

AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Black Planets: Afrofuturism and Black Speculative Fiction



Dr. Shannon Finck

OFFICE HOURS:
TUESDAYS, 2-5 PM &
THURSDAYS BY
APPOINTMENT

OFFICE LOCATION:
TLC 1114 D

EMAIL:
SFINCK@WESTGA.EDU

Course Description

Traditional introductions to African American Literature emphasize realism and take shape around the past. This course looks toward black futures. Specifically, we will examine the ways that black artists have employed elements of the speculative genres (sci-fi, fantasy, utopianism, etc.) to re-envision African American history, reframe race relations in the present, and reinvigorate social justice movements. The works we will study reflect black experience across the Americas, diversifying the literary canon, and presenting alternative visions of the futures of blackness.

Our course takes place fully online, asynchronously, but it is *not self-paced*. You will have reading and writing assignments due weekly as well as periodic due dates for major assignments. Synchronous meetings will be offered (optional, but recommended), as will one-on-one appointments in person or via Blackboard Collaborate.

Course Objectives

To examine the different ways that the various speculative worlds created by the authors and artists we encounter this semester reimagine racial and ethnic differences, as well as differences of gender, sexuality, class, and nationality, and to think about how these reimaginings reflect upon the authors' historical moments and our own.

To define together what speculative culture is, what it means to speculate, and to think about why, given the history of black peoples in the Americas, these authors and artists choose the speculative genres to express themselves.

To focus on a particular history of black speculative culture for which there is growing creative, scholarly, and popular interest.

To develop close reading skills, engaging closely with the literary and extra-literary texts we examine this semester, and using these readings as the basis for making original arguments about some of the above themes/issues.

To improve upon our critical writing skills, the class will require a significant amount of writing, both in and out of class. Some will be higher stakes (graded), some will be lower stakes, but we will proceed from the assumption that writing is a practice, and we will be practicing this skill consistently.

To develop the ability to discuss the importance of literature in our lived experience, environments, and relationships to history via discussion.

Required Texts

- Butler, Octavia. *Dawn*. Warner Aspect, 1997. (978-0446603775)
- Jemisin, N.K. *The Fifth Season*. Orbit, 2015. (978-0316229296)
- Solomon, Rivers. *The Deep*. Gallery/Saga, 2020. (978-1534439870)

Recommended: Womack, Ytasha. *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy*. Lawrence Hill, 2013. (978-1613747964)

All other readings, film, and audio can be found in Course Den, either in PDF format or as links to online content.

I have also created a Spotify playlist to supplement several of our discussions. You can find that playlist here:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2KzLKDrBQ8mLGBqyU5KeU6?si=JrDYcDe1T2aeuligepmPFQ>

All of the art that appears in this syllabus is by the collage artist, Kaylan Michel. You can see more of her work at lostintheisland.com.



Assignments



Quizzes (20%): At the end of each unit, I will assign a basic reading comprehension quiz covering the texts and major concepts from the unit.

Weekly Discussions (20%): Discussions are reserved for your impressions, observations, questions, frustrations, and insights about the material we read. I will generally either post an open-ended prompt for these or solicit your ideas to guide the conversation. These are graded for completion.

Midterm Essay (20%): For this argumentative paper, you will pick one of the texts we have read during the first half of this semester, select a prompt, and make an argument for a specific interpretation of that text, supporting it with evidence and reasoning.

Final Essay (20%): For your final paper, you will pick one of the texts we have read during the second half of the semester, select a prompt, and make an argument for a specific interpretation of that text, supporting it with evidence and reasoning.

Engagement (20%): This is a discussion-based course, so checking in, completing activities, and contributing your share in class every week is a major part of your grade. Engagement is evaluated based on your completion of the assigned work, evidence of your progress through the reading, and the quality and quantity of your comments in discussions. This grade can be boosted by attending periodic synchronous sessions and/or individual meetings with me.

See forthcoming assignment sheets for detailed description, requirements, and rubrics for the midterm and final essays.

