



AFROFUTURISM IN THE BLACK INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

SPRING 2022
HILL HALL RM. 204

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is an exercise in the hope and fear of intellectual endeavor—particularly when that endeavor is the product of a liberation still coming into focus. Coined in 1993, by cultural critic Mark Dery, the term “Afrofuturism” has come to signify the expression of Black diasporic interests in the future through literature, music, art, and digital and techno-cultures. Yet, Black visions of and dialog about futurity (or times to come) have long been an integral part of what sustains Afro-diasporic intellectual communities. Indeed, just as Black communities have pushed for equitable inclusion in their societies, they have also imagined themselves in futures shaped by the push and pull of their historical journeys. To borrow from one of my favorite scholars, Robin D.G. Kelley, the “freedom dreams” of Black people fueled their efforts to create a more just present and future. This semester, we will lean on the disciplines of Black Studies with literature, Critical Race Theory, and Science and Technology Studies to consider the ways in which Afro-Futurism enables Black communities to resist racial exclusion and oppression. Our work together will combine traditional research with creative writing, as we chart the use of utopic, dystopic, and speculative concepts among Black scholars, writers, researchers, artists, and performers.

THIS SEMESTER YOU WILL:

- 1) Develop a basic understanding of Black intellectual history
- 2) Identify and explain the concept of Afrofuturism and its uses in Black socio-political and creative expression
- 3) Identify and evaluate the uses of fiction and non-fiction sources in Afrofuturist expression
- 4) Discuss and debate issues of race, gender, class, sexual identity, and spirituality as they emerge in Afro-futurist work
- 5) Analyze written, audio, and visual sources relevant to Black expressions about the future
- 6) Organize and create analytical, argumentative essays that observe the basic conventions of academic writing, including proposing a thesis, organizing, and analyzing main points, and supporting ideas with well-chosen textual evidence from multiple sources
- 7) Create a final essay that combines formal research with creative thinking and writing by drawing on the conventions of Afrofuturistic thought

Instructor: Professor Hunter

Email:
lahunter@newark.rutgers.edu

Virtual Office Hours
(Tuesdays 12-1:30 pm):
<https://rutgers.zoom.us/j/92835284787?pwd=SGZnVk8wY3p2V29lZ0dtOVZPUkM4UT09>

Password: 417592

Virtual Class Meeting Link:
<https://rutgers.zoom.us/j/92285030104?pwd=dHEzYUtGTUZlc1ZaakYrd2xiMkRFZz09>

