

# BLACK POPULAR CULTURE

AADS/COM 218201  
SPRING 2019  
SHORT SYLLABUS



## ANSWERS TO IMPORTANT QUESTIONS!

### WHO'S THE PROFESSOR?

Anjali Vats, JD, PhD

### WHEN AND WHERE DOES THE CLASS MEET?

Wednesdays in Gasson Hall 204 from 4:30-6:50

### WHAT IS THIS SYLLABUS EVEN?!?

Pedagogy scholars argue that the contract model of syllabuses is increasingly outdated (when was the last time you read your Instagram terms of service?!?). This is a way of making the material in the class accessible and interesting! Plus, it keeps your professor from having to tell you to read the syllabus.

### WHAT WILL I LEARN IN THIS CLASS?

You'll learn to define, historicize, and discuss Black Popular Culture from the 1800s - 2000s in the US using methods drawn from Black Studies, media studies, cultural studies, and rhetoric. Black Popular Culture covers everything from TV shows to movies to books to podcasts to poetry. We'll talk about the meaning of blackness, gender, class, authenticity, respectability and more! We'll also use those tools to analyze Black popular cultural texts.

### HALP! HOW DO I GET TO OFFICE HOURS?

Sign up here: <https://tinyurl.com/ycygodvw>

Come to St. Mary's South S455 at your appointment time! Please make sure you show up at your scheduled time or cancel.

### CAN'T I JUST EMAIL YOU?!?

Yes and no. I will do my best to respond to short, easy questions not addressed on the syllabus within 48 hours, not including weekends/holidays. For all other questions, face-to-face contact is ideal. You can email me at [vats@bc.edu](mailto:vats@bc.edu).

### WHAT DO I HAVE TO READ/WATCH?

A lot of academic articles and long form journal articles posted on Canvas! Also, some books, TV shows, podcasts, and movies.

### WHAT WILL I BE GRADED ON THIS SEMESTER?

Media critiques – 1 @ 100 points	100 points
Pop Quizzes – 4 @ 50 points	200 points
Creative project – 1 @ 200 points	200 points
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>500 points</b>

### CAN YOU SAY MORE ABOUT ALL THAT?

I can and will as the semester goes on!

### WHAT ABOUT LATE ASSIGNMENTS? AND FILE FORMATS?

Late assignments will lose 10 points per day. I will accept them for 7 days. All assignments must .doc, .docx, or .pdf format. There are no makeups for pop quizzes.

### OKAY, WHAT IF I HAVE TO MISS CLASS?

Cool. But Department of COM policy requires me to count *all* absences toward your total, whether excused or not. That means you don't need to tell me if you're not going to be in class. But if you miss two weeks of classes, I have to reduce your grade by one letter and if you miss three classes, I have to give you an F.

### BUT I HAVE THIS SPECIAL EXCUSED THING!

There are no exceptions, truly. It's out of my hands. Asking again won't change the answer to the question.

### SIGH, WELL, HOW CAN I GET THE NOTES I MISSED?

From a classmate! I will answer lingering questions only.

### WHAT ABOUT MAKEUP WORK?

I don't allow makeup work, except in the case of emergencies and excused absences. If you have a foreseeable issue, please get in touch in advance.

### **CAN I USE MY COMPUTER, PHONE, IPAD, GRAPHING CALCULATOR...?**

I run a no technology classroom. For our time together, I would like you to be 100% present and engaged. For most humans, technology makes that very difficult in my experience.

### **WHAT'S THE GRADE SCALE?**

Grading will be done on a total points scale, calculated into a percentage, and translated as follows:

A	4.0	94- 100%
A-	3.66	90- 93%
B+	3.33	87- 89%
B	3.0	84- 86%
B-	2.66	80- 83%
C+	2.33	77- 79%
C	2.0	74- 76%
C-	1.66	70- 73%
D+	1.33	67- 69%
D	1.0	64- 66%
D-	.66	60- 63%
F	0	59% or below

### **WHAT IF I DISAGREE WITH MY GRADE?**

I'm happy to discuss your grade concern! However, if you want to discuss or challenge your grade you must: (1) wait 24 hours after receiving your score, (2) email me a paragraph summary of your concerns, making reference to the assignment, and (3) make an appointment to meet with me. I'll entertain grade disputes for one week after papers are returned. And please know that grades can go up or down if I regrade your paper!

