

Spanish 481
The Inhospitable City
Spring 2020
Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:00 am – 12:20 pm
Professor Natalie L. Belisle

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Course Overview

As Ángel Rama explores in his classic text, *La ciudad letrada*, the planning, ordering, and administration of the city in colonial Latin America was a task originally appointed to a corps of cultured and elite men (*letrados*), such that the development of the written word was concomitant to the formation of the region's local, national, and state power. Undoubtedly, this link between the “canon” of elite writing culture and civil administration in Latin America gave way to a rather specific, if not limited, reading public, to the exclusion of the unlettered masses—namely, racial, sexual, and gender minorities.

Against this backdrop, this course will turn its attention to the writing and visual culture of postcolonial Latin America to give credence to the voices of those who have been disenfranchised within the strictures of an inhospitable lettered city. We will focus primarily on three contemporary Spanish Caribbean cities: San Juan, Puerto Rico; La Habana, Cuba; and Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Marked by indigenous extinction, black enslavement, emancipation, revolution, neoliberal violence, and ecological disaster, these cities have borne voices that testify to the dispossession, placelessness, and alienation experienced by many of their inhabitants today. Remaining attentive to these experiences, writers and visual artists to be studied include: Mayra Santos Febres, José Luis González, Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, Rita Indiana Hernández, Eduardo Lalo, Ena Lucía Portela, and Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá, among others. The course will explore how their works walk readers through the underbelly of the Spanish Caribbean city to reveal places occupied by those deemed outcasts, outsiders, refugees, and lawless. Additionally, primary texts will be placed in conversation with critical writings about race, gender and sexuality, space, and the public.

Through these texts, the course will be guided by the following the themes:

- the relationship between the formation of the Latin American literary canon and the Law
- the Spanish Caribbean city as “camp” that destabilizes the Law of the land and the literary canon
- how Spanish Caribbean writing and visual culture articulate ethical and emancipatory reading practices and forms of belonging in a city that is inclusive of and hospitable to difference

This is a reading and writing intensive upper-division undergraduate course. Readings in the course will provide a solid foundation for more advanced study in Latin American and Caribbean literature, culture, and history. Previous work in 300-level Spanish courses is highly recommended. All discussion and work, both in and out of class, will be conducted entirely in Spanish.