About the course

This course is intended to illustrate some of the ways that one might (re) consider the assemblage that is Black life.

Rather than take a wholly historical approach, our course materials are organized around Black geographies.

We will work with a variety of texts (fiction, film, music etc.) that will allow us to map the sites and spaces that have constructed both Black identities in the Americas, and the relationships between Blacks in the diaspora and in Africa, oscillating between sites of leisure and pleasure and sites of confinement and control. Our readings are intended to stimulate fruitful discussion as we look at how Black life is constructed on the auction block, in the dancehall, and along urban streets, in addition to other critical locations.

What’s in the syllabus:
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Required materials & Where to find them

Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Sonia Sanchez’s *Does Your House Have Lions?* are the only book-length texts required for the course. *Things Fall Apart* is available online through Rutgers’ library; both books are available for purchase at NJ Books. Required films will be on reserve (or accessible) at the library. All other articles, chapters, images and music can be located on Blackboard.
Learning Outcomes
The course requirements are based upon our learning goals:

- Understanding the debates and concepts emerging from the field of African-American Studies.
- Gaining a wider vocabulary and set of references to draw on when talking about the lived experiences of African and African diasporic subjects.
- Honing the ability to engage in meaningful and respectful discussions around race and Black life, both in class and online.
- Developing the ability to think critically about Black life in the diaspora.
- Developing writing skills by engaging different types of written assignments (moving from blogs to lengthier argumentative essays).

Course Requirements & Grading

Participation (40%) Since you cannot participate if you are not present, participation is comprised of both attendance and active engagement in class discussions. To be actively engaged you should be able to make thoughtful comments throughout each class session that reflect that you have done the assigned reading, that you are grappling with the implications of the reading and that you can respond effectively in classroom debates about different interpretations of the reading. You can also ask questions if you are not sure about how to interpret the reading. In-class quizzes and notes may also be factored into your participation grade. Active engagement in class discussions also involves listening to your classmates (and to your instructor). Please keep in mind that it is very difficult to actively engage while you are involved in another discussion on your cell phone, laptop or tablet (or, if you are off-school, by passing notes to one another on loose-leaf paper). Students who are repeatedly engaging in outside discussions (via text, chat, etc) will be asked to excuse themselves and will be marked absent for that session. Students who are more than 5 minutes late (without a legitimate excuse) will be marked absent for the session. One unexcused absence (to be used at your discretion except on the day of the writing workshop) is allowed over the course of the semester. To indicate that you will be absent you will need to use Rutgers’ Self-Reporting absences app. More than one unexcused absence, perpetual tardiness, and leaving early from class sessions will result in a reduction of your participation grade.

Note: It is the policy of Rutgers University that a student with any combination of eight or more un/ excused absences will not receive course credit.

Two Blog Posts (20%) The blog will offer an opportunity for you to creatively disrupt conventional (or ‘academic’) writing while still critically responding to a prompt. Blog posts submitted for this class must be more than paragraphs of free thought; you may create a ‘Mixtape’ or a ‘Weekly Round-up’ and you must incorporate short video clips, music, photos and (of course) words to respond critically to the assigned prompt. Group blog posts in the form of a roundtable will also be considered. As a guide, blog posts should be no less than 3 paragraphs. (There are four due dates listed on the schedule—pick two.) How to submit a blog post.

Argumentative Essay (20%) You will be asked to develop an original 5 pg argumentative essay due on Oct. 23rd via Blackboard. Unlike blog posts, this is an exercise in using more conventional/‘academic’ writing. Because this type of writing is an area of weakness for some (and an area of strength for others) part of this assignment is about collaboration and includes working through and submitting a draft, peer reviewing the work of others, having your own writing constructively critiqued, and attending the in-class writing workshop. See grading rubric.

Final Project (20%) You are responsible for completing one of the following projects (due at the end of the semester). In order to help you think through your project ahead of time, you will submit a project proposal on Nov 25th.

Final Project options:
1. Take-home exam comprised of identifications and short-essay questions that ask you to respond to several texts and concepts that we’ve discussed this semester.
2. 10 pg. essay developed from an original prompt having to do with one of our course themes and approved by the course instructor. The essay would use the same conventions and format practiced in the 5 pg. essay completed earlier in the semester.
3. 5 pg. event response/review which can be submitted in the form of a 5-7 paragraph blog post, and should include relevant photos and/or other media from the event.
4. In class multi-media presentation
The Reading
How to approach it & what to take notes on

1. Pay close attention to genre
   Reading a novel is different than reading a blog, and likewise, different than reading a chapter out of a book (which has a larger context). Is the text a satire or a memoir?

2. Look at the discussion topic for the next class
   Each class has a thematic focus. How does the assigned text fit into a discussion on street life or the prison industrial-complex (for example)?

3. Note specific passages
   Write down page numbers, song lyrics (etc.) that you would like to talk about in class or in your essay assignments. Also take note of any language that is unfamiliar to you.

