

We Are Each Other's Harvest
Introduction to 20th and 21st Century Black Environmental Literature
Spring 2023

“When the Earth is sacred to us, our bodies can also be sacred to us.” - bell hooks

African American Studies R1B

Instructor: Ashia Ajani, ajani97@berkeley.edu

T/Th 11 am -12:30 pm | Class Room: Evans 72

Office Hours: F 10 am to noon and by appointment

Course description: this course is designed to provide students with five major sources of inspiration from Black environmental literature:

- 1) As a multifaceted art form drawing from a multicultural, intergenerational movement
- 2) As a multispecies, far reaching engagement built from traditional African diasporic modes of storytelling, including but not limited to hip hop, the Black church, oral storytelling and the Black Arts Movement
- 3) As an opportunity to incorporate the “fusion of history onto the natural world” (Wardi) into their own writing practice
- 4) As an opportunity for creative place making and community building
- 5) As an opportunity to explore the layered experiences of the personal, political, social and ecological elements that make up marginalized life

Required Materials

Ruffin, Kimberly N. *Black on Earth: African American Ecoliterary Traditions*. University of Georgia Press, 2010. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46nkgt>. ebook available on JSTOR and Project MUSE

Gumbs, Alexis Pauline. *M Archive: After the End of the World*. Duke University Press, 2018. ebook Available on Duke Press

Morrison, Toni. *Tar Baby*. Random House, 2014. ebook available on Internet Archive

Web based

Links are provided in the syllabus – there may be a couple of paywalls so your instructor will provide documents via email when necessary.

Learning Goals

This course has these main goals that will be measured in your grade:

- Understand, articulate and implement narrative elements in a variety of storytelling styles and genres
- Practice and use various critical analysis and feedback methods both in workshop and in reflection of your own writing
- Identify the major terms and terminology, rhetorical devices and structural features of Black environmental literature
- Engage in close reading of Black diasporic environmental literature
- Build a creative community and respond to current environmental phenomena, particularly the climate crisis

Attendance policy:

I understand that life happens and can affect a student's attendance. However, by signing for a class that is heavily based on workshop participation and feedback, you are agreeing to prioritize your responsibilities for being present to the best of your capacity and to respect responsibility to the group work.

If you will be absent, please let me know at least **24 hours** in advance to be marked as an excused absence. Due to the collaborative nature of this course, it is a student's responsibility to check in with their workshop group/group partners to make up any missing coursework.

Grading criteria:

10% class participation: attendance, engaging in discussion, giving feedback, participating in exercises, reading aloud, taking risks, engaging w/ other students; preparedness for workshop, preparation of bio
30% 1 page craft essays (10% for each essay)
15% environmental/climate story; midterm assignment
10% final project proposal
35% final project

Craft Essays (250 words)

Students will be required to pick 3 pieces of writing from this semester and write a craft essay analysis on those pieces of writing. A craft essay is *not* an essay summarizing what a piece has said, but instead takes one element of the writer's style and analyzes how it serves the greater text or literary canon –its purpose it to look at an element of craft and analyze it across several resources, or to take a single chapter, essay, poem or book and analyze it across several craft elements.

From the writer Matt Bell:

“Craft analysis is designed to discover the specific ways a writer creates a certain literary element, such as tone or voice. One can study the way tone affects a story, but that is a literary analysis of tone. Studying the ways punctuation and sentencings create tone is a craft analysis. Remember that you are reading these pieces as writers.”

Throughout your responses, use specific examples, relate the reading to your work in progress or other work we’ve studied, and add to the subject your own experience and aesthetics.”

Environmental/Climate Story (350-500 words)

This is a short essay on how the climate crisis, your experience with/relationship to nature or environmental history has impacted you personally, your family, your people, your homeland, or your life. This is meant to be nonfiction, but there can be exceptions with good reason.

Final Project Proposal (1 page double spaced)

This is a document that can be in bullet points, storyboard or essay form that outlines your plan for your final project. You will also be responsible for preparing a powerpoint or canva slide to share with the class during final project outline presentations. Be prepared to receive and give constructive feedback as part of your grade for this assignment.

Final Project (1000-1500 words OR a packet of three poems OR 3 pages of comic)


Your final project is a chance to flex your creative muscle: if you are interested in doing a primarily visual project, your work must be accompanied by a 500 word artist statement. Your project **MUST** include:

- A works cited section with at least TWO citations from the assigned readings in MLA or Chicago style
- A short reflection at the end describing your writing process (100-200 words, this is included in the 1500 max word limit)
- A title that speaks to the content of your assignment
- Page numbers with your last name (or chosen name if different)

Office Hours: A good majority of class time will be dedicated to workshopping and Q&A; it is often beneficial for the person asking the question as well as the rest of the participants to ask during class, as this may generate learning and discussion for all members. However, if you are more comfortable speaking outside of class or we do not get to your question/comment during class time, please contact me via email to set up an appointment.

