

Transnational Black Culture in the 21st Century

(Online/Blackboard)

Syllabus

Topics in American Studies: 21:050:489:HQ

Topics in Black Studies: 21:014:400:HQ

Instructor: Bernie Lombardi

Instructor Email: Bernie.Lombardi@Rutgers.edu

Office Hours: by appointment (Phone/G-chat)

Course Description:

This course examines how the meaning of black culture shifts as it circulates transnationally across diverse social geographies. By focusing on black popular culture in a global context, we will analyze how the social meaning of race (and its intersections with gender and sexuality) varies across different locales and in relation to multiple histories. We will pay specific attention to how culture mediates between various African and African diasporic communities, and we will attempt to determine the significance of a global black community for the 21st century. This class examines a variety of cultural texts ranging from fiction, music, and film to television, visual art, social media, and journalism. These texts will bring us from the United States to England, the Caribbean, and Africa.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will acquire the skills to historicize black cultures in the contemporary moment within the context of multiple socio-geographies and histories
2. Students will consider the significance of transnational black popular culture for understanding inter- and intra-racial relations in the 21st century both within and without the frame of the nation-state.
3. Students will consider the significance of a global black community for the 21st century
4. Students will think comparatively about the production and reception of black culture in multiple geographies and social communities
5. Students will understand the social meaning of race and its development and transformation across time and place.
6. Students will become familiar with the social and cultural intersections of race with gender, sexuality, class, generation, and geography
7. Students will examine black culture through several disciplinary lenses (including history, literature, anthropology, sociology, film, and journalism)
8. Students will learn how to compare different methodological approaches
9. As this is a 400 level writing intensive course, students will spend a significant amount of time writing about their thoughts on the reading.

Students will also experience the revision process, as they will have to opportunity to revise their essays.

10. Students will develop skills for analyzing and writing about various cultural forms.

Note: This syllabus may be subject to change. The instructor will make students aware of changes via email.

Required Books:

All required readings and visual materials are posted on Blackboard. If students decide to complete the extra credit assignment, they will have to purchase Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* at their local bookstore or on Amazon.com.

Grade Breakdown:

Discussion Board Posts and Responses: 40%

Essay: 30%

Final Exam: 30%

Description of Assignments:

Discussion Board Posts: Each week the instructor will pose three questions to guide student's reading. He will assign each student one question to respond to on the Blackboard discussion board (The students do not get to choose their questions). These posts are due at 10:00 AM every Thursday. Any late posts (posted after 10:00 AM on Thursday) will not be given credit. These posts are not formal essays. They should be roughly 1-2 paragraphs. Please write posts in full sentences, as every class participant will be reading these posts. Students' posts will guide the class discussion for the week. When submitting a post to the discussion board thread, please include "Question 1," "Question 2," or "Question 3" in the title. This will make it easier for students to navigate the discussion board.

Discussion Board Responses: Each week students are required to respond to two of their classmates' discussion board posts. These are due every Friday at 10:00 AM (Late policy is same as for Discussion Board Posts). Students must respond to a post for each of the two questions that they did not post about on Thursday. For example, if a student posted in Question A on Thursday, he or she should respond to one post in Question B and one post in Question C on Friday. Friday responses can be shorter than Thursday posts, but, again, should be written in full sentences. For each response, students should point out something they agreed/liked/appreciated about their classmate's post and explain why. They should also state at least one way in which they disagreed (and why) or explain how they would have answered

the question differently. Please note: The (online) classroom is a safe space. All students should be respectful while responding to each other's posts. In addition, all students should be receptive to their classmate's constructive criticism. This will enable students to grow as they learn from each other.

Essay: Students are required to write one essay for this course. All essays must be written in 12 point Times New Roman or Cambria font, be double-spaced, and have 1 in. margins on all sides. Essays can be no shorter than 5 full pages and no longer than 6 full pages. The instructor will provide students with specific topics to choose from. Students are required to draw on at least 3 sources assigned in class to write their essays. Essays will be deducted a half a letter grade for every day they are late. For example, if a late essay should receive an A, it will be given a B+. If the essay is due on Wednesday at 11:59 PM, anything submitted after that is considered late.

In addition, students will have the opportunity to revise their essays to improve their grades. This is optional. If students decide to revise their essays, the instructor will average the first grade with the second grade to come up with the final grade for the essay. For example, if a student receives an 80% on the first draft and a 90% on the revision, that student will receive an 85% for the final essay grade. Because the revision is optional, the instructor will not accept late submissions: no exceptions.

All essays and revisions must be submitted both on Blackboard under "Assignments" and directly to the instructor via email.

Final Exam: There will be a final exam (on Blackboard) on Wednesday, August 16. Students will have 3 hours to complete it. Specific times are TBD. The exam will consist of several short answer and essay questions. The majority will be comparative in nature. Students should not quote any text directly on the final exam, as this is an exam and not a formal essay. ****Note:** In addition to knowing all information provided by the instructor via audio, visual and written lectures, students are responsible for reading all discussion board posts and responses each week. The instructor may form exam questions based off of discussion board conversations.

Extra Credit Assignment (Optional): Students are asked to write a report on the novel *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi. Reports must be no shorter than 3 full pages and no longer than 5 full pages. All reports must be written in 12 point Times New Roman or Cambria font, be double-spaced, and have 1 in. margins on all sides. These reports are not summaries of the novel. Students are required to write about how the novel relates to the theme of black transnationalism. In addition, they can analyze their chosen novel in relation to any of the other themes considered in the class. Students are required to inform the instructor at least one week before the due date as to what the topic of their report will be in order to gain approval. If students submit this assignment and the instructor believes it is worthy of extra credit, their final course grade will go up a half a letter grade. For example, if a student is set to receive a B in the course and he or she successfully completes this

assignment, the grade will increase to a B+. Note: If a student submits a summary of the novel with no analysis, it will not be considered for extra credit.

