

ENG 1131 Writing Through Media: Afrofuturism

Section: 7489

Time: MWF Period 7
Screening: R E1-E3

Room: Class: Norman Hall Addition G512
Screening: WEIL 408E

Instructor: Derrick King

Email: Dk987@ufl.edu

Office: Turlington 4409

Office Hours: Monday, period 8 and by appointment.

Course Description:

Afrofuturism proposes that visions of the future and the media technologies that enable them are always profoundly marked by the histories of colonialism and slavery as well as present-day racial inequalities and exclusions. In response to these histories and experiences, a diverse group of black artists in Africa as well as the African diaspora in the Caribbean and the Americas have employed different forms of media technologies to articulate alternative visions of the future. Therefore, as Afrofuturist scholar Lisa Yaszek puts it, Afrofuturism is not reducible to any one genre or medium, but is instead “an aesthetic mode that encompasses a diverse range of artists working in different genres and media who are united by their shared interest in projecting black futures derived from Afrodiasporic experiences.” This course will consider texts in a wide variety of mediums, including films such as *Sankofa*, *Brother From Another Planet*, and *Born in Flames*, television episodes of *Star Trek* and *The X-Files*, music videos by Janelle Monáe and Kanye West, music by Parliament-Funkadelic and Cybotron, and fiction by Octavia Butler and Nalo Hopkinson.

Students in this course will investigate the way in which race has been constructed through various kinds of media texts and how these constructions have been transformed or remixed by artists working in the Afrofuturist tradition. For instance, Paul D. Miller/DJ Spooky’s film project *Rebirth of Nation* (2007) transforms our understanding of film history by recutting and rescoring D.W. Griffith’s hugely influential but undeniably racist 1915 film *Birth of a Nation*. While *Birth of a Nation* is a white supremacist film that was partially responsible for the growth of the Ku-Klux-Klan in the early 20th century, *Rebirth of a Nation* demonstrates how media texts can also be used to critique racist ideology and enable visions of alternate futures.

The course is divided into three major sections (with the first week of class serving as a general introduction to Afrofuturist concepts). The first section will explore how technology can be used to rewrite or “reprogram” historical narratives in order to unlock visions of a better future. Students will be asked to consider the complex relationships between race, history, and technology. The second section explores some of the ways in which science fiction texts have represented race, with a particular focus on the use of allegories involving extraterrestrials. We

will consider both the possibilities and the limitations of such allegorical representations. The final section of the course will then examine Afrofuturist visions of the future in literature, television, music and film. We will explore both dystopian and Utopian visions of the future (or future worlds that are either worse or better than our present one) and situate these within the tradition of both Afrofuturist thought and science fiction more generally.

This course is also designed to provide 6000 words toward the Writing Requirement. A major focus of the course will be writing instruction: students will learn how to organize their thoughts, make clear arguments, and use evidence drawn from many different kinds of media texts to demonstrate these arguments.

Required Texts:

Octavia Butler, *Lilith's Brood* (Grand Central Publishing, 2000) ISBN: 0446676101

Adilifu Nama, *Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction Film* (University of Texas Press, 2008) ISBN: 0292717458

The majority of readings will be made available to you on Course Reserves through the Smathers Library website: <https://ares.uflib.ufl.edu/ares/> or on our course Saki site under the resources tab.

Assignments (all due dates listed under course schedule):

Points

200 4 Rhetorical Analyses (50 points each)

100 10 Reading Quizzes (10 points each)

150 Weekly Message Board Postings (10 points each)

50 In-Class Presentation of an Afrofuturist Text

50 Proposal for Final Research Paper

100 Annotated Bibliography for Final Research Paper

350 Final Research Paper

1000 Total Points Possible

4 Rhetorical Analyses (500 Words Each)

The purpose of these assignments is for you to practice analyzing how media texts produce meaning through a combination of visual, written, and auditory elements. An assignment sheet will be distributed to you. See the Course Schedule below for due dates and subjects.

10 Unannounced Reading Quizzes

I will periodically begin class with a short reading quiz to make sure you did the reading. These quizzes will be randomly distributed throughout the semester, so you should always be prepared!

Weekly Message Board Postings (200 words each)

You are required to post weekly on our course message board, which can be found on our course Saki site. I will also frequently use our message board to share links to online content relevant to the course for you to consider. I want your weekly postings to be critical responses to course material. You may use these postings to raise questions, evaluate your reactions to the texts, or think through potential interpretive arguments. Finally, I want your posts to be interactive. There are therefore two components to each week's posting: one 100-word posting in which you introduce a question, idea, or argument, and at least two 50-word responses to your classmate's posts. We will frequently refer to postings during class discussion, so you should always keep up with the message board.

