

ENGL 3350-01: Afrofuturism: An Introduction to African American Literature

Dr. Kendra R. Parker | Fall 2021 | Site Synchronous | Georgia Southern University |

What *is* Afrofuturism?



"A core value of Afrofuturism...is to imagine futures directed by the survival and even the resurgence of black people and their cultures, experiences, and designs"
~DeWitt D. Kilgore

"...a way of bridging the future and the past..."
Ytasha L. Womack

We will explore African American literature from its earliest iterations to the 21st century with Afrofuturism as its guiding light to investigate how African American literature has always been forward-thinking, future-oriented, and visionary. We will consider the varied ways Black American writers have always been concerned with creating new, alternative worlds. Throughout the semester, we will grapple with different understandings of **Literary Afrofuturism** to read, situate, and interrogate Black American writers' works.

Course delivery: This course will be a site synchronous course, with students on both the Armstrong and Statesboro campuses attending class in person on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Dr. Parker will be in Statesboro on Tuesdays and Savannah on Thursdays.

Course Learning Outcomes

At the completion of this course, you should be able to

1. Recognize and analyze the literary elements in African American literary works
2. Understand, define, and give examples of particular terms related to our study of Afrofuturism and African American literature
3. Define and identify the 4 goals that surround our study of African American literature
4. Understand the conventions and genres of traditional literature of the time and observe African American authors' appropriation of these conventions/genres

5. Create a well-developed final project that (A) uses discipline-specific vocabulary and analytic techniques; (B) situates and interprets Afrofuturist literature alongside other Afrofuturist mediums

Course Reading and Assignment Schedule

This reading and assignment schedule is subject to change. In the event of a shutdown--whether weather related or health related--I will update you about the course assignments and reading schedule via Folio and via your georgiasouthern.edu email.

Unit 1: Language as Technology: Coded Language, Word Play, and 'Reading' as Afrofuturism

"Afrofuturism *is* a bit like code-breaking in that spoken and written languages can mean very different things in black America across time. Linguistic coding, or wordplay, becomes a key component that ensures black survival"
~Isiah Lavender, *Afrofuturism Rising* (2019)

"Black people have always been masters of the figurative: saying one thing to mean something quite other has been basic to black survival in oppressive Western cultures. Misreading signs could be, and indeed often was, fatal. "Reading," in this sense, was not play; it was an essential aspect of the "literacy" training of a child. This sort of metaphorical literacy, *the learning to decipher complex codes*, is just about the blackest aspect of the black tradition"
~Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "Criticism in De Jungle," p. 124¹

Week 1

Thursday, August 12, 2021

- Read: Course Syllabus
- Complete: Attendance Verification Quiz
- Complete: Flipgrid Video Introduction - **8/15 @11:59 PM on Folio**
- Complete: Perusall Syllabus Annotation - **8/15 @ 11:59 PM on Folio**

Week 2

Tuesday, August 17, 2021:

- "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,"
- "Wade in the Water"

Thursday, August 19, 2021:

- Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America" (1773)

¹ Black American Literature Forum, Winter, 1981, Vol. 15, No. 4, Black Textual Strategies, Volume 1: Theory (Winter, 1981), pp. 123-127.

- Paul Laurence Dunbar, “An Antebellum Sermon” (1895)

Unit 2 - Afrofuturism’s Hope & Freedom: Imagining Liberation

“Black people’s desire for a better life, for a better future, and for freedom itself provided the basic intuitive urge powering resistance, rebellion, and subversive writing in early America”
~Isiah Lavender, *Afrofuturism Rising* p. 29

Week 3

Tuesday, August 24, 2021

- Isiah Lavender, “Hope and Freedom Technologies” (2020)
- Virginia Hamilton, “The People Could Fly”

Thursday, August 26, 2021

- Ida B. Wells-Barnett, excerpts from *A Red Record* (1895)

Week 4

Tuesday, August 31, 2021

- David Walker’s “Preamble” and “Article II” of *The Appeal* (1829)
- Exam 1 opens at 3:30 PM EST on Folio

Thursday, September 2, 2021

There is no formal class held today.

- Exam # 1 due @ 11:59 PM EST

Unit 3: Black Technologies for a Safe(r) Future?: Race as Trickster Technology

“...trickster technology, whereby slaves pragmatically applied biopolitical knowledge to manipulate their environment to their own benefit [. . .] Simply changing one’s name represents the most basic of trickster technologies to claim a denied humanity”
~Isiah Lavender, *Afrofuturism Rising*, p. 94

Week 5

Tuesday, September 7, 2021

- Langston Hughes, “Jokes On Our White Folks” (1942)

- Hughes, “Passing for White, Passing for Colored, Passing for Negroes Plus”

Thursday, September 9, 2021

- William and Ellen Craft, **Part I** of *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* (1860)

Week 6

Tuesday, September 14, 2021

- George S. Schuyler, excerpt from *Black No More* (1931) in *Dark Matter*

Thursday, September 16, 2021

- Alice Dunbar Nelson, “The Stones of the Village” (1900-1910)

Unit 4: What is Africa to Me?