Feedback: You are responsible for giving and receiving quality critical feedback in workshops and in the larger class to help sharpen and develop other students' writing. Your role in receiving feedback is to listen with an open mind; using these guidelines ensures that all students feel heard, respected and given comprehensive feedback without judgment or unnecessary critique.

In preparation for the first class, students must read this article: “Black Feminist Ecological Thought: A Manifesto by Dr. Chelsea M Frazier
<https://atmos.earth/black-feminist-ecological-thought-essay/>

DATE	CLASS CONTENT	PREP FOR UPCOMING CLASS
Week 1: 1/17	Syllabus overview & gallery walk Introduction to Black Environmental Literature (Jamboard activity) What is ecocriticism? writing exercise: why do we write? Reading Discussion	“Do Not Fear the Woods” by Alex Terrell https://bwr.ua.edu/44-1-feature-craft-essay-alex-terrell/ “How We Write When We Write About Life: Caribbean Nonfiction Resisting the Voyeur” by Victoria Brown https://www.essayjournal.com/victoria-brown-how-we-write-when-we-write-about-life-caribbean-nonfiction-resisting-the-voyeur.html
1/19	What is a craft essay? Citation as a Black feminist practice Reading Discussion	<i>Black On Earth</i> INTRODUCTION. Message of the Trees: Recognizing Ecological Burden and Beauty (pp. 1-24)
Week 2: 1/24	<i>BOE</i> Intro Discussion What is climate/environmental storytelling? Watch: 	Read: “The Florida Project” by Morayo Faleyimu https://grist.org/fix/climate-fiction/imagine-2200-florida-project/ Prepare bios (100 words)

		maximum)
1/26	<p>What is ecocriticism? How does it help us write?</p> <p>Bios due in class</p> <p>Reading Discussion</p>	<p><i>Black On Earth</i> CHAPTER TWO York, Harriet, and George: Writing Ecological Ancestors (pp. 56-87)</p>
Week 3: 1/31	<p>Writing well rounded characters/drawing inspiration from history and our contemporary</p> <p>Reading Discussion</p>	<p>Read: “Black Walden Came First. Thoreau, After.” https://www.nrdc.org/stories/black-walden-came-first-thoreau-after</p>
2/2	<p>Origins of environmental romanticism and the sublime: what has shifted?</p> <p>Reading Discussion</p>	<p>Read: “Nantucket Doesn’t Belong to the Preppies” by Tiya Miles https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/08/nantucket-doesnt-belong-to-the-preppies/619874/</p> <p>OPTIONAL: <i>Black On Earth</i> CHAPTER FOUR Bones and Water: Telling on Myth (pp. 111-135)</p>
Week 4: 2/7	<p>What do we want to happen in the world? What is our contribution? What are our passions? Who is our audience? Where do we want to have an impact?</p> <p>Reading Discussion</p>	<p>Read: “Elsewheres: Maroons and Fugitivity in the Great Dismal Swamp” by Janay Draughn https://www.mdcinc.org/2022/07/12/elsewheres-maroons-and-fugitivity-in-the-great-dismal-swamp/</p>
2/9	<p>Craft Essay Discussion 1</p> <p>Reading Discussion</p>	<p><i>Black On Earth</i> CHAPTER FIVE “I Got the Blues” Epistemology: Thinking a Way out of Eco-Crisis (pp. 136-157)</p> <p>Optional: Conclusion</p>
Week 5: 2/14	<p>Lyricism and musical storytelling – what is the role of the artist?</p>	<p>“Three Ecological Lessons From Toni Morrison” by</p>

	<p>Reading/listening to Mercy, Mercy, Me (The Ecology) by Marvin Gaye</p> <p>https://www.vice.com/en/article/mbz8mb/dj-cavem-eco-hip-hop Dr. Ietef “DJ Cavem” Vita</p> <p>The Secret Life of Plants by Stevie Wonder</p> <p>Reading Discussion</p>	<p>Paige Curtis</p> <p>https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/three-ecological-lessons-toni-morrison-nature-symbolism</p>
2/16	<p>Gathering resources: how do we research? How do we source material towards a decolonial model of knowledge sharing? Who is included in our own knowledge networks?</p> <p>Reading Discussion</p>	<p><i>Tar Baby</i> Chapter 1-3 (~68 pages)</p>
Week 6: 2/21	<p>Using natural imagery in our own writing: how do we describe? How do we embody?</p> <p>Reading Discussion</p>	<p>Read “John Redding Goes to Sea”</p> <p>https://www.narrativemagazine.com/issues/stories-week-2016-2017/story-week/john-redding-goes-sea-zora-neale-hurston</p>
2/23	<p>Exploring human/non-human kinships in environmental literature: who are our allies? Who are we responsible to? Who are our enemies?</p> <p>Craft Essay Discussion 2</p>	<p><i>Tar Baby</i> Chapter 4-5 (~91 pages)</p>
Week 7: 2/28	<p>Environmental mythology, mythmaking and fantasy: how do we describe phenomena we are curious about or unfamiliar with?</p> <p>Reading Discussion</p>	<p>Read: “How the Survivors of Slavery Used Material Objects to Preserve Intergenerational Wisdom” by Tiya Miles</p> <p>https://lithub.com/how-the-survivors-of-slavery-used-material-objects-to-preserve-intergenerational-wisdom/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Lit%20</p>

