

Professor Thompson
AFR 372C, AMS 321, E 376M, T&D 357T, WGS 340
Flags: Cultural Diversity & Writing

Rethinking Blackness

Course Description

Cultural critic Wahneema Lubiano argues that “postmodernism offers a site for African American cultural critics and producers to utilize a discursive space that foregrounds the possibility of rethinking history, political positionality in the cultural domain, the relationship between cultural politics and subjectivity, and the politics of narrative aesthetics.” Other scholars such as Cornel West conclude that the black experience in America is fundamentally absurd. Henry Louis Gates Jr. suggests that, “only a black person alienated from black language-use could fail to understand that we have been deconstructing white people's languages and discourses since that dreadful day in 1619 when we were marched off the boat in Virginia. Derrida did not invent deconstruction, we did!” If postmodernism is characterized by a de-centered human subjectivity then the black condition in the Americas is fundamentally postmodern.

Although many writers render the outsider status of African Americans with somberness this course examines texts that re-imagine black subjectivity beyond traditional narratives of suffering and oppression. The authors that we will read present topics sacred to many African Americans such as the Civil Rights movement, slavery, family and blackness, but do so outside traditional African American literary paradigms. We will consider how their treatment of such sensitive issues expands notions of black identity and re-writes assumptions about the African American experience. During the term we will explore texts—some non-canonical others more familiar—from the late 20th century to the present. Class participants will become acquainted with artists working in a variety of genres such as literary satire, rock musical, faux documentary and speculative fiction.

Required Texts

1. Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (1979)
2. Katori Hall, *The Mountaintop* (2011)
3. Andrea Lee, *Sarah Phillips* (1984)
4. Robert O'Hara, *Insurrection: Holding History* (1999)
5. Stew, *Passing Strange* (2008)
6. Lisa B. Thompson, *Single Black Female* (2012)
7. Baratunde Thurston, *How to Be Black* (2012)
8. Touré, *Whose Afraid of Post Blackness?* (2011)

Suggested Texts

Diana Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual*, 6th edition

All books can be purchased at the university bookstore. Assigned articles designated by an * can be located on the course's Blackboard page.

Course Requirements & Policies

Essays

This course carries the Writing Flag. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise one or more assignments, and you may be asked to read and discuss your peers' work. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your written work. Writing Flag classes meet the Core Communications objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, and Personal Responsibility, established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Each student must write two essays during the term. The first paper topic will be based on a prompt distributed in class. For the final essay you will conduct individual research on a text or body of work (book, photography collection, play, film, music, sport, paintings etc.) that represent blackness reimagined. Both essays should demonstrate your critical reading, thinking and writing skills and showcase your analytical engagement with theories of postmodernist black identity in African American literature, art, film and culture. Please note that written assignments must be turned in by the BEGINNING of class. Late papers will be penalized. It is essential that you carefully proofread your essays for clarity and grammatical errors. All work must be typed in a 12-point academic font, doubled-spaced and have one-inch margins as well as appropriate citations. It is incumbent upon you to keep a personal copy of all work that you submit until final grades are posted.

Midterm Examination

There will be an exam featuring multiple-choice, fill-in and short answer questions that covers the major themes, concepts, characters and theories discussed in the course up to the midterm point. The exam will not only test whether you are completing the assigned reading, but also assess your comprehension of the lecture and class discussions.

Group Presentation

Pre-determined groups will provide author introductions for each new book. Groups are responsible for researching the writer and then creating and delivering a presentation. Groups can focus as broadly or narrowly as they see fit. In order to disseminate the information groups can provide a handout, use poster boards, shoot a video and/or create a PowerPoint presentation or Prezi. I suggest that you be as creative as possible in order to effectively engage your audience. You must all work together and insure that the workload is adequately divided among every student. The group must submit a typed outline (1-2 pages) on the day of the presentation. Time limit: 5 minutes.

Individual Presentation

During the last week of course students will share their final projects. The individual presentation will give you an opportunity to showcase both your creative and intellectual skills. Please note that on the day of your presentation you must submit the typed (2+ page) "script" or outline of your presentation.

Time limit: 5 minutes.

I strongly advise you to consult with me as you develop your individual and group presentations. Make sure that you rehearse every aspect of your presentation because you will be graded on a variety of criteria such as: content, persuasiveness, organization, presentation of evidence, validity of argument, contact with the audience, vocal punctuation and expressiveness, oral language style, appropriate volume and pace of speech, poise, comfort, and eye contact. It is also important that your presentations stay within the time limit so that everyone has an opportunity to participate.

On a final note, the presentations are not just an academic exercise for the presenters. I expect audience members to act as engaged listeners. In fact, your written feedback on each presentation will be incorporated into the grades so your active participation is not just encouraged, but required.

Participation

Complete all reading before class and participate fully in discussions and exercises (presentations, quizzes, performances and in-class group projects). Remember to bring texts to class because you may be called upon to read an excerpt, perform a scene or analyze a passage. Each student is expected to speak during EVERY class. Many of the texts are quite complicated so I strongly suggest that you take reading notes since our discussions rely on textual observations. Prompt and regular attendance is expected. Tardiness is disrespectful to me and to your classmates. Please be advised that if you miss multiple classes and/or are consistently late your grade will suffer.

Notice:

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>

Final grades will be calculated as follows:

Essay One (5-7 pages)	15%
Midterm Exam	25%
Group Presentation	10%
Presentation	10%
Essay Two (7-10 pages)	30%
Participation	10%

Course Schedule

Important Dates

Friday, September 20

Due: Essay 1 Draft

Friday, September 27

Due: Essay 1

Friday, October 4

Midterm Examination

Friday, November 8

Due: Final Essay/Project Proposal

Monday, November 18

Due: Draft of Essay 2

Friday, November 29

Thanksgiving Holiday!

Monday, December 2

Presentations

Wednesday, December 4

Presentations

Friday, December 6

Presentations

Due: Essay 2