All written work for this class must be in MLA format: Times New Roman 12-pt font, double-spaced, with 1" margins.

Grading Scale:

A+= 98 A=95 A-=92 | B+= 88 B=85 B-=82
C+= 78 C=75 C-=72 | D+= 68 D=65 D-=62
F= No credit



Class Schedule



Week/Unit	Texts	Assignments
1 Jan. 11-17	<p>“The Comet,” W.E.B. Du Bois</p> <p>“The End of White Supremacy, An American Romance,” Saidiya Hartman</p>	Discussion #1
2 Jan. 18-24	<p>“Racism and Science Fiction,” Samuel Delany</p> <p>“How Long ‘til Black Future Month,” N.K. Jemisin (Yes, watch the videos! We’ll talk about Janelle Monáe, too.)</p>	Discussion #2

Week/Unit	Texts	Assignments
3 Jan. 25-31	Excerpt from <i>Black No More</i> , George S. Schuyler “A Habit of Waste,” Nalo Hopkinson	Discussion #3
4 Feb. 1-7	“Why Blacks Should Read (and Write) Science Fiction,” Charles R. Saunders <i>Lovecraft Country</i> , Episode 1	Discussion #4
5 Feb. 8-14	“Rhythm Travel,” Amiri Baraka <i>Space is the Place</i> , film and music by Sun Ra (This is a great week to check out the mixtape on Spotify if you haven’t already.)	Unit 1 Quiz Optional Synchronous Meeting
6 Feb. 15-21	“The Monophobic Response,” Octavia Butler <i>Dawn</i> , pp. 1-82 (through Chp. 7 of Pt. II)	Discussion #5
7 Feb. 22-28	<i>Dawn</i> , pp. 82-165 (through Chp. 7 of Pt. III)	Discussion #6
8 March 1-7	<i>Dawn</i> , pp. 165-end	Midterm Essay due by midnight, March 7th
9 March 8-14	“Spider the Artist,” Nnedi Okorafor “Black Friday,” Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah Scene from <i>Black Panther</i>	Unit 2 Quiz Optional Synchronous Meeting
10 March 15-21	Spring Break – No Assignments	Spring Break – No Assignments

Week/Unit	Texts	Assignments
11 March 22-28	“The African Cosmos for Modern Mermaids (Mermen),” Ytasha Womack <i>The Deep</i> , Chps. 1-4	Discussion #7
12 March 29-April 4	<i>The Deep</i> , Chps. 5-end	Discussion #8
13 April 5-11	<i>The Fifth Season</i> , Chps. 1-8	Discussion #9
14 April 12-18	<i>The Fifth Season</i> , Chps. 9-16	Discussion #10
15 April 19-25	<i>The Fifth Season</i> , Chp. 17-end	Unit 3 Quiz Optional Synchronous Meeting
16 April 26-May 2	No reading assignment	Final Essay due by midnight, May 5th

Institutional Policies & Academic Support

Accessibility Services: Students with a documented disability may work with UWG Accessibility Services to receive essential services specific to their disability. All entitlements to accommodations are based on documentation and USG Board of Regents standards. If a student needs course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability or chronic illness, or if they need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, the student should notify their instructor in writing and provide a copy of their Student Accommodations Report (SAR), which is available only from Accessibility Services. Faculty cannot offer accommodations without timely receipt of the SAR; further, no retroactive accommodations will be given. For more information, please contact Accessibility Services.

Center for Academic Success: The Center for Academic Success provides services, programs, and opportunities to help all undergraduate students succeed academically. For more information, contact them: 678-839-6280 or cas@westga.edu.

University Writing Center: The University Writing Center assists students with all areas of the writing process. For more information, contact them: 678-839-6513 or writing@westga.edu.

Support for Online Courses: UWG takes students' privacy concerns seriously. Technology-enhanced and partially and fully online courses use sites and entities beyond UWG and students have the right to know the privacy policies of these entities. For more information on privacy and accessibility for the most commonly used sites, as well as technology requirements visit the UWG Online site. Students enrolled in online courses can find answers to many of their questions in the Online/Off-Campus Student Guide. If a student is experiencing distress and needs help, please see the resources available at the UWG Cares site. Online counseling is also available for online students.

