

COURSEWORK

Seeing Rochester Anew

In ENGL 103, students apply the tools of critical analysis to their surroundings—and come to see Rochester from a new perspective.

By Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

Course: Rochester, NY (ENGL 103) Fall 2023

Instructor: Rosemary Kegl, associate professor of English

Overview

It's not unusual for faculty in the humanities and social sciences to find that the city of Rochester can function as a valuable learning lab. It's steeped in history, from the 19th-century social movements for abolition of slavery and for women's rights to the revolution in photography and film fostered by George Eastman to the 21st century protests against the death of Daniel Prude at the hands of Rochester police officers.

Among several courses in which undergraduate students interact with the community, ENGL 103 offers them the chance to explore Rochester with an especially broad lens. As Kegl writes on the course syllabus, "We discuss the city's museum exhibits and public murals, parks and cemeteries, memorial monuments and statues, photographs and speeches, drama and prose fiction, and protests and social movements from the 19th through the 21st centuries as depicted in film and print."

Students learn specific tools to bring to the task. "We become familiar with models in the humanities for reading, viewing, and analyzing these objects, spaces, and events," Kegl adds. "And we practice our interpretative skills."

The course includes multiple excursions. Whether students are from Rochester or an ocean away, Kegl says they have a chance to "experience and analyze the ways that people who design various spaces and maintain them over the years use techniques to evoke aesthetic responses, like the picturesque,

OUT AND ABOUT: Students explore public art including murals by Nate Hodge (left) and Sarah Rutherford (right) and Stanley Edwards's Frederick Douglass monument.

the pastoral, the beautiful, or the sublime." Even students who have visited these spaces before come away with a richer, more nuanced understanding of Rochester—and the tools to consider other communities more fully as well.

On the Syllabus

Readings are drawn from newspapers and periodicals, archives, and scholarly books and articles. Students also read one play, *The Agitators*. Written in 2019 by Mat Smart, it explores 19th-century social movements by reimagining the friendship between activists Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony. Other highlights include

"Mt. Hope Cemetery Context in the Rural Cemetery Movement," Heritage Landscapes LLC and Wendel Duchsherer Architects and Engineers, PC

Selections including "Modern Mural Painting in the United States: Shaping Spaces/Shaping Publics," from *A Companion to Public Art*, edited by art historians Cher Krause Knight and Harriet Senie

Several articles by Justin Murphy, education reporter for the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, concerning debates over school renamings in the Rochester City School District

"Is Objectivity in Journalism Even Possible?" *Columbia Magazine* (Winter 2022–23)

Students also view virtual exhibits, documentaries, videos, and murals. Some highlights include

July '64, directed by Carvin Eison

Rochester Black Freedom Struggle Online Project, Department of Rare Books, Special Collections, and Preservation

"A Tour of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Highland Park," WXXI. [R](#)

