

LTEN 185/ETHN 174
Themes in African-American Literature:
Afrofuturism

Professor Babak Rahimi
Program for the Study of Religion
Department of Literature
Program for the Study of Religion
UCSD
brahimi@ucsd.edu

2021
Summer I

Personal Meeting ID 718 560 6274
Office Hours:
Tuesdays 2:00pm-4:00pm
Wednesdays 2:00pm-3:00pm

Description of the Course

Afrofuturism is a complex set of cultural aesthetic, literary and philosophical currents that explore intersections of past and future African diasporas with scientific and technological possibilities. This course examines the futurist currents in 20th/21st century African American literature, although viewed in the context of American colonial and republican history. We study how black authors have employed speculative genre so to reinvent the African American histories and futures. We also examine how futurism marks a new subjectivity that troubles essentialized discourses and practices of racial identity while offering alternative black futurity.

Objectives

The basic goals of the course are as follow:

1. To understand the complex and changing histories of African-American communities and cultural practices.

2. To gain a through interdisciplinary study and familiarity with basic theoretical debates on literature and especially African-American literature in the context of American history.
3. To Understand the broad relationship between literature, race and politics.
4. To improve one's writing and critical skills.

Prerequisites

Since this is an upper-division course, you are required to have taken lower-division course at least one humanity course.

Assignments and grades:

Film or Media Reviews	60%
Research paper	40%

Film and Media Reviews

Film Reviews: Each week you are expected to write a 200 to 300 words reflective paper on a newspaper article, media or film that relates to Afrofuturism. You choose a film or media content for review with a focus on Afrofuturism. Film and Media reviews should show your knowledge on the chosen media content or film and also express a depth of analytical thought in relation with the broader subject under study (African-American cultures). Please submit your paper to the following email address: religion101ucsd@gmail.com. Due Sunday nights (11:59pm) each week, except the final week. PLEASE SEND YOUR PAPERS IN THE EMAIL MESSAGE. Please no words or PDFs.

Research Paper (Final):

A research paper on a key theme, text, historical event, or figure in the history and social life of Afrofuturism or any other subject related to African-American cultures. Such themes may include a range of topics, but they should be specific and pertinent to the course subject. You should show independent research by using academic articles, books and peer-reviewed journals. You may also use audio-visual sources. Your research paper should have a title and bibliography. The pages should be numbered. Your research should be analytical and clearly present a thesis statement in the first paragraph of the paper. A 2000-word research paper (excluding bibliography) is due on **Friday July 30th at 11:59pm**. Please email your paper to: religion101ucsd@gmail.com. PLEASE SEND YOUR PAPERS IN **WORD ONLY** (no PDF). Also copy and paste your paper in the email box.

Class Policy

Late papers:

Late papers will be penalized a half letter grade for each day that they are late. Please turn in your papers via email.

● *Plagiarism*

A major part of your course assignments involves writing based on your assigned reading. So, make sure to cite your sources, either quoted directly or paraphrased, so to avoid plagiarism. See me if you have any questions regarding what constitutes plagiarism.

● *Assistance*

In case of disability that may require accommodation, please see me on the first day of class.

Readings

It is important for each student to know that this upper-division course requires sizable weekly reading. You will be expected to understand the readings and create thesis statements and make support of your claims with evidence in your writings. We will also engage in creative writings, so expect to read works of fictions.

Required Text

1. Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*
2. Nnedi Okorafor, *Binti*
3. Octavia E. Butler, *Kindred*
4. Harriet Jacobs, *Life of a Slave Girl*
5. Ytashal L. Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi* (Chicago, Illinois: Chicago Review Press, 2013)

Lectures

Lectures will be **asynchronous** and posted on Canvas (Media Gallery) in the beginning of the week. Make sure to listen and watch them for contextual understanding of the assigned readings.

Schedule of Classes

LTEN 185/LTEN 174 (4 Units)

Summer 1 2021

June 28 2021 – July 30

Week 1, June 28-July 2

- Introduction to the course
- What is African-American Literature?
- The legacy of slavery

Readings:

1. Mark Dery, "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose (FLAME WARS: THE DISCOURSE OF CYBERCULTURE, ed. Mark Dery [Duke University Press, 1994].)
(Canvas: File)
 2. Harriet Jacobs, *Life of a Slave Girl*
- Weekly Review: due on Sunday **July 4** at 11:59pm
religion101ucsd@gmail.com

Week 2, July 5-9

- "The New Negro"
- What is Afrofuturism?

Readings:

1. Octavia E. Butler, *Kindred*
2. Ytashal L. Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi*, 1-38.

- Weekly Review: due on Sunday **July 11** at 11:59pm
religion101ucsd@gmail.com.

Week 3, July 12-16

- Afrofuturism and post-humanism

Readings:

1. Ytashal L. Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi*, 39-50.
2. Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*

- Weekly Review: due on Sunday **July 18** at 11:59pm
religion101ucsd@gmail.com.

Week 4, July 19-23

- Afrofuturism and the anthropocene

Readings:

- 1) Ytashal L. Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi*, 51-128.
- 2) Nnedi Okorafor, *Binti*

- Weekly Review: due on Sunday 26 at 11:59pm
religion101ucsd@gmail.com

Week 5, July 26-30

- Afrofuturism, memory and the question of “American literature”

Readings:

1. Ytashal L. Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi*, 129-194.

Final Exam due: Friday July 30st at 11:59 religion101ucsd@gmail.com