

New York University
Gallatin School of Individualized Study
Spring 2020
Black Experiences in Literature, Movies, and Television

Course Number: FIRST-UG 828

Class Meeting Times: Monday & Wednesday 12:30pm-1:45pm

Class Location: Academic Resource Center 18 Washington Place, Room LL03

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Office location & hours: 411 Lafayette Street; Room 307; Tuesdays 10-12 noon and by appointment

Course Description: From the antebellum era to the Harlem Renaissance, Black people have turned to art, writing, and spirituals to make a statement about race relations, construct their racial identity, and (re)claim a sense of humanity under conditions of oppression. These artistic expressions are all the more significant and worthy of analysis in this era of mass media and in light of contemporary racial conflicts neatly summarized by the hashtag “BlackLivesMatter.” This course will explore the pluralities and contradictions of black experiences as depicted in literature, movies, and television. A guiding theme will be how artistic representations of blackness illustrate and grapple with what WEB DuBois famously called “the double consciousness”: a consistent awareness of their racial categorization and concern with others’ perception of them *as blacks* rather than as an individual or a holder of other statuses. It will take special interest in the work of Spike Lee, Toni Morrison, Tyler Perry, and Shonda Rhimes, all of whom delve into issues concerning race and captivate black audiences while doing so. We will use each artist to decipher what it means to be black; how this definition varies according to gender, class, age, and sexuality; and how depictions of blackness have changed over time. While many of the readings and media in this class are fiction, we will approach them from a sociological and humanistic perspective—that is, mining them for clues on how historical and social conditions (e.g., Jim Crow, mass incarceration, gentrification) shape the possibilities and limits of black experiences. And we will probe how different media permit artists to convey the lived experience and struggles of blacks in different, often more visceral, ways—and to different audiences—than conventional social science and nonfiction reporting.

Required Texts and Media: The required books listed below are available at the campus bookstore. All other readings are available on NYU Classes. All of the movies are on reserve at NYU Bobst library. You may also access most of the movies and television shows on streaming services.

1. *Passing* by Nella Larsen [ISBN 0-14-118025-0]
2. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neal Hurston [ISBN 0-06-093141-8]
3. *Sula* by Toni Morrison [ISBN 1-4000-3343-8]

Academic Integrity: “Academic honesty means that the work you submit — in whatever form — is original.” This includes but is not limited to “cheating, plagiarism, falsification of data or sources, forgery of academic documents in attempt to defraud.” In short, use your own words and ideas in the assignments and be sure to properly cite any sources that you may have used to arrive at those ideas.

If I find that you have plagiarized, you will receive an F on the assignment and I will notify the dean. If this occurs more than once, you will receive an F for the course. For more information on this policy, and sanctions, visit: [Gallatin's Academic Integrity Policy](#).

Grading: There will be no midterm or final exam. Grades are based on performance in the following areas:

Participation, Attendance, and Go to Student [20 points]: You are expected to keep up with the reading and be prepared to contribute to the class discussion. Each week, a couple of “go to” students will have two main responsibilities: (1) post 2-3 critical questions based on the reading; and (2) lead a discussion during class that distills the main ideas of the readings *and* pushes them further. *Your performance as the discussion leader and questions for that day are worth 10 points.* All other students will post a brief (i.e. one line) discussion question, comment, or point that they would like to discuss on the NYU Classes “Forums” thread. I expect all students to read and think about their peers’ discussion questions and come to class prepared to enter into an intellectual dialogue about the issues raised. *These questions (when you are not the discussion leader), your overall participation in class, and attendance are worth 10 points.*

Here are a couple examples of great discussion questions by former students:

1. *In Chapter Six of Doing Business with Beauty, Adia Wingfield interviews Mariane, a business owner who says “The customers say [the workers] don’t know how to do customer service, that they don’t respect the customers. So, that can be very hard.” How do the differences in norms across cultures affect the social interactions between ethnic business owners and their customers? How do these interactions influence stereotypes about certain ethnic groups within certain industries (i.e. attitudes of Asian-American owned nail salons)?*
2. *In “Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race” George Lipsitz discusses the idea that “the national spatial imaginary is racial marked”, he explores racism hidden within architecture and landscape and how this idea plays a role in the construct of societies and neighborhoods. What effect does the racialization of space have on areas that later become gentrified? How does gentrification play a role in the reformation of these spaces?*

Note: Attendance and participation matters for your grade. If you are absent more than once, you will likely see this reflected in your grade. Likewise, if you never speak in class and do not post discussion questions, this will be reflected in your grade. **If you are absent more than twice, you cannot receive an A in the course.**

Essays [40 points]: Four 2-page essays will be assigned [10 points each]. The essays will require you to answer a question that shows you have critically engaged with the assigned readings. I will announce the essays at least one week before they are due. I will deduct two points for every day that a paper is late.

Term Paper Proposal/Annotated Bibliography [10 points]: Students must submit a description of their research topic, research question, data source, and annotated bibliography (3-4 pages).

Presentation [10 points]: You will make a ten to fifteen-minute presentation based on your preliminary findings. Everyone should be prepared to present on the first day of presentations.

Final Paper [20 points]: Students must write an 8-10 paged term paper. I will provide several options for general topics but you will be able to choose the case study you would like to analyze. For instance, I may suggest “The representation of Black fathers on television” as a general topic, and you may choose talks shows, such as Maury Povich as your case study. You will have to relate your case study to several themes that we will cover throughout the course (make those connections explicit in your paper). You are required to critically engage with the existing theories on the topic, analyze your selected case, and make an argument based on your findings. The paper must include a minimum of three citations from the course and at least four additional scholarly research articles that are not listed on the syllabus.

