

Women's Studies 4850W
Afrofuturism: Decolonizing the Imagination and Imagining a Liberated Future
Spring 2019
Tuesday 6:00-9:30pm
CDC 230

Instructor: Aisha A. Upton
Office: Fontbonne 109
Office hours: Monday and Wednesday 11:00am-12:15pm and by appointment
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Course Overview:

This writing intensive capstone seminar is focused on the topic of Afrofuturism. In this course we will use speculative fiction, or, what Imarisha and Brown (2015) have coined as “visionary fiction” to explore that it means to “decolonize the imagination.” According to Imarisha and Brown, visionary fiction is “vital for any process of decolonization, because decolonization of the imagination is the most dangerous and subversive form there is: for it is where all other forms of decolonization are born. Once the imagination is unshackled, liberation is limitless” (pg.). Working through this process of decolonization, we will explore what a liberated future would/could look like. All of this exploration will be done through an intersectional lens that takes into account power relations like race, gender, class, and nation.

It is my hope that exploring these concepts and their connections to social justice and movements will be fulfilling to you and will spark an interest in imagining your own future. With that in mind, each of you will have the opportunity to concentrate on your own areas of academic interest that will culminate into an amazing final research paper.

Required Texts:

Jemisin, N.K. 2018. *How Long 'til Black Future Month*. London: Orbit Books.
Imarisha, Walidah and adrienne marie brown. 2015. *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*.
Butler, Octavia. E. 2000. *Parable of the Sower*. New York: Grand Central Publishing.

How you will be graded:

This seminar combines three elements: (1) engagement as a group with planned content related to central course themes; (2) student-led discussion; and (3) engagement with individual interests and life plans through research and personal narrative.

Course Requirements:

Participation: 50 points
Weekly response papers: 50 points
Memoir and Vision Statement: 50 points
Research Paper 50 points
Total: 200 points

A: Clearly superior work; obviously beyond a “good job” in some combination of the following respects: creativity, originality, depth, clarity, and critical, independent thinking

B: A good job, meeting all the expectations of the assignment. “B” work goes beyond minimum competence by showing insight, creativity, clarity

C: Adequate work, generally meeting expectations but lacking in some areas

D: Inadequate work, but not failing

F: Incomplete, dishonest, or simply not a serious effort

93%= A

90%= B

87%+= B+

83%+=B

80%+=B-

77%+=C+

73%+=C

70%+=C-

67%+D+

60%+=D

<60%

Participation and Attendance:

Because this is a discussion-based class, your participation in class is crucial! Participation includes, (1) *coming to class*¹. If you are not in class to participate, your grade will suffer. You are allowed to miss **one day** (week) of class without penalty. Each subsequent absence will cause your grade to go down by one letter grade. In my experience, students who regularly attend classes have a better experience in courses, get the most out of those experiences, and tend to get better grades. I guarantee that you will get out of this course what you put into it. (2) *Reading the required texts*. Again, you will get out of this course what you put into it. It would behoove you to not get behind on the reading. (3) *Regularly contributing to class discussions* (talking in class), discussion leading, and bringing in outside material. Please note that your ability to contribute to class discussions is directly correlated with your class attendance and your complete reading of the assigned texts. Not every comment/question must be brilliant and insightful; questions and “thinking aloud” are important to the learning process. I cannot stress enough how important contributing to class discussions will be to you, other students, and me as the instructor. Speak up!

Discussion leading:

Each student will be assigned two class meetings to lead discussion. Leading discussion means coming prepared to summarize the reading/material for the week and preparing 3-5 discussion questions. The questions should be substantive questions (questions that can lead to a discussion). If you would like, you can incorporate outside material.

Bringing in outside material and discussion question:

Each week every student should bring in some outside material that they see as connected to the weekly reading. This material could be a piece of news, another reading, a video, etc. The purpose of this component is for you to make a personal connection to the reading.

¹ Please contact me if you experience a personal or family emergency. I am strict about late assignments, but not inflexible.

Weekly Two Page Informal Writing Responses:

On ten Tuesdays throughout the semester, you will turn in a two-page informal writing response. These writing responses are **not** formal papers. The purpose of the response papers is for you to reflect on the readings/discussions. Do you still have any burning questions? Is there something that you really like/dislike? Do you see a connection between something we've covered in class to a cultural artifact? This is your space to put it out into the world. On the Tuesdays that these are due, bring some of your thoughts to class to add to our discussion. These must be turned in on D2L by 11:59 on the day of our class meeting.

Memoir and Vision Statement:

Details about these assignments will be discussed in class.

Final Paper:

Details about the final paper will be discussed in class.