In-Class Presentation of an Afrofuturist Text

During the eighth week of class, I will ask each student to find and present on an Afrofuturist text of their choice (literature, film, television, music, ect.). These presentations are informal; the goal is for you to deepen your understanding of Afrofuturism and introduce your classmates to a text you have encountered outside of the course. These texts will then be collected on a course blog.

Proposal for Final Essay- 250 words

Annotated Bibliography- 1000 words

Final Research Paper- 3000 words

The course will culminate with a 3000-word formal research essay on a topic related to Afrofuturism. I will distribute an assignment sheet after spring break, but you should begin thinking about your topic during the first half of the semester. In addition to the research paper itself, I require that you turn in a proposal and an annotated bibliography for some of your potential sources. Due dates are listed below.

Course Schedule (Tentative)

Note: you will be expected to have read all the texts listed on each day prior to that day's discussion.

Week 1

W 1/7 Introduction; in class activity: watch music videos by Cybotron ("Clear"), Deltron 3030 ("Virus"), and Nicolette ("No Government")

R 1/8 Screening: *The Last Angel of History* (John Akomfrah, 1996); music videos by Outkast ("ATliens"), Missy Elliot ("The Rain"), Janelle Monáe ("Many Moons," "Tightrope," "Prime Time," "Q.U.E.E.N.," and

“Dance Apocalyptic”), Kanye West (“Love Lockdown”), M.I.A. (“Bring the Noise,” “Born Free,” and “Paper Planes”), Thee Satisfaction (“Queens”), and Ebony Bones (“Bread and Circus”)

F 1/9 Lisa Yaszek, “Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future” (Saki, under “resources”)

Week 2

M 1/12 Kodwo Eshun, “Further Considerations on Afrofuturism” (Course Reserves)

W 1/14 Alondra Nelson, Introduction to special issue of *Social Text* on Afrofuturism (Course Reserves)

I. Mixtapes, Turntables, and Video: Remixing and Reprogramming History with Technology

R 1/15 Screening: *The Birth of a Nation* (selected scenes only) (D.W. Griffith, 1915); *Rebirth of a Nation* (Paul D. Miller aka D.J. Spooky, 2007)

F 1/16 Jason Apple, “Re-mixed Histories: Cinematic Narrative, Found Footage, and Hip-Hop Historiography in DJ Spooky's ‘Rebirth of a Nation’” (Course Reserves)

Week 3

M 1/19 No Class: MLK Day

W 1/21 Anna Everett, “The Revolution Will Be Digitized” (Course Reserves) **Due: Rhetorical Analysis 1 on**

Rebirth of a Nation

R 1/22 Screening: *The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975* (Göran Olsson, 2011)

F 1/23 Joy Zaccaria, Review of *The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975* in *Digital Video* (Course Reserves)

Week 4

M 1/26 Alicia Headlam Hines, Alondra Nelson, and Thuy N. Tu, Introduction to *Technicolor: Race, Technology, and Everyday Life* (Course Reserves)

W 1/28 José Esteban Muñoz, “LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Radical Black Traditions, and Queer Futurity” (Course Reserves)

R 1/29 Screening: *The Watermelon Woman* (Cheryl Dunye, 1996); *Looking For Langston* (Isaac Julien 1989)

F 1/30 Thelma Wills Foote, “Hoax of the Lost Ancestor in Cheryl Dunye’s *The Watermelon Woman*” (Course Reserves)

Week 5

M 2/2 Tegan Bristow, “We want the funk: What is Afrofuturism to the situation of digital arts in Africa?” (Course Reserves)

W 2/4 Gilroy, “Living Memory: A Meeting with Toni Morrison” (Course Reserves)

R 2/5 Screening: *Sankofa* (Haile Gerima, 1993)

F 2/6 Sylvie Kandé and Joe Karaganis, “Look Homeward, Angel: Maroons and Mulattos in Haile Gerima's *Sankofa*” (Course Reserves)

II. Alien Allegories: The Afrodiasporic Experience as Science Fiction

Week 6

M 2/9 Adilifu Nama, *Black Space* Introduction and Chapter 1 (1-41); Listen to Dr. Octagon, “Earth People” and Dignable Planets, “It’s Good to be Here” (Youtube links on Saki)