		Hub%20Daily%3A%20June%2010%2C%202021&utm_term=lithub_master_list&fbclid=IwAR0X4SFhD0BtU9Cv28IoibGx_Ixz2JM5nWd6vJnnSmUf10k_NnaGAycQY24
3/2	What is environmental memory? What is environmental nostalgia? Reading Discussion	<i>Tar Baby</i> Chapter 6-8 (~48 pages)
Week 8: 3/7	environmental/climate stories workshop	Read: “MAXVILLE: THE TOWN OF OREGON’S AFRICAN AMERICAN LOGGERS” by kayla Tunstall https://www.filson.com/blog/profiles/maxville-the-town-of-oregons-african-american-loggers/
3/9	Debrief of workshop Reading Discussion	<i>Tar Baby</i> Chapter 9-10 and Conclusion (~54 pages) Edited environmental/climate stories due by 11:59 PM 3/10
Week 9: 3/14	How does one write a conclusion? Reading Discussion	Read: “Forever Gone” by J Drew Latham https://orionmagazine.org/article/forever-gone/ “Bbymutha's Cockroaches Symbolize Survival in the Face of Climate Crisis” by Ashia Ajani https://www.them.us/story/bbymutha-reclaiming-the-roach-to-save-the-planet
3/16	Writing through crisis: utopia vs dystopia —what is left in between?	<i>M Archive: After the End of the World</i> “From the Lab

	<p>Reading Discussion</p> <p>Craft Essay Discussion 3</p>	<p>Notebooks of the Last Experiments” and “Archive of Dirt: <i>What We Did</i>”</p>
<p>Week 10: 3/21</p>	<p>Introduction to Black Nature Poetry: Writing the Pastoral, Anti-Pastoral and Post-Pastoral</p> <p>Read together: “Antipastoral: This Green and Pleasant Land” by Ariana Benson https://www.ecotheo.org/etreview/antipastoral</p> <p>Small group discussions:</p> <p>“Sonnet with Compost Bin” by Irene Vazquez https://www.hennepinreview.com/irene</p> <p>“Characteristics of Life” by Camille Dungy https://poets.org/poem/characteristics-life</p> <p>“Botanical Fanaticism” by Thylas Moss https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/92808/botanical-fanaticism</p> <p>“Another Antipastoral” by Vivee Francis https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/155836/another-antipastoral</p>	<p>Read: “The Earth Before the End of the World” by John Yau https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69719/the-earth-before-the-end-of-the-world</p>
<p>3/23</p>	<p>What are hybrid forms? What is prose poetry?</p>	<p><i>M Archive: After the End of the World</i> “Archive of Sky: <i>What We Became</i>” “Archive of Fire: <i>Rate of Change</i>”</p>
<p>SPRING BREAK</p>	<p>No class</p>	<p>Catch up on late/missing work or look ahead (try to spend some time in nature!)</p>
<p>Week 11: 4/4</p>	<p>What is speculative writing? Reading and writing ecological futurity</p> <p>Reading Discussion</p>	<p>Read: “The Altered Destiny” https://atmos.earth/afrofuturism-black-ecology-culture-history/ by KENDRIANA</p>

		<p>WASHINGTON</p> <p>“Indigenous and Black Communities Find Common Cause for Land Justice” https://www.yesmagazine.org/social-justice/2022/11/22/community-indigenous-colonization-reparations</p>
4/6	<p>Reading structure: what is the purpose of the archive? How do we format our work?</p> <p>Reading Discussion</p>	<p>Read <i>M Archive: After the End of the World</i> “Archive of Ocean: Origin”</p>
Week 12: 4/11	<p>Writing about joy and pleasure</p> <p>Reading Discussion</p>	<p>Read: “Rooted” by Michelle Lanier https://www.southerncultures.org/article/rooted/</p>
4/13	<p>Craft Essay Discussion 4</p> <p>Reading Discussion</p>	<p>Read: <i>M Archive: After the End of the World</i> “Baskets Possible Futures Yet to Be Woven”</p>
Week 13: 4/18	<p>Writing about grief</p> <p>Reading Discussion</p>	<p>“This Land Was Made” by Ama Codjoe https://orionmagazine.org/article/this-land-was-made/</p>
4/20	<p>Writing about hope and environmental aspirations</p> <p>Reading Discussion</p> <p>Final Project Proposals Due by 11:59 PM</p>	<p>Read “And, Scene: <i>Moonlight</i>” https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/12/the-power-of-water-in-moonlight/511547/</p> <p><i>M Archive: After the End of the World</i> “Memory Drive”</p>
Week 14: 4/25	<p>Writing environmental aesthetics</p> <p>Reading Discussion</p>	<p>Read: “America’s biggest jails are frontline environmental justice communities” by Adam Mahoney</p>