### **WHAT IF I NEED A DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION?**

I'll do everything I can to support you! You can start the process by contacting Kathy Duggan, (617) 552-8093, at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities, or Paulette Durrett, (617) 552-3470, in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities.

### **HOW ARE WE GOING TO TALK ABOUT RACE?**

Talking about race is tough! And often triggering. We're going to try to create a safe classroom space in which everyone is comfortable speaking. This is no small task. It requires respect, vulnerability, thoughtfulness, and self-awareness. Perhaps most importantly, it requires acting instead of reacting, by understanding how our trauma gets in the way of hearing each other. We won't be perfect, that's not the goal. But we'll try to create a space without harassing or discriminatory language, with a supportive environment in which we can support one another even when we make mistakes.

### **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CREATE A "SAFE SPACE?"**

"Safe space" is a term that gets used a bunch. In short, we're trying to minimize additional trauma to each other in our conversations. That also means that we need to be present and engaged with each other. Texting, sleeping, and other distracting behaviors are not consistent with creating a safe space or an engaged and supportive space.

### **ONE MORE THING, ACADEMIC INTEGRITY!**

I'll abide by BC's academic integrity policy. You signed this when you arrived and I've attached it here.

### **WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT ALL THIS?**

My door is always open and I'm 100% happy to talk with you about any of the issues outlined here!



**ISSA RAE, INSECURE**



**PRINCE & JANELLE MONAE**



**JESSICA WILLIAMS AND PHOEBE ROBINSON, 2 DOPE QUEENS**



**MARSHAWN LYNCH, OAKLAND RAIDERS**

# COURSE SCHEDULE

- 8.28 COURSE INTRODUCTION**  
Syllabus and Introduction  
Reading in the Information Age  
*Black Is, Black Ain't* [In class]
- 9.4 WHAT IS BLACK POPULAR CULTURE?**  
E. Patrick Johnson, "Introduction" in *Appropriating Blackness*  
Stuart Hall, "What is this Black in Black Popular Culture?"  
Racquel Gates, "Reclaiming the Freak"  
*Thriller* [In class]  
*Michael Jackson* [In class]
- 9.11 RACIAL TROPES AND STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS AS METHODS**  
Patricia Hill Collins, "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images"  
Herman Gray, "Black Masculinity and Visual Culture"  
Stuart Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes"  
"Why Cultural Critics of Color Matter," <https://hyperallergic.com/437068/why-cultural-critics-of-color-matter/>  
*2 Dope Queens* (Hair) [In class]
- 9.18 HISTORICIZING HARLEM TO BLACK ARTS**  
Media Critique Assignment Description  
Eric Lott, "Love and Theft"  
Martin Favor, "Discourses of Black Identity"  
Smith, "The Black Arts Movement and Its Critics"  
*bell hooks and Laverne Cox in Public Dialogue at the New School* [In class]
- 9.25 PICTURING CIVIL RIGHTS**  
Ashraf Rushdy, "Exquisite Corpse"  
Maurice Stevens, "Subject to Counteremory"  
*Malcolm X* [In class]
- 10.2 MUSIC AND MOVEMENTS – THE BLUES THROUGH JAZZ**  
Douglas Kellner, "Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture"  
Wesley Morris, "Why Is Everyone Always Stealing Black Music?" *The New York Times Magazine: 1619 Project*,  
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/music-black-culture-appropriation.html>  
Daphne Brooks, "Nina Simone's Triple Play"  
*What Happened Miss Simone?* [In Class]
- 10.9 INDEPENDENT RESEARCH DAY**  
"Civil Rights Road Trip: Music Playlist," <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2018/mar/31/civil-rights-road-trip-music-playlist-aretha-franklin-nina-simone-stevie-wonder>
- 10.16 MUSIC AND MOVEMENTS – MOTOWN THROUGH POP**  
Media Critique Due  
Gerald Early, "White and Black Middle West"  
Anna Pochmara and Justyna Weirzchowska, "Nobody Knows My Name"  
*Purple Rain* [In class]
- 10.23 MUSIC AND MOVEMENTS – HIP HOP**  
Bryan J. McCann, "Contesting the Mark of Criminality"  
*Straight Outta Compton* [In class]

