

ENG 358:455 Afrofuturism



Mondays and Wednesdays 2:50-4:10 p.m.

Professor Ryan James Kernan

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Office Hours 4:30-5:30 p.m. Mondays and by appointment

Course Sakai Site: <https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal>

Course Description

In the words of Mark Dery, Afrofuturism "treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of 20th century technoculture and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriate images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future." First and foremost, then, during this seminar, we will take up the connections between African-American signification and technoculture. Over the course of the semester, we will look at a series of texts—short stories, novels, comics, film, and music—through the prism of Afrofuturism. We will explore the themes and tropes of this multimedia movement as well as its artistic and political stakes, and will arrive at some conclusions about how to define it. Questions we will explore together include: What does it mean to be non- or post-human while black? What does it mean to think "future" in a world of black death? How do key theories of black cultural production help us think about the work and temporality of Afrofuturism? What are the

major debates within Afrofuturism? What is the role of queerness in Afrofuturist production? What is the role of the global in Afrofuturist production? In addition to their engaged participation, students will be required to complete weekly short-responses and quizzes and to write one final paper (10 to 12 pages).

Synchronous Remote Technology Requirements

This is a SR class that meets two times per week over ZOOM. The ideal way to attend class is via a computer with a working webcam, earphones, and microphone. You can also access your ZOOM classrooms and classroom materials over your smartphone. If you do not have the appropriate technology for financial reasons, please email the Dean of Students deanofstudents@echo.rutgers.edu for assistance.

Zoom Instructions:

Attending Monday Classes (please sign into classes 2 minutes before start time)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84941595649?pwd=Y3F0ZFNvaWFsZEFES0xjazN4d1VqZz09>

Meeting ID: 849 4159 5649

Passcode: 1NXcLR

One tap mobile

+19292056099,,84941595649#,,,,,0#,,446968# US (New York)

+13017158592,,84941595649#,,,,,0#,,446968# US (Germantown)

Dial by your location

+1 929 205 6099 US (New York)

+1 301 715 8592 US (Germantown)

+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

+1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)

+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)

Meeting ID: 849 4159 5649

Passcode: 446968

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/ke1gO9zqD>

Attending Wednesday Classes (please sign into classes 2 minutes before start time)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89670131147?pwd=NHUrSWtRdzhRMUJo1RTZkUmdDYkpMZz09>

Meeting ID: 896 7013 1147

Passcode: 7iHWLT

One tap mobile

+13126266799,,89670131147#,,,,,0#,,779793# US (Chicago)

+19292056099,,89670131147#,,,,,0#,,779793# US (New York)

Dial by your location

- +1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)
- +1 929 205 6099 US (New York)
- +1 301 715 8592 US (Germantown)
- +1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)
- +1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)
- +1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

Meeting ID: 896 7013 1147

Passcode: 779793

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/kcbic5xz0F>

Attending Office Hours

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89126554257?pwd=Qzl0NHZ3ekwrK1lyd0tBWk1xWldxZz09>

Meeting ID: 891 2655 4257

Passcode: 2c165m

One tap mobile

+13017158592,,89126554257#,,,,,0#,,678960# US (Germantown)

+13126266799,,89126554257#,,,,,0#,,678960# US (Chicago)

Dial by your location

- +1 301 715 8592 US (Germantown)
- +1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)
- +1 929 205 6099 US (New York)
- +1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)
- +1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)
- +1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)

Meeting ID: 891 2655 4257

Passcode: 678960

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/kegPHdaGm>

Attendance Policies

Students are expected to attend all classes; if you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me. Students are permitted to miss three classes per semester. Unexcused absences will result in a 10% penalization in your attendance grade for every absence beyond the third.

Please note: A maximum of one missed reading quiz may be “made-up” during office hours.

Discussion and Office Hours

Class discussion offers you a place for exploration, a space where – if you come prepared – all can benefit from your insights and from those of others. Exploring texts

can be difficult, and fascinating discussions depend on a variety of opinions. Discussion is also meant to clear up any confusion you might have about lectures, our texts or the essays we'll be writing. You should NEVER be afraid to ask a question. There are stupid professors, but there are no stupid questions. Most of the time, I'll be able to stay after lecture to answer brief questions, and you should also (in all of your classes for the rest of your academic life) take advantage of my office hours! Office hours allow you to get one-on-one help with any difficulties you may encounter, and your visitation keeps professors from getting too lonely and spiteful in their offices.

Late Work

Collected responses or papers submitted after the due date will lose half a letter grade for every day they are late. I will consider extensions on a case-by-case basis, provided you have a compelling reason for requiring the extension and you speak to me at least 72 hours before the essay is due.