		https://grist.org/equity/toxic-jaills-environmental-justice-los-angeles-new-york-chicago/ “The Bones of My Father” by Etheridge knight https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49933/the-bones-of-my-father
4/27	Craft Essay Discussion 5 Reading Discussion	“Chapter Seven: The Criminalizing of the Africanized Honeybee: A Science Fiction Disaster Tale Told in Semiotic Three-Part Harmony” by Karen Anijar and Toni Humber
Week 15: 5/2	Reading Discussion Sharing Final Project Proposals	Work on final projects
5/4	Closing thoughts & reflections — revisiting the syllabus: what have we gained? What are we still curious about? Sharing Final Project Proposals	Work on final projects
Week 16: 5/9	Office Hours	Finish Final Project
Friday 5/12	FINAL PROJECT DUE by 11:59 PM	Bask in your accomplishments!

Academic Integrity:

All work must be your own, meaning that the words must be your own, and you need to ALWAYS cite your sources. Word-for-word copying, paraphrasing, and scrambling of other peoples’ work is plagiarism and is a violation of the student code of conduct. You can sample or be inspired by someone else as long as you state that explicitly. *Ex: “Thank you Tupac for the sample.”* or *“After Danez Smith”* Plagiarized work will receive an F. Please feel free to consult me or to seek the following resources if you are unsure of whether or not you are properly citing your sources:

<http://sa.berkeley.edu/conduct/integrity>

<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/how-to-find/cite-resources>

STUDENT RESOURCES

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: for students in need of disability-related accommodations: <http://dsp.berkeley.edu>

STUDENT LEARNING CENTER: for students experiencing difficulty in fulfilling the requirements of the course: <http://slc.berkeley.edu/writing>

THE TANG CENTER: for students who are in need of counseling with regard to personal, career, or health-related issues: <http://uhs.berkeley.edu/students/counseling>

FREE PRINTING

[OCF.berkeley.edu](http://ocf.berkeley.edu) - Free Printing is available downstairs in the MLK building on lower Sproul. Educational Technology Services also has low-fee printing that can be sent via wireless. **Plan ahead! There are peak times, but no excuse for not bringing copies of your work for others to read during the workshop.**

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

Poetry for the People is an anti-oppression classroom, and that includes taking a stand against ableism and to support students with disabilities. Whether or not you are officially in the DSP system, we respect your authority and expertise about your abilities and needs. Our community and curriculum allows us flexibility if we know in advance. Please communicate about your needs with your STPs or GSI. If you need disability-related accommodations in this class, if you have emergency medical information you wish to share, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please inform your STPs/GSI immediately. Please see them privately after class.

For students with mental health challenges, we understand that some of the requests for personal poetry may be triggering. We encourage all students, but particularly students with emotional vulnerability to develop self-care plans for intense feelings that may come up in this class.

The Disabled Students' Program (DSP) is the campus office responsible for verifying that students have disability-related needs for academic accommodations and for planning appropriate accommodations, in cooperation with the students and their instructors. Students needing academic accommodations should request them from DSP: 230 César Chávez Student Center, 642-0518 (voice) and 642-6376 (TTY).

ACCOMMODATION OF RELIGIOUS CREED

In compliance with Education code, Section 92640 (a), it is the official policy of the University of California at Berkeley to permit any student to undergo a test or examination, without penalty, at a time when that activity would not violate the student's religious creed, unless administering the examination at an alternate time would impose an undue hardship which could not reasonably have been avoided. Requests to accommodate a student's religious creed by scheduling tests or examinations at alternative times shall be submitted directly to the faculty member

responsible for administering the examination.

Reasonable common sense, judgment and the pursuit of mutual goodwill should result in the positive resolution of scheduling conflicts. The regular campus appeals process applies if a mutually satisfactory arrangement cannot be achieved. This spring, many students may be fasting. We encourage students to practice self-care during this time, and to keep your STPs informed if fasting impacts your attendance.

GREEN POLICY

The Berkeley AfAm Department supports environmental wellness, which means using recycled paper whenever possible, double sided printing whenever possible, green/reusable products whenever possible, and reducing consumption/waste and recycling whenever possible.