

LEHMAN COLLEGE OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDIES

LEH 301 (O2W) Black Popular Culture

Spring 2007 (writing intensive)
Mondays 11-1:40pm CAR 331
E-mail: gail.ryder@lehman.cuny.edu

Professor Gail M. Perry-Ryder

Office hrs: CAR 291, ext. 7715
Tues.11-12:30pm; Thurs.11-12pm
Students may drop in during hours, call, or
make an appointment.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR KEEPING THIS SYLLABUS ALL SEMESTER

Course Objectives

This course examines the evolution of African-American popular culture past and present as reflected in various modes of mass media. Examples will be drawn from film, music, television, art, and other genres to demonstrate the continuity of images of African-Americans across diverse domains. Students will explore the historical relationship of African Americans to mainstream culture through a critical examination of popular representations of peoples of African descent, and other groups of color that appear in popular mass media, through selected essays, case studies, narratives, films, and documentaries. Students will be expected (as this is a writing intensive course) to produce formal, written critiques of these forms throughout the semester. This course assumes some knowledge of African American history and some familiarity with trends in American popular culture.

Course Requirements

1. **Regular attendance and punctuality are mandatory. Class begins at 11:00am sharp and attendance is always taken at the beginning of class.** More than three absences or more than four latenesses will result in one letter grade deduction of your final grade. After 11:15, attendance will not be taken. Students arriving after this time will be marked absent.
2. **No late papers will be accepted.** Papers cannot be e-mailed. Hand in all papers on the due date directly to me, or to my department mailbox in Carman 285 **on or before the due date** if you are going to be absent from class.
3. **No make-up final exam will be given.** Speak to me about any scheduling conflicts you have as early as possible.
4. **No make up days for oral presentations will be given.**
5. **No food or snacks are permitted in class;** noise and odors from food and wrappers are distracting. Drinks are fine if consumed quietly.

Grading

Final grades are based on the average score of the following four components:

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|----|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. | 10 required critical response papers of 3-4 pages each | 100 points (10 points each) |
| | (Essay #1 due Feb 5th is required). | |
| 2. | Class participation | 100 points |
| 3. | Oral presentation | 200 points |
| 4. | Final exam | 100 points |

Required texts

1. Dines, Gail and Jean Humez, eds. *Gender, Race, and Class in Media*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003. Referred to as **“D&H”** on the syllabus weekly assignments. One copy is also on reserve in the library.
2. A packet of readings is on reserve at the library, located at the Reserves desk in a green binder. There are three copies of the binder available for student use. The library allows you **TWO HOURS** to borrow one binder. Referred to as **“RES”** on the syllabus weekly assignments.

Critical response papers

- are not separate essays for each article but ONE unified essay that equally addresses all assigned readings for the week.
- must be 3-4 pages long and **a**; summarize ALL readings, **b**; discuss, compare, and contrast their significant themes, and **c**; provide your personal analysis of the content of all articles.
- are assigned weekly unless the syllabus says otherwise; **ten** must be done out the fourteen classes.
- **cannot** be made up or handed in late, but may always be handed in early. DUE in class on the date given.
- must be based on weekly readings from the Dines and Humez text AND reserve readings.
- need to be typed, stapled, double-spaced, in black-ink, in 12-point or will not be accepted.
- should be proofread and corrected before submission.

Oral presentations

- are considered the most significant part of your class grade; worth 200 points
- **CANNOT be made up due to no-shows or coming to class unprepared**
- are done only once, without re-dos or make-ups
- must be given on the date chosen by the student unless changed at least one week in advance by student or changed by instructor
- must be between 15-20 minutes, practiced at home, and well-prepared.
- will be evaluated by the instructor and by peers
- may use visual aids and notecards **BUT** will be failed if the notes are used to read aloud.
- must do all of the following: first, select a week from the syllabus covering a topic of interest to you. Using that week's readings, select two-three key issues/problems to focus on in Black popular culture that are related to the themes being discussed that week. Do outside background research on these key issues for more information, and come prepared with these other sources beyond just what the assigned readings have given you. The assigned readings should just be fuel for your ideas. Then, in the oral presentation, you will present the viewpoints of the authors of the readings, give a critique, present your stance on the issues, and use your outside sources for support. Why are these issues important? What is the significance for popular culture? For society? You must have several supporting arguments for your positions on the issues you discuss. For example, you should be clear about how it is important to mainstreams America, and its larger implications for society at large, for African Americans, or other groups, as well as possible solutions to the issues. This must be well thought-out. Your level of preparedness will show in your presentation.