Formatting

Work should be formatted according to MLA standards. If these are unfamiliar, refer to MLA guide- lines as explained via the [Purdue OWL](#) style guide. Ensure that your margins are set to 1" on all sides; that you do not exceed 12-point font; that you use between one-and-a-half and double spacing; that you provide page numbers; and that you use a clear, legible typeface (such as Garamond, Palatino, or Times New Roman). All written work will be submitted via the "Assignments" tab on Sakai, in Word document format (.doc or .docx) when possible. Otherwise, submit via PDF. Other formats (.pages, Google doc links, etc.) are not acceptable.

Disability Services

(848) 445-6800 / Lucy Stone Hall, Suite A145, Livingston Campus, 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway, NJ 08854 / <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation:

<https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your

courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

Academic Integrity

Students and instructors have a duty to each other and to our community to abide by norms of academic honesty and responsibility. To present something as your own original writing when it is not is plagiarism. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating are serious violations of trust. Academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, will have severe consequences, in accordance with the University Policy on Academic Integrity and the Code of Student Conduct. For details about the University's academic integrity policies, please see <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>.

All students will need to sign the Rutgers Honor Pledge on every major exam, assignment, or other assessment as follows:

On my honor, I have neither received nor given any unauthorized assistance on this examination (assignment, paper, quiz, etc.).

Departmental Learning Goals

1. knowledge of literatures in English, their historical, cultural, and formal dimensions and diversity
2. strategies of interpretation, including an ability to use critical and theoretical terms, concepts, and methods in relation to a variety of textual forms and other media
3. the ability to engage with the work of other critics and writers, using and citing such sources effectively
4. the ability to write persuasively and precisely, in scholarly and, optionally, creative forms.

Creating an Inclusive, Anti-Racist Classroom

In this class, we will work together to develop a learning community that is inclusive and respectful. Our diversity may be reflected by differences in race, culture, age, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, and myriad other social identities and life experiences. The goal of inclusiveness, in a diverse community, encourages and appreciates expressions of different ideas, opinions, and beliefs, so that conversations and interactions that could potentially be divisive turn instead into opportunities for intellectual and personal enrichment.

A dedication to inclusiveness requires respecting what others say, their right to say it, and the thoughtful consideration of others' communication. Both speaking up and listening are valuable tools for furthering thoughtful, enlightening dialogue. Respecting one another's individual differences is critical in transforming a collection of diverse individuals into an inclusive, collaborative and excellent learning community. Our core commitment shapes our core expectation for behavior inside and outside of the classroom.

Student-Wellness Services: All of these services are being provided remotely during Fall 2020.

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)

(848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901/

<http://health.rutgers.edu/medical-counseling-services/counseling/>

CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professionals within Rutgers Health services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community, and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

Crisis Intervention :

<http://health.rutgers.edu/medical-counseling-services/counseling/crisis-intervention/>

Report a Concern: <http://health.rutgers.edu/do-something-to-help/>

Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA)

(848) 932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 /

www.vpva.rutgers.edu/

The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call 848-932-1181.

Requirements

Attendance: 10% of Final Grade

Attend class!

Participation: 15% of Final Grade

Participation will be graded according to how often you contribute to the seminar by sharing an opinion, answering a question, etc.

Responses: 20% of Final Grade

Sometimes, your responses will be collected and graded. Every seminar, I will choose people to read their responses, and those responses will also be graded.

Reading Quizzes: 20% of Final Grade

These quizzes will not be difficult at all if you've done the reading. Keep up with the reading, though, as this is an easy way to gain and lose points.

Final paper: 35% of Final Grade

Over the course of the semester, you will be developing a sophisticated ten to twelve page final paper, using the theorists and texts on the syllabus (or texts of your own choosing).

Grading Standards

A- Outstanding. Demonstrates thorough mastery of course materials and skills.

B- Good. The student's work demonstrates serious engagement with all aspects of the course but incomplete mastery of course materials and skills.

C- Satisfactory. The student's work satisfies requirements but shows significant problems or major gaps in mastery of course material.

D- Poor or minimal pass. The student completes the basic course requirements, but the student's work is frequently unsatisfactory in several major areas.

Failure. Student has not completed all course requirements or turns in consistently unsatisfactory work.

Class Schedule

Week #1

September 2nd

Course Introduction

Week #2

(September 7th Holiday)

September 8th (use Monday Zoom room)

Reading

Mark Dery, "Black to the Future" [Sakai]

Alondra Nelson, "Future Texts" in *Social Text* [Sakai]

Response

Come to class with a one or two sentence statement, written in your own words, defining Afrofuturism.

September 9th

Reading

Ytasha L. Womack, "A Human Fairy Tale Named Black" in *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*

W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Comet" in *Dark Matter*

Response

Come to class with a short passage (a few sentences) from either of the readings that you'd like to discuss.