Other things you should know:**Technology policy:**

I do not mind if you use technology in the classroom with the exception of cell phones. Again, I will not permit the use of cell phones. Texting, GroupMe, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram, and any other app/site that exist to talk to people outside of the classroom have no place in the classroom unless specifically directed. Other technology such as laptops and tablets for note-taking are allowed. Please refrain from using your technology for social media, as this is a distraction for you and for other students. In class discussions we need to be respectful of other people while they are talking. To that end, it's important that we pay attention to each other rather than our screens.

In-Class Discussion Policy:

Due to the topic of the course, in this class we will cover difficult and controversial topics (race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.) to which we may not all agree. You are welcome to share your own opinions/ask questions about these topics and are expected to listen to others when they share their opinions/ask questions – even if you do not agree. Everyone in class is expected to be respectful of others. With this in mind, personal or group-based attacks will not be tolerated.

E-mail policy:

Please make sure to consult the course syllabus, other handouts, or D2L before submitting inquiries via email. I will respond to your email as soon as I can, but please allow 48 hours after you initially email to email me again.

Writing Assistance at the O'Neill Center:

If necessary, we will refer students to the O'Neill Center for writing assistance. Please do not get offended if you are referred. Instead, please view it as an opportunity to improve your writing skills. The center offers a service designed to meet the needs of students, and the staff members are competent, friendly, and non-threatening. We, at St. Kate's, attempt to do our best to accommodate students to help them achieve a successful outcome. When the instructor and the student work together, a successful outcome is usually met.

Academic Dishonestly:

Absolutely no incidents of academic dishonestly or academic misconduct will be tolerated. The best way to avoid being academically dishonest is to properly cite any ideas/words that are not originally your own.

Special Accommodations:

Saint Catherine University is committed to equal access for all and recognizes that disability is an aspect of diversity. The University's goal is to create learning environments that are usable, equitable, inclusive and welcoming. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to the learning environment, accurate assessment or your achievement, please contact the Resources for Disabilities office as soon as possible. Access Consultants can be reached in the O'Neill Center at 651-690-6563 to discuss academic adjustments or accommodations.

If you need accommodations for a disability, please inform us immediately at the beginning of the semester to work out appropriate arrangements. We cannot grant any accommodations without notice from Disability Services. This information will be kept confidential. Please note that notifying us at the end of the semester or thereafter will not be useful to your situation.

Incompletes:

There will be no incompletes given for this course unless you have performed satisfactorily (at least 70%) in most of the requirements, and you have an emergency [i.e., sudden illness/hospitalization of self or immediate family member (medical documentation required), death of immediate family, etc.]. You will be required to write a formal contract for completion of the project. An "I" grade automatically converts to an "F" grade one year after the final exam of the term in which the "I" was given.

Preliminary Schedule

Note: This schedule will change as the seminar takes shape and student interests emerge. Revisions will be announced in class and on the course D2L site. Please check the site weekly for announcements.

Tuesday February 5: Introductions

Introduction to the course and each other. Introduction to Afrofuturism. Introduction to memoir/vision statement. Introduction to research paper.

Tuesday February 12: Introduction to Afrofuturism cont.

Reading: Articles and links on D2L.

Tuesday February 19: How Long 'Til Black Future Month

Reading: *How Long 'Til Black Future month* pp. 1-74.

Draft memoir due

Tuesday February 26: How Long 'Til Black Future Month - Taylor

Reading: *How Long 'Til Black Future Month* pp. 75-149.

Tuesday March 5: How Long 'Til Black Future Month - Shelby

Reading: *How Long 'Til Black Future Month* pp. 150-233.

Tuesday March 12: How Long 'Til Black Future Month - Erin

Reading: *How Long 'Til Black Future Month* pp. 234-295

Tuesday March 19: How Long 'Til Black Future Month – Jeannine

Reading: *How Long 'Til Black Future Month* pp. 296-end.

Draft vision statement due

Tuesday March 26: Spring Break

Tuesday April 2: Parable of the Sower - Pono

Reading: *Parable of the Sower* pp. 1-99.

Tuesday April 9: Parable of the Sower - Taylor

Reading: *Parable of the Sower* pp. 100-178.

Tuesday April 16: Parable of the Sower - Erin

Reading: *Parable of the Sower* pp. 179-257.

Tuesday April 23: Parable of the Sower – Pono

Reading: *Parable of the Sower* pp. 259-end.

Parable of the Sower play on Friday April 26.

Tuesday April 30: Octavia's Brood – Jeannine
Reading: *Octavia's Brood* pp. 1-78.

Tuesday May 7: Octavia's Brood – Shelby
Reading: *Octavia's Brood* pp. 79-144
Final versions of memoir and vision statement due.

Tuesday May 14: Octavia's Brood
Reading: *Octavia's Brood* pp. 145-214

Tuesday May 21: Octavia's Brood
Reading: *Octavia's Brood* pp. 215-281.

Final papers due.