W 2/11 Adilifu Nama, *Black Space* Chapter 2 (42-69)

R 2/12 Screening: *Brother From Another Planet* (John Sayles, 1984); *The X-Files*: “The Unnatural” (1999)

F 2/13 Ramzi Fawaz, “Space, that Bottomless Pit: Planetary Exile and Metaphors of Belonging in American Afrofuturist Cinema” (Course Reserves)

Week 7

M 2/16 Adilifu Nama, *Black Space* Chapters 3-4 (70-122)

W 2/18 Derrick Bell, “The Space Traders” (Course Reserves) **Due: Rhetorical Analysis 2 on “The Unnatural”**

R 2/19 Screening: *Alien Nation* (Graham Baker, 1988); *Cosmic Slop: “The Space Traders”* (1994)

F 2/20 Adilifu Nama, *Black Space* Chapter 5 (123-147)

Week 8

M 2/23 **Presentations**

W 2/25 **Presentations**

R 2/26 Screening: *District 9* (Neill Blomkamp, 2009)

F 2/27 Joshua Clover, “Allegory Bomb” (Course Reserves)

M 3/2- F 3/6 No Class: Spring Break

III. Black to the Future: Utopia, Dystopia, and the Afrofuturist Imagination

Week 9

M 3/9 Mark Dery, “Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose” (Course Reserves); Listen to Blue Scholars, “John DeLorean” (Youtube link on Saki)

W 3/11 Mark Bould, “Come Alive by Saying No: An Introduction to Black Power SF” (Course Reserves)

R 3/12 Screening: *Star Trek: "Plato's Stepchildren"* (1968); *Star Trek Deep Space 9: “Far Beyond the Stars”* (1998)

F 3/13 Matthew Goldmark, “Futures on Demand” (Course Reserves)

Week 10

M 3/16 Amy Nathan Wright, “Exploring the Funkadelic Aesthetic: Intertextuality and Cosmic Philosophizing in Funkadelic's Album Covers and Liner Notes” (Course Reserves); Listen to Funkadelic, “One Nation Under a Groove” and Parliament, “Mothership Connection (Star Child)” (Youtube links on Saki)

W 3/18 Nathan Ragain, "A Reconcepted AM: Language, Nature and Collectivity in Sun Ra and Henry Dumas"
(Course Reserves)

R 3/19 Screening: *Space is the Place* (John Coney, 1974)

F 3/20 Adilifu Nama, *Black Space* Chapter 6 (148-172) Due: Rhetorical Analysis 3 on Funkadelic, "One Nation Under a Groove" and Parliament, "Mothership Connection (Star Child)"

Week 11

M 3/23 Nalo Hopkinson, "A Habit of Waste" (Course Reserves)

W 3/25 Due: Proposal for Final Essay

R 3/26 Screening: *Born in Flames* (Lizzie Borden, 1983); *Fresh Kill* (Shu Lea Cheang, 1994)

F 3/27 June Oxford and Lucy Winer, "Born in Flames: Fiery Factions and Feminism" (Course Reserves)

Week 12

M 3/30 Octavia Butler, *Dawn* (Book I of *Lilith's Brood*) Part 1 (5-44) Due: Rhetorical Analysis 4 on Hopkinson, "A Habit of Waste"

W 4/1 Octavia Butler, *Dawn* (Book I of *Lilith's Brood*) Part 2 (47-112)

R 4/2 Screening: *Welcome II the Terrordome* (Ngozi Onwurah, 1995); *Pumzi* (Wanuri Kahiu 2009)

F 4/3 Julian Stringer, "On the Rise: the Work of Ngozi Onwurah" (Course Reserves)

Week 13

M 4/6 Octavia Butler, *Dawn* (Book I of *Lilith's Brood*) Part 3 (116-196)

W 4/8 Octavia Butler, *Dawn* (Book I of *Lilith's Brood*) Part 4 (199-248)

R 4/9 Screening: *Children of Men* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2006)

F 4/10 Kirk Boyle, "Children of Men and I Am Legend: The Disaster-Capitalism Complex Hits Hollywood"

Week 14

M 4/13 **Due: Annotated Bibliography for Final Essay**

W 4/15 Marlo David, “Afrofuturism and Post-Soul Possibility in Black Popular Music” (Course Reserves)

R 4/16 Screening: *High Tech Soul: The Creation of Techno Music* (Gary Bredow, 2006); In-class listening to music by Derrick May, Cybotron, Model 500, Inner City, Mia Hesterly, and Drexycia.