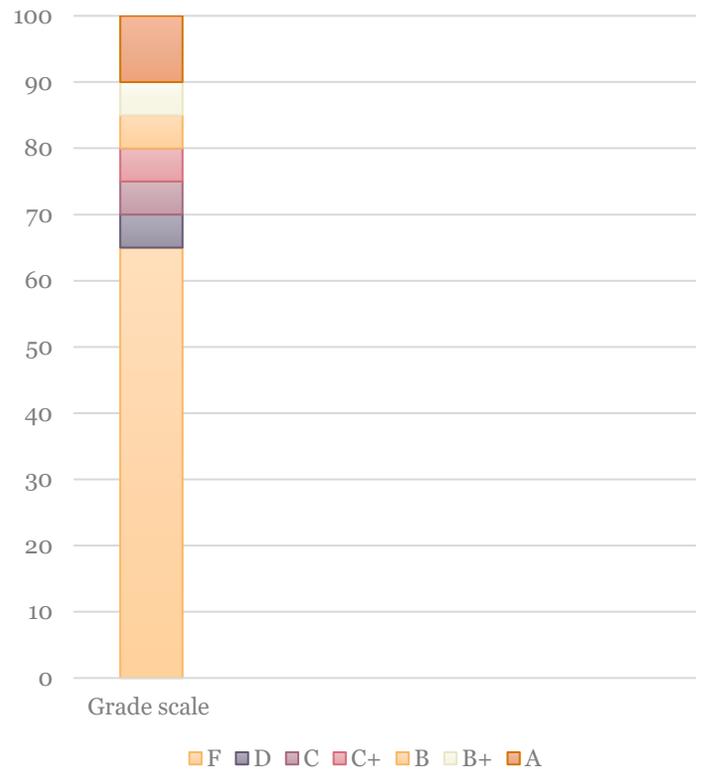
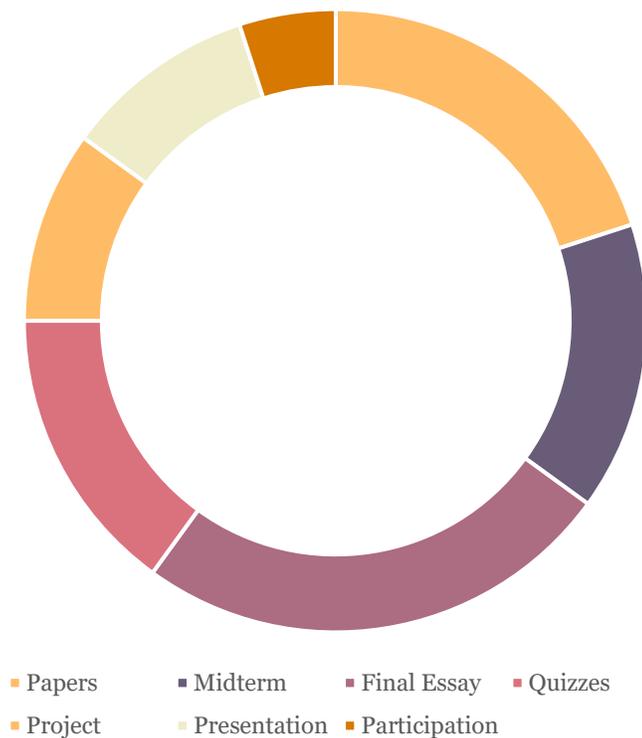
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Required Text:

All readings are accessible via Canvas and the Rutgers University Library.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Grading Scale



COURSE ASSIGNMENTS EXPLAINED

Paper assignments: You will complete two focused writing assignments this semester that require you to conduct formal research, examine historical primary sources and Black creative fiction. The due dates of each assignment are listed below, and detailed guides will be available on our Canvas course page.

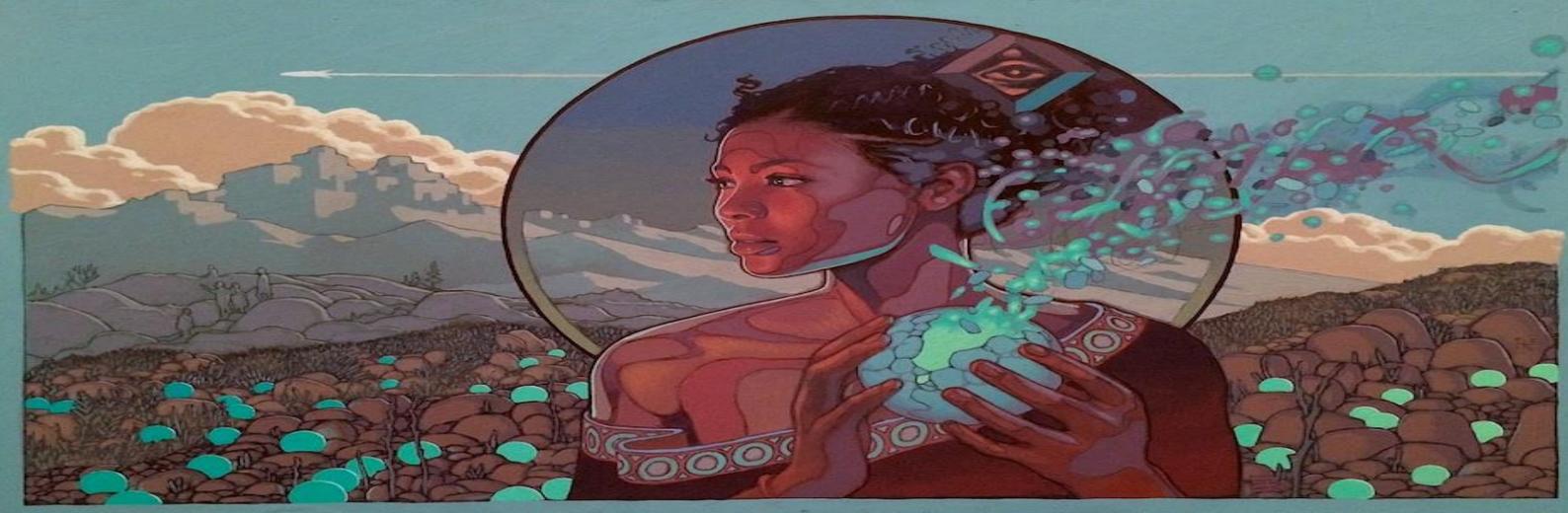
Exams: You will complete two written, essay style, exams this semester. The first, your midterm, will require you to think about the development of Afrofuturism as it emerged in the work of a Black intellectual of your choice. The second, your final exam, will require you to apply an Afrofuturist theme to the discussion of a specific event, idea, or historical period of your choosing. Detailed guidelines will be posted on Canvas.

