

Summer Session 2022
ENGLISH 4736/5736:
FICTION

Thematic Title: *Afrofuturism*
an entirely online course

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I provide these phone numbers only in case of emergency; please try email first.

Greg Tate has said that "Black people live the estrangement that science fiction writers imagine." This course takes up the constellation of intersections between Black history and the radical Black imagination that is commonly called Afrofuturism, focusing in particular on figurations of Africa as a space of science fictional possibility from both sides of the Atlantic. If Afrofuturism has been, as Kodwo Eshun has said, "a program for recovering the histories of counter-futures created in a century hostile to Afrodiasporic proection," how does the rise of Africa as a global economic powerhouse in the twenty-first-century transform our understanding of Black futurity? 2018's smash hit *Black Panther* is only the most vivid registration of the ongoing global importance of the Afrofuturist imagination; from comics to film and television to literature to music videos to social media we will trace Afrofuturism across the twenty-first century cultural landscape, in both the U.S. and in Africa.

LEARNING GOALS

Marquette Core Curriculum: Cognition, Memory and Intelligence: Guiding Questions

How do we process interactions with the world around us? How do we acquire knowledge? How do we make memories? How does language influence how we think? How do social interactions change how we think? How do we imagine things and events we've not experienced? How do new technologies change how we think? Why and how do the answers to these questions change over the course of one's life? How does lifestyle, injury or disease affect these processes? What is artificial intelligence, and how is artificial intelligence in computers and machines different from human intelligence?

Students choosing this theme will study the mind from a variety of perspectives, including: neurocognitive processes of early childhood and adult brain development, mental disorder, trauma and PTSD; language acquisition, speech pathology, and the cognitive operations of multilingualism and translation; artificial intelligence, machine learning and data science; and reflections on and representations and understandings of the workings of the human mind in history, theology, philosophy, literature and languages, and communications and media studies.

English Department Learning Outcomes

- Articulate how the imaginative constructs of poetry, drama, and prose (fiction and nonfiction) illuminate fundamental questions of human experience.
- Define critical theories/methods of reading.
- Identify rhetorical tactics within texts.
- Analyze the function of rhetorical tactics within texts.
- Argue for interpretations and evaluations of texts.
- Reflect on the validity of personal bases for evaluating texts in light of textual, historical, and cultural evidence.
- Construct well-written texts in a variety of genres and/or media.
- Deliver effective multi-media presentations.
- Demonstrate effective strategies for collaboration with peers.

Course-Specific Learning Goals

- Demonstrate understanding of the cultural, historical, and political contexts in which various Afrofuturist narratives have been produced.
- Apply techniques of critical analysis as appropriate to diverse cultural archives and documents, with attention to the assumptions, preconceptions, and biases that both authors and audiences bring to any text.
- Explore the relationship between the concept of Afrofuturism and interrelated ideas of history, futurity, technology, ecology, disability, gender, race, utopia, and the nation.
- Conceptualize Afrofuturist science fiction as one way that Black writers have chosen to expose and resist global narratives of white supremacy.
- Use literary and cultural study to develop skills for careful reading and clear writing.
- Interpret and critique a variety of literary and nonliterary texts on the levels of both form and content.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND PERSONAL EMERGENCIES

Everyone at Marquette recognizes that this is an extremely difficult time which may be filled with different sorts of uncertainty as we move forward with the summer term. Your safety, health, and well-being are our primary concern and we want to be able to support you in any way that we can.

The university also understands that you may be facing personal obstacles that may make it difficult to meet your typical academic goals. Please refer to the Student Resources page on the Marquette COVID-19 Response webpage for information and resources on basic needs such as housing, food, financial aid, and medical and mental health; the webpage also offers information on official University communications, access to technology, and student services. Faculty and staff are also here for you.

If you feel like your performance in the class is being impacted by your situation outside of class, please don't hesitate to talk with me. I want to be a resource for you. You are not alone.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Octavia E. Butler, *Bloodchild and Other Stories*

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Black Panther: A Nation Under Our Feet, Book One*

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Black Panther: A Nation Under Our Feet, Book Two*

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Black Panther: A Nation Under Our Feet, Book Three*

Nnedi Okorafor, *Lagoon*

Abdourahman Waberi, *In the United States of Africa*

Any edition of any of these texts will do.