Honor Code: At the University of West Georgia, we believe that academic and personal integrity are based upon honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Students at West Georgia assume responsibility for upholding the honor code. West Georgia students pledge to refrain from engaging in acts that do not maintain academic and personal integrity. These include, but are not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, aid of academic dishonesty, lying, bribery or threats, and stealing. The University of West Georgia maintains and monitors a confidential Academic Dishonesty Tracking System. This database collects and reports patterns of repeated student violations across all the Colleges, the Ingram Library, and the School of Nursing. Each incidence of academic dishonesty is subject to review and consideration by the instructor, and is subject to a range of academic penalties including, but not limited to, failing the assignment and/or failing the course. Student conduct sanctions range from verbal warning to suspension or expulsion depending on the magnitude of the offense and/or number of offenses. The incident becomes part of the student's conduct record at UWG. Additionally, the student is responsible for safeguarding his/her computer account. The student's account and network connection are for his/her individual use. A computer account is to be used only by the person to whom it has been issued. The student is responsible for all actions originating through his/her account or network connection. Students must not impersonate others or misrepresent or conceal their identities in electronic messages and actions. For more information on the University of West Georgia Honor Code, please see the Student Handbook.

UWG Email Policy: University of West Georgia students are provided a MyUWG e-mail account. The University considers this account to be an official means of communication between the University and the student. The purpose of the official use of the student e-mail account is to provide an effective means of communicating important university related information to UWG students in a timely manner. It is the student's responsibility to check his or her email.

Institutional Policies & Academic Support

Credit Hour Policy: The University of West Georgia grants one semester hour of credit for work equivalent to a minimum of one hour (50 minutes) of in-class or other direct faculty instruction AND two hours of student work outside of class per week for approximately fifteen weeks. For each course, the course syllabus will document the amount of in-class (or other direct faculty instruction) and out-of-class work required to earn the credit hour(s) assigned to the course. Out-of-class work will include all forms of credit-bearing activity, including but not limited to assignments, readings, observations, and musical practice. Where available, the university grants academic credit for students who verify via competency-based testing, that they have accomplished the learning outcomes associated with a course that would normally meet the requirements outlined above (e.g. AP credit, CLEP, and departmental exams).

Mental Health Support: If you or another student find that you are experiencing a mental health issue, free confidential services are available on campus in the Counseling Center. Students who have experienced sexual or domestic violence may receive confidential medical and advocacy services with the Patient Advocates in Health Services. To report a concern anonymously, please go to UWGcares.

ELL Resources: If you are a student having difficulty with English language skills, and / or U.S. culture is not your home culture, specialized resources are available to help you succeed. Please visit the E.L.L. resource page for more information.

COVID-19 Protocols: Students should be aware and plan ahead for the possibility of having to complete all courses and/or exams online or in a proctored environment. This means talking with your instructors about what minimum technical requirements (software and hardware) will be required should your class move online or a student's personal needs dictate. This also includes making plans for internet access at whatever location participation may occur. Virtual or in-person proctored exams, if your instructor should require them, may result in an additional cost to the student. Please discuss these details with your instructor or see the information provided here.

Face Coverings: Effective July 15, 2020, University System of Georgia institutions, including the University of West Georgia, will require all faculty, staff, students, and visitors to wear an appropriate face covering while inside campus facilities/buildings where six feet social distancing may not always be possible. Face covering use will be in addition to and is not a substitute for social distancing. Face coverings are not required in campus outdoor settings where social distancing requirements are met. Anyone not using a face covering when required will be asked to wear one or must leave the area. Reasonable accommodations may be made for those who are unable to wear a face covering for documented health reasons.

Student FAQs: For more information about UWG COVID-19 guidance for students visit the [COVID-19 Updates](#) page.