Quizzes: This semester you will complete two quiz assessments that measure your understanding of the concepts we explore together as well as your ability to contextualize and apply the major themes of Afrofuturism in your writing. All quizzes will be posted on Canvas. The due date of each quiz assessment is listed below.

Project & Presentation: As you move through this semester, I ask that you create a brief a multimedia representation of your final research/creative writing project. This visual representation of your project must provide an overview of your chosen idea, event, or historical period that draws on one or more of the themes we explore this semester and should convey its importance to your intended audience.

Participation: To keep the course interesting and fun, I ask that we maintain thoughtful, open, and respectful conversations in each class. Understandably, there will be times when each of us may be late or absent. In this case, let's agree to give one another a 24-hour notice. If this is not possible, and your late attendance or absence is not due to an emergency, it will count against you. Three incidences of lateness equal one absence; each unexcused absence after this will lower your final grade by one half grade. Any student who misses eight or more sessions through any combination of excused and unexcused absences should speak with me immediately.

NOTE: The global impact of COVID -19 continues to impact the nature of university learning and classroom engagement everywhere. If you are having ANY difficulty completing assignments or accessing the technology to participate in our course, please do not hesitate to reach out to me to discuss the best strategy for continuing the course successfully.



Evaluation: A key element aspect of your experience in this class will involve the instructor's evaluation of your progress in the course, with the course materials. As part of each of the instructor's assessment of your coursework, the following elements will be considered where applicable with each of the course assignments noted above.

- ✦ How effectively you develop your arguments in clear and coherent texts, as well as in oral communication, to produce an informed analysis of the materials with which you have been presented.
- ✦ How effectively you grasp the differing ways to read a variety of texts and cultural artifacts, and then produce an informed analysis of them. The evaluation will also include assessing your understanding of the connections among texts within given disciplines, and the similarities and distinctions between texts from different disciplines.
- ✦ How successfully you discuss your ideas individually and collectively in class, informally address in writing the information which you are presented in your responses to readings, and how you more formally engage these ideas in longer written work, as well as the midterm and final examinations.
- ✦ How you creatively produce ideas and texts in response to each other through the debates and the one-on-one conversation sessions.
- ✦ How you employ basic methods and methodologies employed in the humanities and social sciences. How well you identify, discuss, and analyze interactions between people from a range of political, social, cultural, racial, ethnic, and gendered groups.
- ✦ How well you understand and address the relationship between the course materials and the defining social, political, cultural, and intellectual questions of your own time, in both historical and historical perspectives.