All assignments must be in the following format unless otherwise noted: Double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, and one-inch margins. I will deduct points from all late assignments.

***I will not grant a grade of “Incomplete” for this course.**

Tentative Course Schedule

****Disclaimer:** I reserve the right to change any aspect of this syllabus, including readings, assignments, and due dates.

Monday, 1/27/20 Introduction

PART I: BLACK IDENTIFICATIONS

Wednesday, 1/29/20 CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF RACE & BLACKNESS
Morning, Ann. 2005. “Keyword: Race.” Contexts 4(4):44-46.

Jackson Jr., John L. 2001. *Harlem World: Doing Race and Class in Contemporary Black America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Ch 5: White Harlem: Toward the Performative Limits of Blackness pages 159-190.]

Monday, 2/3/20

AMBIGUITY & PASSING

Watch: *Imitation of Life* (1959)

Bey, Marquis and Sakellarides Theodora. 2016. "When We Enter: the Blackness of Rachel Dolezal" *The Black Scholar* 46(4):33-48.

Wednesday, 2/5/20

Passing—Introduction & Part 1; pages 1-47

Monday, 2/10/20

Passing—Parts 2&3; pages 51-114

Wednesday, 2/12/20

COLORISM

1929. Thurman, Wallace. *The Blacker the Berry: Part I Emma Lou* pg 19-70. Scribner Paperback Fiction: New York.

(skim) 2001. Thompson, Maxine. Keith, Verna. "The Blacker the Berry: Gender, Skin Tone, Self-Esteem, and Self-Efficacy" *Gender & Society* 15(3): 336-357.

Monday, 2/17/20

NO CLASS IN OBSERVANCE OF PRESIDENT'S DAY

Wednesday, 2/19/20

BLACKNESS x GENDER [MALE SPECTRUM]

Watch: *Shaft* (1971)

2005. Hammond, Wizdom and Jaqueline Mattis. *Being a Man About It: Manhood Meaning Among African American Men---Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 6(2):114-126.

Monday, 2/24/20

Wright, Richard. 2005. *Native Son*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, Book I (pages 1-52).

Wednesday, 2/26/20

Native Son: second half of Book I (pages 53-93)

Monday, 3/2/20

2017. Copeland, Kameron. "From New Black Realism to Tyler Perry: The Characterization of Black Masculinity in Tyler Perry's Romantic Storylines"; *Journal of Men's Studies*; 25(1) 70-91.

2011. Lyle, Timothy. "'Check With Yo' Man First; Check With Yo' Man': Tyler Perry Appropriates Drag as a Tool to Re-Circulate Patriarchal Ideology" *Callaloo* 34(3) 943-958.

Wednesday, 3/4/20

BLACKNESS x GENDER [FEMALE SPECTRUM]

Watch: *Waiting to Exhale* (1995)

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. [Chapter 4: Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images, pages 76-106.]

Monday, 3/9/20

Their Eyes Were Watching God; Ch 1-6-; pages 1-75.

Wednesday, 3/11/20

Watch Episode: *Living Single* (1993)

2016. Joseph, Ralina. "Strategically Ambiguous Shonda Rhimes: Respectability Politics of a Black Woman Showrunner." *Souls*, 18:2-4, 302-320.

2014. Wright, Joshua. "Scandalous: Olivia Pope and Black Women in Primetime History" in *Black Women and Popular Culture: The Conversation Continues*---Lexington Books

Monday, 3/16/20

NO CLASS—SPRING RECESS

Wednesday, 3/18/20

NO CLASS—SPRING RECESS

Monday, 3/23/20

BLACKNESS x GENDER x SEXUALITY

Watch: *Moonlight* (2016)

Orange is the New Black episode TBD

Reading: Audre Lorde TBD

Wednesday, 4/15/20

BLACK BROTHERHOOD & THE VERNACULAR
I Am Not Your Negro

Monday, 4/20/20

CULTURE: DANCE

Lehman, Christopher. A Critical History of Soul Train on Television. Chapter 3: "People All Over the World" Soul Train Enters Syndication 54-78; Chapter 4: "The Hippest Trip in America" Soul Train as a Cultural Phenomenon 79-105. McFarland & Company: Jefferson, North Carolina

Wednesday, 4/22/20

REIMAGINING BLACKNESS

Watch: The Last Dragon (1985)

2008. Cha-Jua, Sundiata Keita Chapter 9: "Black Audiences, Blaxploitation and Kung Fu Films, and Challenges to White Celluloid Masculinity." 199-223.

[skim] 2008. Nama, Adilifu. Ch 3: "The Black Body: Figures of Distortion" in Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction Film.

Monday, 4/27/20

BLACK HEROES, SUPERHEROES, & VILLAINS

Watch: Meteor Man (Last names A-M)

Candyman (Last name initial N-Z)

2011. Nama, Adilifu. Ch 5: For Reel? Black Superheroes Come to Life in Super Black: American Pop Culture and Black Superheroes. University of Texas Press. 2011.pg 126-154

Wednesday, 4/29/20

PRESENTATIONS

Monday, 5/4/20

PRESENTATIONS

Wednesday, 5/6/20

PRESENTATIONS

Monday, 5/11/20

Wrap Up and FINAL PAPER DUE