Schedule of readings, assignments & discussion topics

- **Wed, Sep 4** - Introductions
  Due by next class: M. Nourbese Philip “Dis Place– The Space Between” and Staceyann Chin “All Oppression is Connected”

- **Mon Sep 9** - Diaspora as Geographic Inquiry
  Due by next class: Saidiya Hartman Lose Your Mother “Prologue” and “Markets and Martyrs”

- **Wed Sep 11** - Plantation Geographies
  Due by next class: Walter Johnson Soul by Soul “Turning People into Products”

- **Mon Sep 16** - Plantation Geographies
  Due by next class: Read Robbie McCauley “Sally’s Rape” and view images of Greenhill Plantation

- **Wed Sep 18** - Plantation Geographies
  Due by next class: Chinua Achebe Things Fall Apart

- **Mon Sep 23** - Unsettled Grounds
  Due by next class: Chinua Achebe Things Fall Apart and Berlin Conference/Scramble for Africa documents

- **Wed Sep 25** - Unsettled Grounds
  Due by next class: Langston Hughes’ “rent party” ad collection, speakeasy map, select songs by Gladys Bentley and Ma Rainey, (additional readings TBA), Blog post option: critical commentary on Boardwalk Empire (clips)

- **Mon Sep 30** - Unsettled Grounds
  [TBD]

- **Wed Oct 2** - Unsettled Grounds
  Due by next class: Listen to select songs (Nina Simone, Fela Kuti, Gil Scott-Heron, etc), read James Baldwin “No Name in the Street” (excerpts), Robin D.G. Kelley Freedom Dreams (excerpt), watch The Black Power Mixtape, Blog post option: critical commentary on the film Dead Presidents

- **Mon Oct 7** - Unsettled Grounds
  Due by next class: Read Joe Austin Taking the Train (excerpts), view wildstyle graffiti images and Jean-Michel Basquiat Untitled, 1982

- **Wed Oct 9** - Unsettled Grounds
  Draft of essay due by Monday via Google Docs.

- **Mon Oct 14** - No class- work on drafts
  Due by next class: Complete and print a peer review worksheet for each member of your writing group. Be sure to read each group member’s paper thoroughly and provide in-text comments and questions.

- **Wed Oct 16** - In-class Writing Workshop

- **Mon Oct 21** - No class- work on papers

- **Wed Oct 23** - No class- Paper Due by 1:00 p.m.
  Due by next class: “Globalism and the Prison Industrial Complex: an Interview with Angela Davis” and/or Women, Race & Class (excerpt)

Helpful Hint

Think of this syllabus as a course guide! You should refer to the various sections to help you succeed in the course.

Also, this syllabus is meant to be accessed electronically. Keep in mind that there are hyperlinks embedded in the syllabus. When you see words that are **blue and underlined** please click on them.
The Course Blog

Part of your work in this course includes creative and analytical blog writing. The blog is intended as an opportunity for you to disrupt conventional (or ‘academic’) writing while still critically responding to a prompt.

Even if you have a personal blog, blog posts for this course must be submitted through our course blog: http://introtoaaas.wordpress.com/. (You will have to sign up for a WordPress account, if you do not already have one.)

If you are not an experienced blogger, don’t worry, you are not alone. You will want to peruse the web to find the style of blog writing that speaks to you.

For additional information on submitting your posts, read the requirements and grading section and click on the link “How to Submit a Blog Post.”

Resources

If you are having trouble with the writing assignments, feel free to contact your course instructor to set up an appointment.

Otherwise, check out the Writing Center in Conklin 126. (The email address for the Writing Center is nwc@andromeda.rutgers.edu.)

Schedule of readings (contd.)

Mon Oct 28- Prison Life
Due by next class: Rickie Solinger “Interrupted Life: Incarcerated Mothers in the United States” (excerpts and select exhibition images), Blog post option: critical response to Orange is the New Black (Ep 5 clips)

Wed Oct 30- Prison Life
Due by next class: Watch Paris is Burning and read Sonia Sanchez Does Your House Have Lions?

Mon Nov 4- Street Life
Due by next class: Watch Solange Knowles’ Losing You, view ‘la sape’ images, Blog post option: the politics of street style.

Wed Nov 6- Street Life
Due by next class: Frank Miller & Dave Gibbon’s The Life and Times of Martha Washington (excerpts)

Mon Nov 11- Veterans Day

Wed Nov 13- Street Life
Due by next class: Watch Dave Chappelle’s Block Party, and read NYT article “Brooklyn, the Remix”

Mon Nov 18- Street Life
Due by next class: Edwidge Danticat Create Dangerously “Another Country” (additional readings TBA]

Wed Nov 20- Tent Cities/ Post-Disaster Geographies
Due by next class: View images from “Tent Cities” and Tommie Mabry’s Katrina journal (additional readings TBA) and final project prospectus.

Mon Nov 25- Tent Cities/ Post-Disaster Geographies

Wed Nov 27- Friday schedule, no class

Mon Dec 2- Academia
Due by next class: W.E.B. DuBois The Negro Problem “The Talented Tenth”

Wed Dec 4- Academia

Mon Dec 9- Wrap up
Wed Dec 11- Final Presentations
Mon Dec 16- Final projects/papers due
More Useful Information

Office hours: To discuss your progress in the course, grades, any questions about course concepts, etc. you will have to make an appointment to meet during office hours on Mondays and Wednesdays 12p-12:50p. If you have a quick question or can’t make it to campus during the hours listed above, virtual ‘office’ hours will be held via g-chat, every Tuesday 7p-8p. (You can find me on g-chat using the email address listed above.)

Late Work Policy: Assignments submitted past the due date will not be graded.

On Plagiarism: All assignments completed for this course must adhere to Rutgers University’s policy on academic integrity. Rutgers University treats cheating and plagiarism as serious offenses, and violations of the university honor code will be prosecuted to the full extent that is permitted. All students must sign off on the “Academic Integrity Agreement” form on the course’s Blackboard site.

How to schedule an appointment for office hours: Office hours cannot be scheduled via email. You must use the Google Calendar to schedule an appointment for office hours.

Accommodations: This class welcomes all different kinds of learners and needs. Students with disabilities should consult with the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, Room 302, Robeson Center to get recommendations and arrange for necessary assistance and accommodations, and be in touch with the course instructor as well.