**10.30 THE BLACK TELEVISION REVOLUTION**

Timeka Tounsel, "Productive Vulnerability"  
Assatu Wisseh, "Mapping Mammy 2.0"  
*Color Adjustment* [In class]  
*Insecure* [In class]

**11.6 BLAXPLOITATION, THEN AND NOW**

Quinn, "From Oppositional Readers to Positional Producers"  
Cedric Robinson, "Blaxploitation and the Misrepresentation of Liberation"  
*Coffy* [In class]

**11.13 NEGOTIATING RACE THROUGH DARK HUMOR**

Jonathan Rossing, "Emancipatory Racial Humor as Critical Public Pedagogy"  
Katrina Bell-Jordan, "Speaking Fluent Joke"  
*Sticks and Stones* [In class]

**11.20 BLACKNESS AND BRANDING**

Anjali Vats, "Marking Disidentification"  
Matthew Desmond, "American Capitalism Is Brutal," *The New York Times Magazine: 1619 Project*,  
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/slavery-capitalism.html>  
Zack O'Malley Greenburg, "The Real Story Behind Jay-Z's Champagne Deal,"  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/zackomalleygreenburg/2014/11/06/why-jay-zs-champagne-news-isnt-so-new/>  
Brentin Mock, "The Roots of Jay-Z's Black Capitalism," <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2019/08/jay-z-nfl-team-social-justice-protests-colin-kaepernick/596326/>  
*E:60: Marshawn Lynch* [In class]

**11.27 NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING**

**12.4 NAVIGATING BLACKNESS**

Ralina Joseph, "Strategically Ambiguous Shonda Rhimes"  
Aisha Durham, "Check On It"  
*Lemonade* [In class]

**12.11 FINALS!**

**Creative Projects Due**

## STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY FROM THE COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

The College [of Arts and Sciences] expects all students to adhere to the accepted norms of intellectual honesty in their academic work. Any forms of cheating, plagiarism, or dishonesty or collusion in another's dishonesty is a fundamental violation of these norms. CHEATING is the use or attempted use of unauthorized aids in any exam or other academic exercise submitted for evaluation. This includes data falsification; the fabrication of data; deceitful alteration of collected data included in a report; copying from another student's work; unauthorized cooperation in doing assignments or during an examination; the use of purchased essays, term papers, or preparatory research for such papers; submission of the same written work in more than one course without prior written approval from the instructor(s) involved; and dishonesty in requests for either extensions or papers or make-up examinations. PLAGIARISM is the deliberate act of taking the words, ideas, data illustrative material, or statements of someone else, without full and proper acknowledgment, and presenting them as one's own. COLLUSION is assisting or attempting to assist another student in an act of academic dishonesty. As part of your scholarly development, you must learn how to work cooperatively in a community of scholars and fruitfully utilize the work of others without violating the norms of intellectual honesty. You have a responsibility to learn the parameters of collaboration and the proper forms for quoting, summarizing and paraphrasing.

Faculty members who detect any form of academic dishonesty have the responsibility to take appropriate action. The faculty member also has the responsibility to report the incident and penalty to the Department Chairperson and the appropriate Class Dean. The report will remain in your student file until you graduate. If the gravity of the offense seems to warrant it or if the faculty member prefers that another academic authority decide the matter, he or she may refer the case to a Dean. In addition, if the student is unwilling to accept the faculty member's decision, he or she may choose to have the matter adjudicated either by an Associate Dean or by an Administrative Board. The section of the College of Arts and Sciences in the Boston College Undergraduate Catalogue has further details about this process. Academic integrity is a very important matter. If you have any questions in any of your courses about what is allowed or not allowed, please discuss the matter immediately with the instructor.