“Afrofuturist narrative places the persons and ambitions of the African diaspora at the center
of history”

~Dewitt D. Kilgore, “This Time for Africa!,” p. 59²

Week 7

Tuesday, September 21, 2021

- Langston Hughes, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” (1921)

Thursday, September 23, 2021

- Countee Cullen, “Heritage” (1922)

Week 8

Tuesday, September 28, 2021

- OutKast, “Elevators (Me and You)” (1996)
- Watch the Video. Access the video on Folio or click the URL: https://youtu.be/uqB_UVlhIPA
- Regina Bradley, “The Demo Tape Ain’t Nobody Wanna Hear” excerpt (2021, pp. 19-25)
- **Exam 2 opens at 3:30 PM EST on Folio**

Thursday, September 30, 2021

There is no class held today. Take your exam and submit your essay. Breathe. You got this.

- Exam # 2 due @ 11:59 PM EST
- Midterm Essay due @ 11:59 PM EST on Folio

² In *Literary Afrofuturism*, edited by Isiah Lavender III and Lisa Yaszek

Unit 5: Out of This World - Alien Allegories?

“Then something off to one side caught her eye and she stiffened. ‘Is that one of your white men?’ she whispered. He had told her about Europeans, explaining that in spite of their pale skins, they were neither albinos nor lepers. She had heard of such people but had not seen any until now.” ~Octavia E. Butler, *Wild Seed*, p. 42

Week 9

Tuesday, October 5, 2021

- W.E.B DuBois, “The Comet” (1906)

Thursday, October 7, 2021

- Derrick Bell, “The Space Traders” (1995)
- Midterm Essays will not be accepted after this date at 11:59 PM EST.

Week 10, Day 1

Tuesday, October 12, 2021

- Octavia E. Butler, “Amnesty” (2000)

Unit 6: The Black Arts Movement as Literary Antecedent to Mundane Afrofuturism

Mundane Afrofuturists “[reject] the adolescent desire to run away from the world and its problem--often through scientifically implausible and worn-out tropes such as faster than light travel--and that instead focuses on the future of planet Earth as it might be changed by the sciences and technologies we already have”
~Martine Syms, “The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto”

Week 10, Day 2

Thursday, October 14, 2021

- Podolsky, “Black Arts Movement” (2019)
 - In class: What is the Black Arts Movement? Its goals? How is that linked to what you’ve learned about Afrofuturism?

Week 11

Tuesday, October 19, 2021

- Martine Syms, “The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto” (2013)

- Etheridge Knight, “A Fable” (1986)

Thursday, October 21, 2021

- Jayne Cortez, “There It Is” (1982)
- Listen to Cortez; access the audio on Folio or click the URL: <https://youtu.be/G6bKgljhvRo>
- Maya Angelou, “Still I Rise” (1978)
- Audre Lorde, “A Litany for Survival” (1978)

Unit 7: Afrofuturist Feminism

“‘Visionary Fiction’ is a term we developed to distinguish science fiction that has relevance toward building new, freer worlds from the mainstream strain of science fiction, which most often reinforces dominant narratives of power. Visionary fiction encompasses all of the fantastic, with the arc always bending toward justice.”
~adrienne maree brown and Walidah Imarisha, *Octavia’s Brood*, p. 4

Week 12

Tuesday, October 26, 2021

- Claudia Tate, “Interview with Audre Lorde” (1982)

Thursday, October 28, 2021

- Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (1993), chps 1-9

Week 13

Tuesday, November 2, 2021

- Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (1993), chps 10-13

Thursday, November 4, 2021

- Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (1993), chps 14-end

Week 14

Tuesday, November 9, 2021

- Honoree Fanonne Jeffries, “Sister Lilith” (2000)

Thursday, November 11, 2021

- Nalo Hopkinson, “Greedy Choke Puppy” (2001)
- Walidah Imarisha, “Black Angel” by (2015)

Unit 8: Afrofuturism 2.0: Curating Your Starter Kit

Week 15: Preparing for your Afrofuturism 2.0 Starter Kit

Tuesday, November 16, 2021

- C. Brandon Ogbunu, "How Afrofuturism Can Help the World Mend" (2020)
- Anderson, "Afrofuturism 2.0"
- Review Final Project Assignment
- Exam # 3 Opens at 3:30 PM EST

Thursday, November 18, 2021

- Exam # 3 - Weeks 9-15

Week 16: Thanksgiving Break

Tuesday, November 23, 2021

Thursday, November 25, 2021

Week 17: Last Day of Class

Tuesday, November 30, 2021

Thursday, December 2, 2021:

- Submit Your Final Project

Week 18: Finals Week

- Thursday, December 9, 2021, at 10 AM EST : non negotiable deadline for your final project. Must be submitted on Folio.