Class participation

- consists of being on-time, attending regularly, taking notes, working well in groups, being cooperative, respecting others, doing reading assignments and participating in class discussion and group activities.

Final examination

- will be a take-home exam
- will be a cumulative, objective essay
- may not be handed in later than the date given.

Week One: Jan 29 Topic: Overview/Introduction to Black Popular Culture
Week Two: Feb 5 Topic: The Business of Media THIS IS A REQUIRED FIRST ESSAY
Read from RES packet: *My Beef with Big Media*, Ted Turner
Dematerializing Our Kids, Julie Schor
American Skin, Leon Wynter
Does TV Shape Ethnic Images? S. Robert Lichter

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 12th, CUNY IS CLOSED. OUR CLASS MEETS ON FEB 15TH, A THURSDAY
Week Three: Feb 15 (Thursday) Topic: The Shaping of a “Savage Africa” Through Media Imagery
Read from RES packet: *Imagery of Eurocentrism*, Jan Nederveen Pieterse
Read from D&H text: *Ch. 25 Image-Based Culture: Advertising and Popular Culture*

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19th, CUNY IS CLOSED. OUR CLASS MEETS ON FEB 21ST, A WEDNESDAY
Week Four: Feb 21 (Wednesday) Topic: Legacies of European Expansion and Colonialism on Pop Culture
Read from RES packet: *Savages, Animals, Heathens, Races*, Jan Nederveen Pieterse
On Adventures in Africa, Jan Nederveen Pieterse
Athleticizing the Black Criminal, John Hoberman

Week Five: March 5 Topic: The Context of American Slavery
Read from RES packet: *Anthropology in American Popular Culture*, Lee Baker
Life as a Slave: A Narrative, Mary Reynolds
Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Trials of Girlhood, Harriet Jacobs

Week Six: March 12 Topic: New Images in a “Free” America
Read handout, *The Willie Lynch Letter and the Making of a Slave*, Willie Lynch
Find on the internet: *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (an interview with Nat Turner at time of arrest)
Read from D&H Ch. 43 *King Kong and the White Woman*

Week Seven: March 19 Topic: African Americans in the Arts, Literature and Theatre
Read from RES packet: *Black Poets Sing*, Countee Cullen
Stranger in the Village, James Baldwin
American Mistrust in Black and White, James V. Hatch
From Hansberry to Shange, James V. Hatch

Week Eight: March 26 Topic: Blacks in Film
Read from RES packet: *Black Beginnings: From Uncle Tom’s Cabin to Birth of a Nation*, Donald Bogle
The 1980’s: Black Superstars and the Era of Tan, Donald Bogle
Race at the Movies, Robert Entman
Read from D&H text: Ch. 8 *The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media*

SPRING BREAK APRIL 2-10

Week Nine: Apr 16 Topic: Representations in Product Advertising
Read from RES packet: *Blacks in Advertising*, Jan Nederveen Pieterse
Advertising Whiteness, Robert Entman
Read from D&H text: Ch. 29 *Advertising and People of Color*

Week Ten: Apr 23 Topic: Radio and the Advent of Network Television
Read from RES packet: *Commercial and Non-Commercial Radio*
Read from D&H text: Ch. 3 *The Meaning of Memory: family, Class, and Ethnicity in Early Network Television*

Week Eleven: Apr 30 Topic: News Media
Read from RES packet: *Smilin’ Faces Tell Lies: The News Industry*, Jannette L. Dates
Violence, Stereotypes, and African Americans in the News, Robert Entman
Read from D&H text: Ch. 37 *Lessons from Littleton: What Congress Doesn’t Want to Hear about Youth and Media*.

Week Twelve: May 7 Topic: Commercial Television and African American Imagery
Read from D&H text: *Ch. 7 Black Sitcom Portrayals*
Ch. 55 The Fox Network and the Revolution in Black Television
Ch. 60 Workplace Dramas, Ensemble Casts 1990’s Style

Week Thirteen: May 14 Topic: Black Musical Roots/Contemporary Music and Entertainment
Read from RES packet: *Puerto Rocks*, Juan Flores
Gangsta Rap and American Culture, Michael Eric Dyson
Read from D&H text: Ch. 14 *Whose am I? The Identity and Image of Women in Hip-Hop*

FINAL EXAM: take home essay due on May 22nd