Policy on Academic Integrity (Cheating and Plagiarism): Rutgers University treats cheating and plagiarism as serious offenses. The standard minimum penalties for students who cheat or plagiarize include failure of the course, disciplinary probation, and a formal warning that further cheating will be grounds for expulsion from the University. The department REQUIRES all students to insert an academic integrity pledge on ALL of your submitted work. The pledge should read as follows: “On My honor I have neither received nor given any unauthorized assistance on this assignment.”

MASK POLICY: To protect those in and outside of our homes and classrooms, I ask that you always wear a mask in our class. Please also complete the My Campus Pass symptom checker found at the myRutgers portal before arriving to class each week. For updated information in Covid related campus protocols, see our Guide to Returning to Campus found here: <https://ipo.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Guide%20To%20Returning%20To%20Rutgers.pdf>

PLEASE NOTE: The impacts of the evolving COVID-19 virus continue to redefine our experiences in nearly every dimension of life. In the event of an emergency, inclement weather, or other circumstances that might potentially prevent us from gathering in our classroom, I will run class in an online format until our next physical meeting. All updates will be available via Canvas announcements.

ACCOMMODATION & SUPPORT

Rutgers University Newark (RU-N) is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students. RU-N has identified the following resources to further the mission of access and support:

- ✚ Students with Disabilities: Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Disability Services (ODS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter barriers due to disability. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact ODS, register, have an initial appointment, and provide documentation. Once a student has completed the ODS process (registration, initial appointment, and documentation submitted) and reasonable accommodations are determined to be necessary and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be provided to the student. The student must give the LOA to each course instructor, followed by a discussion with the instructor. This should be completed as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at ods.rutgers.edu. Contact ODS: (973) 353-5375 or ods@newark.rutgers.edu.
- ✚ Religious Holiday Policy and Accommodations: Students are advised to provide timely notification to instructors about necessary absences for religious observances and are responsible for making up the work or exams according to an agreed-upon schedule. The Division of Student Affairs is available to verify absences for religious observance, as needed: (973) 353-5063 or DeanofStudents@newark.rutgers.edu.
- ✚ Counseling Services: Counseling Center Room 101, Blumenthal Hall, (973) 353-5805 or <http://counseling.newark.rutgers.edu/>.
- ✚ Students with Temporary Conditions/Injuries: Students experiencing a temporary condition or injury that is adversely affecting their ability to fully participate in their courses should submit a request for assistance at: <https://temporaryconditions.rutgers.edu>.
- ✚ Students Who are Pregnant: The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance is available to assist students with any concerns or potential accommodations related to pregnancy: (973) 353-1906 or TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu.
- ✚ Gender or Sex-Based Discrimination or Harassment: Students experiencing any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking, should know that help and support are available. To report an incident, contact the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance: (973) 353-1906 or TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu. To submit an incident report: tinyurl.com/RUNReportingForm. To speak with a staff member who is confidential and does NOT have a reporting responsibility, contact the Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance: (973) 353-1918 or run.vpva@rutgers.edu.