Week #3

September 14th

Reading

Octavia Butler, "The Evening and the Morning the Night" in *Dark Matter*

Kodwo Eshun, "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism" [Sakai]

Response

Come to class with an argument about why Butler's short story should be considered an Afrofuturist work.

September 16th

Reading

Lisa Yasek, "Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future" [Sakai]

Ralph Ellison, "Battle Royale" (excerpt) from *Invisible Man* [Sakai]

Response

Come to class with a close-reading of a passage from "Battle Royale."

Week #4

September 21st

Reading

Reynaldo Anderson, "Afrofuturism 2.0 and The Black Speculative Art Movement: Notes on a Manifesto," [Sakai]

Derrick Bell, "The Space Traders" in *Dark Matter*

Response

Complete reading quiz by 11:55 p.m. [Sakai]

September 23rd

Reading

Reynaldo Anderson, "Critical Afrofuturism" [Sakai]

Amiri Baraka, "Rhythm Travel" in *Dark Matter*

Octavia Butler, "Bloodchild" [Sakai]

Response

Revise your definition of Afrofuturism in a paragraph using quotations from at least two of the thinkers we have encountered thus far.

Week #5

September 28th

Reading

Ytasha L. Womack, "Pen My Future" in *Afrofuturism*

Sutton Griggs, *Imperium in Imperio* (Chapters I to X)

Response

Complete reading quiz by 11:55 p.m. [Sakai]

September 30th

Reading

Sutton Griggs, *Imperium in Imperio* (Chapters XI to XX)

Response

Come to class with two paragraphs that use your definition of Afrofuturism to explore Griggs' text. What "counter-futures" do Bernard and Belton symbolize for the readers?

Week #6

October 5th

Reading

George Schuyler, *Black No More* (Dedication to Chapter 7)

Response

Complete reading quiz by 11:55 p.m. [Sakai]

October 7th

Reading

George Schuyler, *Black No More* (Chapter 8 to Chapter 13)

Response

Come to class with a one to two paragraph argument about one of the ways Schuyler's novel suggests that race is a technology or tool. For what purposes is it used?

Week #7

October 12th

Reading and Screening

Space Is the Place, (Dir. John Coney, 1974) [Sakai]

Nabeel Zuberi, "The Transmolecularization of [Black] Folk: Space is the Place, Sun Ra and Afrofuturism" [Sakai]

Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement" [Sakai]

Response

Come to class with an argument that positions *Space is the Place* as both a work of "Black Arts" and as an Afrofuturist work.

October 14th

Reading and Screening

Space Is the Place, (Dir. John Coney, 1974) [Sakai]

Ramzi Fawaz, "Space, that Bottomless Pit: Planetary Exile and Metaphors of Belonging in American Afrofuturist Cinema" [Sakai]

Response

Come to class with a scene from the movie you'd like to discuss.

Week#8

October 19th

Reading and Screening

The Brother from Another Planet (Dir. John Sayles, 1984) [Sakai]

Janani Subramanian. "Alienating Identification: Black Identity in The Brother from Another Planet and I Am Legend." *Science Fiction Film & Television* 3.1 (2010): 37-5 [Sakai]

Response

Come to class with one or two paragraphs outlining two different ways to interpret the end of the film.

October 21st

Reading

Octavia Butler, Damian Duffy, and John Jennings. *Kindred* ("Prologue," "The River," and "The Fire")

Ytasha Womack, "A Clock for Time Travelers" in *Afrofuturism*

James Snead, "On Repetition in Black Culture" [Sakai]

Response

Come to class with a short explanation/conjecture as to why stories about time travel into the past constitute Afrofuturist works?

Week #9

October 26th

Reading

Octavia Butler, Damian Duffy, and John Jennings *Kindred* (“The Fall” and “The Fight”)

Response

Finish reading quiz by 11:55 pm [Sakai]

October 28th

Reading

Octavia Butler, Damian Duffy, and John Jennings *Kindred* (“The Storm,” “The Rope,” and “Epilogue”)

Response

Come to class with one or two paragraphs describing how Dana changes over the course of the narrative.

Week #10

November 2nd

Reading and Screening

Sankofa (dir. Haile Gerima, 1993) [Sakai]

Kara Keeling “In Order to Move Forward” in *The Witch’s Flight* [Sakai]

Response

Come to class with one or two paragraphs comparing and contrasting Mona-Shola’s character development in *Sankofa* with that of Dana in *Kindred*.