F 4/17 Sean Albiez, “Post-Soul Futurama: African American Cultural Politics and Early Detroit Techno” (Course Reserves)

Week 15

M 4/20 **Peer Review for Final Essay**

W 4/22 **Due: Final Essay**

Grading and Course Policies

Grading Scale

A	4.0	93-100	930-1000	C	2.0	73-76	730-769
A-	3.67	90-92	900-929	C-	1.67	70-72	700-729
B+	3.33	87-89	870-899	D+	1.33	67-69	670-699
B	3.0	83-86	830-869	D	1.0	63-66	630-669
B-	2.67	80-82	800-829	D-	0.67	60-62	600-629
C+	2.33	77-79	770-799	E	0.00	0-59	0-599

Assessment Rubric

	SATISFACTORY (Y)	UNSATISFACTORY (N)
CONTENT	Papers exhibit evidence of ideas that respond to the topic with complexity, critically evaluating and synthesizing	Papers either include a central idea(s) that is unclear or off- topic or provide only minimal or

	sources, and provide an adequate discussion with basic understanding of sources.	inadequate discussion of ideas. Papers may also lack sufficient or appropriate sources.
ORGANIZATION AND COHERENCE	Documents and paragraphs exhibit identifiable structure for topics, including a clear thesis statement and topic sentences.	Documents and paragraphs lack clearly identifiable organization, may lack any coherent sense of logic in associating and organizing ideas, and may also lack transitions and coherence to guide the reader.
ARGUMENT AND SUPPORT	Documents use persuasive and confident presentation of ideas, strongly supported with evidence. At the weak end of the satisfactory range, documents may provide only generalized discussion of ideas or may provide adequate discussion but rely on weak support for arguments.	Documents make only weak generalizations, providing little or no support, as in summaries or narratives that fail to provide critical analysis.
STYLE	Documents use a writing style with word choice appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline. Sentences should display complexity and logical structure.	Documents rely on word usage that is inappropriate for the context, genre, or discipline. Sentences may be overly long or short with awkward construction. Documents may also use words incorrectly.
MECHANICS	Papers will feature correct or error-free presentation of ideas. At the weak end of the satisfactory range, papers may contain a few spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors that remain unobtrusive and do not obscure the paper's argument or points.	Papers contain so many mechanical or grammatical errors that they impede the reader's understanding or severely undermine the writer's credibility.

Absence and Tardy policies

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found in the online catalog at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Attendance is required. If a student misses more than **five** classes during the semester, his or her final grade will drop one half letter grade (50 points) for each additional absence. This policy includes screening periods. I exempt from this policy only those absences involving university-sponsored events, such as athletics and band, and religious holidays. Absences related to

university-sponsored events must be discussed with the instructor prior to the date that will be missed.

Please Note: if students are absent, it is their responsibility to make themselves aware of all due dates. If absent due to a scheduled event, students are still responsible for turning assignments in on time.

Tardiness: If students enters class after roll has been called, they are late, which disrupts the entire class. Two instances of tardiness count as one absence.

Final Grade Appeals

Students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Department of English Program Assistant. Grade appeals may result in higher, lower, or unchanged final grade.

Classroom Behavior

I will not tolerate any rude, coarse, or offensive remarks based upon race, gender, ability, or sexual identity. In addition, please keep in mind that students come from diverse cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. Many of the texts we will discuss and write about engage controversial topics and opinions. Diversified student backgrounds combined with provocative texts require that you demonstrate respect for ideas that may differ from your own. Disrespectful behavior will result in dismissal, and accordingly absence, from the class.

In-Class Work

Assignments are due at the beginning of class at the assigned deadline. Late papers will not be accepted. Failure of technology is not an excuse. If you are going to be absent on a date an assignment is due, you need to make arrangements to turn it in early.

Students must be present for all in-class activities to receive credit for them.

Students with Disabilities

The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

Statement on Harassment

UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://www.hr.ufl.edu/eo/sexharassment.htm>

Statement on Academic Honesty

All students must abide by the Student Honor Code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/student-honor-code.aspx>

Statement of Composition (C) and Humanities and Writing Credit

This course can satisfy the General Education requirement for Composition or Humanities. For more information, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/general-education-requirement.aspx>

This course can provide 6000 words toward fulfillment of the UF requirement for writing.

For more information, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/writing-and-math-requirement.aspx>

Statement of Online Course Evaluation Process

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>