PLEASE NOTE: SYLLABUS SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

	TOPIC	WHAT TO READ	WHAT TO SUBMIT
Week 1	Course Introduction & “Futures”		
Jan.19			Submit your reflection to our first Canvas module on Sunday January 23 by 11:59 pm.
Week 2	Definitions & Modality		
Jan. 24		Read Mark Dery’s “Black to the Future”	
Jan. 26		Read Rasheeda Phillips’ “Constructing a Theory” & Joy Kmt’s “Creating Worlds”	
Week 3	Things Hoped For [in sacred spaces]		
Jan. 31		Read Beverly J. Robinson’s “Faith is the Key, Prayer Unlocks the Door”	
Feb. 2		Read the “Sacred Spaces” page in this week’s module & Listen to “Resonance” Playlist 1	
Week 4	North Star Reverberations (Hope impulses)		
Feb. 7		Read excerpts from Isiah Lavender’s <i>Afrofuturism Rising</i>	
Feb. 9		Read excerpts from Frederick Douglass’ “Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass” & Harriet Jacobs’ “Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl”	Quiz 1 due Feb. 11 @ 11:59 pm
Week 5	Moral Uplift & Dystopic Realities		
Feb. 14		Read Charles W. Chesnutt’s “Mars Jeems Nightmare” & excerpts from Martin R. Delany’s <i>Blake</i>	
Feb. 16		Read Excerpts from W.E.B. DuBois’ <i>Souls of Black Folk</i> & Pauline Hopkins’ <i>Of One Blood</i>	Essay Assignment 1 due Feb. 18 @ 11:59 pm
Week 6	Migrants, Aliens & Modernity		
Feb. 21		Read W.E.B. DuBois’ “On Being Crazy” & Richard Wright’s “The Ethics of Jim Crow”	

Feb. 23		Read Zora N. Hurston's "Color Struck" & Marita Bonner's "Nothing New"	
Week 7	Migrants, Aliens & Modernity (cont.)		
Feb. 28		Read excerpts from Robin D.G. Kelley's <i>Freedom Dreams</i>	
Mar. 2		Read Marcus Garvey's "The Future as I See It" & Paul Robeson's "I Want to be an African"	
Week 8	In Search of Ourselves: The Firmament		
Mar. 7		Read excerpts from James Baldwin's <i>The Price of the Ticket</i> & Sun Ra's <i>The Wisdom of Sun Ra</i>	
Mar. 9		Read excerpts from Ralph Ellison's <i>The Invisible Man</i> & Toni Morrison's <i>The Bluest Eye</i>	Midterm essay due Mar. 11 @ 11:59 pm
Week 9	SPRING BREAK		
Mar. 14		-----	
Mar. 16			
Week 10	Africa in "Afro" Futurity [or African Futurism]		
Mar. 21		Read Chinua Achebe's "An Image of Africa" & Watch Chimamanda Ngozi's "The Danger of a Single Story"	
Mar. 23		Read Nnedi Okorafor "Binti" & "African Futurism Defined"	
Week 11	Oscillations: Black Interiority		
Mar. 28		Read Elizabeth Alexander "Toward the Black Interior" & excerpts from James Baldwin's <i>Nothing Personal</i>	
Mar. 30		Read Toni Morrison's "Race Matters" & excerpts from Anaïs Duplan's <i>Blackspace</i>	Essay Assignment 2 due Apr. 1 @ 11:59 pm
Week 12	"The New Jim Code" & Black Digital Identities		
Apr. 4		Read Octavia Butler's "Bloodchild" or Nisi Shawl's "The Things I Miss Most"	
Apr. 6		Read Ruha Benjamin's "Retooling Solidarity, Reimagining Justice"	Quiz 2 due Apr. 8 @ 11:59 pm
Week 13	Community Futures		

Apr. 11		Read Camae Ayewa “Timepockets” & Nyasha Felder “Community Project Lightcone”	
Apr. 13		Read Natalie-Claire Luwisha-Bowditch “Black Female Engineer + Her Afrofuturist City”	
Week 14	Endemic Pandemics		Presentations begin this week.
Apr. 18		Read: Colson Whitehead <i>Zone One</i> (part 1)	
Apr. 20		Read: Colson Whitehead <i>Zone One</i> (part 2)	
Week 15	Reflection: Extraordinary Futures		
Apr. 25		Read Toni Morrison’s “The Future of Time”	
Apr. 27		Read Vanessa Taylor’s “How Afrofuturism Helped Me Cope with Post-Pandemic Uncertainty”	
Week 16			
May 2	Final Class		All final presentation files due today @ 11:59 pm.
	Final Exam Essay	-----	Final Exam Essay due May 9 @ 6 pm.