November 4th

Reading, Screening, and Listening

Ytasha Womack, “Mothership in the Key of Mars” in *Afrofuturism*

Parliament Funkadelic, “One Nation Under a Groove: Documentary” [Sakai]

Joshua Bird, “Climbing Aboard the Mothership: An Afrofuturistic Reading of Parliament-Funkadelic” [Sakai]

Parliament, “Mothership Connection (Star Child)” lyrics and song [Sakai]

Response

Come to class with one or two paragraphs describing the role that black history (and/or former black cultural production) plays in “Mothership Connection (Star Child).”

Week #11

November 9th

Reading, Screening, and Listening

The Last Angel of History (dir. John Akomfrah) (1995) [Sakai]

Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than the Sun*, pp A[175]-A[193], pp 00[-007] – 00[000], pp. 02[013] – 02[024] [Sakai]

Drexciya, "The Quest: Part 1" [Sakai]

Recommended Reading: for interesting, extra reading (on Drexciya) read Eshun *More Brilliant Than the Sun* pp. 06[078] 06[089] [Sakai]

Response

Come to class with a passage from *More Brilliant Than the Sun* that you'd like to discuss.

November 11th

Reading, Screening, and Listening

Ytasha Womack, "The Divine Feminine in Space" in *Afrofuturism*

Robin James, "Robo-Diva R&B": Aesthetics, Politics, and Black Female Robots in Contemporary Popular Music [Sakai]

Beyoncé Knowles, "Get Me Bodied" 2007 BET AWARDS [Sakai]

Rihanna, "Umbrella" [Sakai]

Alexander G. Weheliye, "'Feenin' Posthuman Voices in Contemporary Black Popular Music" [Sakai]

Response

Come to class with a two paragraph response that summarizes Weheliye's article and explains how it relates to Afrofuturism as you understand it.

Week #12

November 16th

Reading, Screening, and Listening

Daylanne English and Alvin Kim, "Now We Want Our Funk Cut: Janelle Monáe's Neo-Afrofuturism" [Sakai]

Janelle Monáe, "Many Moons" [Sakai]

Janelle Monáe, "Tightrope" [Sakai]

Janelle Monáe, "Q.U.E.E.N." feat. Erykah Badu [Sakai]

Steven Shaviro, "Cyborg/Goddess: Dawn Richard, 'Calypso'" [Sakai]

DAWN, "Calypso" [Sakai]

DAWN, "Tide: The Paradox Effect" [Sakai]

Response

Embracing the writing-style of Eshun, write a two to three paragraph analysis of one of DAWN's songs or of an EMD song of your choice. Make sure you focus, primarily, on the music and not just on the video or lyrics.

November 18th

Reading

Clayton D. Colmon, "Queer Afrofuturism: Utopia, Sexuality, and Desire in Samuel Delany's "Aye, and Gomorrah," Utopian Studies, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2017), pp. 327-346 [Sakai]

Samuel Delaney, "Aye, and Gomorrah" in *Dark Matter*
Samuel Delaney, "Racism in Science Fiction" in *Dark Matter*
Audre Lorde "Prologue" [Sakai]
Alexis Pauline Gumbs "Audre Lorde as Prologue for Queer Black Futurism"

[Sakai]

Response

Come to class with a passage from any of the texts you'd like to discuss.

Week #13

November 23rd

Reading and Screening

Pumzi (Dir. Wanuri Kahiu, 2009) [Sakai]

M. Omelsky, "After the End Times: African Futures and Speculative Fictions"

[Sakai]

Response

Come to class with a working thesis for your final paper.

November 25th no class (Friday's class)

Week #14

Reading

November 30th

Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring* (Chapters 1-4)

Womack, "The African Cosmos for Modern Mermaids (Mermen) in *Afrofuturism*

Response

Complete Reading Quiz by 11:55 pm.

December 2nd

Reading

Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring* (Chapters 5-8)

Response

Come to class with an introduction for your final paper.

December 4th Marathon Office Hours

Week #15

December 7th

Reading

Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring* (Chapters 9-13)

Response

Come to class with one or two paragraphs that discuss Ti-Jeanne's growth as a character. Where does she begin and where does she end? What makes her transformation and triumph possible?

December 9th

Reading

Henry Dumas, "Ark of Bones" in *Dark Matter*

Ytasha Womack, "The Surreal Life" in *Afrofuturism*

Response

No Response- Writing Practicum

Final Paper Due December 15th (10-12 pages)

Required Books Listed by ISBN:

Afrofuturism by Ytasha Womack

ISBN: 9781613747964

Kindred: Graphic Novel Adaptation by Octavia Butler adapted by John Jennings and Damian Duffy

ISBN: 9781419709470

Brown Girl in the Ring by Nalo Hopkinson

ISBN: 9780446674331

Black No More by George Schuyler

ISBN: 9780486480404

Imperium in Imperio by Sutton Griggs

ISBN: 9780812971606

Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora ed. Sheree Thomas

ISBN: 9780446677240