Note on Assignments: In the event that students know an assignment will be late, they should inform the instructor at least three days prior to the assignment due date. If the instructor considers a student's reasoning legitimate, he can choose not to penalize for lateness (this is completely up to the instructor's discretion). If students are ill or unable to complete an assignment due to a serious family matter, they should provide the instructor with appropriate documentation, such as a doctor's note.

Plagiarism Policy: Plagiarism is a serious academic offense, for which a student may receive a range of punishments, including failing the course, a permanent record on his or her final transcript, suspension or even expulsion from the University. Please familiarize yourself with the University's definition of plagiarism by reviewing the Rutgers University Policy on Academic Integrity, here: <http://wp.rutgers.edu/courses/plagiarism>.

If the instructor suspects any student of plagiarism he will bring it to his/her attention and report it to the administration. Faculty members have a professional obligation to report all instances of plagiarism in their classes. Failure to do so promotes inequity among the student body, given that honest students have not had the advantage of using external sources in preparing their work.

Other Course Policies:

Students should never hesitate to contact the instructor with questions regarding the course content. This is an open and safe space for continuous dialogue, and there is no such thing as a "stupid" question. The instructor will try and get back to students within 24 hours (many times, sooner) Mondays-Fridays. However, he may not respond to emails on Saturdays and Sundays.

Students should have a plan to ensure that they will have access to the internet on a daily basis throughout the course. Technical problems, failed internet connections, and computer crashes are not excuses for not completing course work. Students should make a plan for what they will do if they have any technical problems.

Students should always keep an open mind and respect opposing views. Many of the topics this course covers are sensitive and require intellectually mature and respectful participants. Being respectful and open-minded is the best way to learn and grow. Individual and intellectual growth should always be goals while taking courses in college. If students ever feel disrespected or uncomfortable during course discussions, they should not hesitate to contact the instructor.

Course Schedule:

Week 1: Defining Key Terms

July 10 – 14

1. Stuart Hall, “What is This ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?”
2. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, “Nation, Migration, Globalization: Points of Contention in Diaspora Studies” in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader* (ed. Braziel and Mannur)
3. Achille Mbembe, “Afropolitanism”
4. Taiye Selasi, “Bye-Bye Babar”
5. **Watch:** Episode 1.1 of *An African City*

Assignment Due Dates:

BB Post: Thursday, July 13 (10:00 AM)

2 BB Responses: Friday, July 14 (10:00 AM)

Week 2: Urban Cultures

July 17 – 21

1. Ato Quayson, *Oxford Street Accra: City Life and the Itineraries of Transnationalism*: **chapters 5 and 6**
2. **Watch:** Andrew Dosunmu, *Restless City*
3. Nancy Foner, “Black Immigrants and the Realities of Racism: Comments and Questions”
4. Marc Perry, “Global Black Self-Fashionings: Hip Hop as Diasporic Space”

Assignment Due Dates:

BB Post: Thursday, July 20 (10:00 AM)

2 BB Responses: Friday, July 21 (10:00 AM)

Week 3: Sexuality

July 24 – 28

1. Chinelo Okparanta, “America”
2. Diriye Osman, “Your Silence Will Not Protect You”
3. Marlon James, “From Jamaica to Minnesota to Myself”
4. Mimi Sheller, *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom*: **chapter 9**
5. “‘Go Beyond Our Natural Selves’: The Prison Letters of CeCe McDonald”

Assignment Due Dates:

BB Post: Thursday, July 27 (10:00 AM)

2 BB Responses: Friday, July 28 (10:00 AM)

Week 4: Memory and Representations of Slavery

July 31 – August 4

1. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route: prologue and chapter 2*
2. Kamari Maxine Clarke, "Mapping Transnationality: Roots Tourism and the Institutionalization of Ethnic Heritage" in *Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness* (ed. Clarke and Thomas)
3. Annie Paul, "'Do You Remember the Days of Slav'ry?' Connecting the Present with the Past in Contemporary Jamaica"
4. Gabeba Baderoon, "Remembering Slavery in South Africa"

Assignment Due Dates:

Essay (5-6 pp): Wednesday, August 2 (11:59 PM)

BB Post: Thursday, August 3 (10:00 AM)

2 BB Responses: Friday, August 4 (10:00 AM)

Week 5: The Myth of Post-Racial Societies

August 7 – 11

1. **Watch:** Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story"
2. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "Now is the Time to Talk About What We are Actually Talking About"
3. Alicia Garza, "A HerStory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement"
4. "'Building a Living Archive of Struggle': #FeesMustFall at the University of the Western Cape"
5. Michael Dawson and Lawrence Bobo, "One Year Later and the Myth of a Post-Racial Society"
6. **Watch:** "Black Lives Matter Meets the Golden Goose that Comes to Roost"
*Note: students are only required to watch the first **4** minutes of this video
7. **Watch:** "South Africans Demonstrate in Support of 'Black Lives Matter'"

Assignment Due Dates:

BB Post: Thursday, August 10 (10:00 AM)

2 BB Responses: Friday, August 11 (10:00 AM)

Week 6: August 14 - 16**Assignment Due Dates:**

Extra Credit Assignment: Monday, August 14 (10:00 AM)

Optional Essay Revision: Wednesday, August 16 (11:59 PM)

Final Exam: Wednesday, August 16 (time TBD)