with creating a scholarly voice that combines personal reflection with academic research.



From the Assignment Sheet

As we read *Citizen: An American Lyric*, think about the way that you negotiate space with your body in Athens and at UGA, and more broadly the politics that govern space in the United States. Likewise, think about how you change the space that you inhabit with your particular historical body. As Rankine writes, “space is the silence we are rushing to fill.” How do you fill it?

For this project, you will pick a place in Athens or on the UGA campus that interests you. You will research its history and create an illustrated documentary essay that informs readers about the history of that place, and presents us with an impression of the place as it is today.

A good essay will be complicated. Calling *Citizen* a book about race is like calling *Moby Dick* a book about a whale. That’s only getting at part of it. Give some thought to as many different elements of place as possible.

These excerpts from Sunderlin's assignment sheet may inspire your own prompts for class. Based on your goals and the time available, the assignment could easily be reduced to an engaging in-class activity or expanded to encompass a semester-long project.

Some questions your essay might consider:

- To what degree is this place controlled by its history?
- What history controls it?
- Who is the owner of that history?
- How does it make you feel to be in this place?
- Why does it make you feel that way?
- Do you think it works the same way for other kinds of bodies than your own?
- What is the visible story of the place? What is the hidden story?

HISTORIC PLACES IN ATHENS

- Wuxtry/Bizzaro
- Morton Theatre
- First AME Church
- Gospel Pilgrim Cemetary
- Taylor-Grady House
- Camak House
- Joseph Henry Lumpkin House
- Hot Corner (Hull & Washington St.)—Wilson's Styling, etc.
- Chestnut Grove School
- Old Clarke County Jail (Meigs St.)
- Jackson St. Cemetary
- Athens Factory (Baldwin & Williams St.)
- Athens Manufacturing Company (While Circle)

Above is a partial copy of the list Sunderlin provides students who wish to look beyond UGA campus for their site. Those students studying buildings on North Campus will also find much to learn about the people whose names are associated with buildings on North Campus especially.



A photo of Hot Corner in Athens, GA, from georgiapoliticalreview.com

You may want to request a special library session or course guide to assist students with beginning research. Contacting one of the librarians specializing in history may be particularly helpful.

Suggested Readings to Pair with *Citizen* and this Assignment:

- Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me*
- Robert Cohen's article on UGA's Desegregation, Fall 1996 issue of *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*
- Charlayne Hunter-Gault's *In My Place*, Chapter 15 (tells author's story of being one of the first two African Americans to enroll at UGA in 1961)
- John Inscoe's *Writing The South through the Self*, Ch. 4 (on "Traumas of Train Travel in the Jim Crow South")
- Tera Hunter's *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*, Chapter 5
- Stephanie Smallwood's *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to America Diaspora*, Chapter 2