We will also be watching several movies, which are available for rent or purchase on major sites like Amazon Prime, Netflix, YouTube, and Disney+: *Get Out*, *Black Panther*, "Dirty Computer," *District 9*, and "Pumzi."

Additional readings and course materials will also be made available via D2L.

GRADING AND EVALUATION

Grades will be updated continuously on D2L; please note that the D2L gradebook builds up from the bottom, so you start at zero towards 400 possible points.

Grades will be distributed along the typical distribution:

A: 400-370

A-: 369-360

B+: 359-350

B: 349-330
B-: 329-320
C+: 319-310
C: 310-290
C-: 289-280
D: 279-240
F: below 240

Additional details on all assignments, including point values and rubrics, re available on D2L. In general, an initial post in the forums is worth 10 points and a response post is worth 5 points; longer and creative responses are worth 20 points. Your final project is worth 100 points, a quarter of the course grade—so devote time to it accordingly!

This summer there will be several graduate students in the course taking the course alongside the undergraduates. These graduate students will have different expectations, which are detailed on the graduate student supplement on D2L.

FORMAT OF WRITTEN WORK

Most of your written work in this course is published using D2L's forums. You should compose your work in a word processing programming, not in your browser, and then copy and paste it into the appropriate discussion forum when the post is finished. Composing your work in a word processing program will make it easier for you to save a copy of the work on your own hard drive, as well as prevent you from losing your work if your browser crashes, resets, or otherwise fails to successfully upload the material.

I give a general guideline for how long each response should be, but I won't be checking wordcounts—it is intended only as a guide. The important thing is to provide a thoughtful, substantive, engaged response to the material under discussion.

Your final project can take a number of forms, some of which are not text-based in nature—but if it is a written paper it should be approximately six-to-eight pages, typed in twelve-point font, double-spaced with one-inch margins, saved in a format Microsoft Word can open. Your filename should contain *your name* in it, for example, yourlastname-firstpaper.docx.

I expect you to *edit* and *proofread* all written work.

Please give each piece of writing an original title, and include your name, the name of the assignment, and the due date in a header on the first page.

PAPER SUBMISSION

Your responses and rewritings should be submitted via D2L's discussion forums by class time by the due date. **Late responses will receive half credit; very late responses will receive no credit, at the discretion of the instructor.**

I understand that the summer term covers an unusual period of time for instruction that includes the likelihood of personal travel—and we are, of course, still in a pandemic as well. My recommendation is that you consult the syllabus and plan ahead, completing work due on such days ahead of time. I will not grade work differently that has been submitted in advance.

To receive full credit, your final project should be submitted in the appropriate forum on D2L as well as in the associated D2L Dropbox folder by the last day of the course.

Except in very unusual circumstances, work will not be accepted by email.

EXTENSIONS

Although the assignments in this course have a sufficiently long timetable to allow you to plan and complete all work in a timely manner, I nonetheless recognize that emergencies do happen, especially in the context of the pandemic. **If you find that you will not be able to make a deadline, please contact me as soon as you can to arrange an alternative due date.** There is no need to concoct an elaborate story to justify this, or to lie to me; simply tell me the truth about what's going on and we can work out an alternative that works for you.

TECHNOLOGY IS TERRIBLE: PLAN AHEAD!

The Internet goes down. Files become corrupted. Computers crash. These are predictable facts of twenty-first century life, not emergencies. For this course, for all your courses, for the rest of your career and your life in this world you need to develop work habits and strategies that take into account the basic, inescapable unreliability of computers. Start your assignments well in advance of the due date; save them often, while they are still in process; save backup copies of essential documents like your short story, including copies off-site using a service like Carbonite, Dropbox, or Google Drive. Even just periodically emailing your story-in-process to yourself will prevent you from losing your short story to a computer crash at the last minute.

ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION

This class meets entirely online, and therefore uses discussion practices that are appropriate to the online space. Please consult the discussion forum response rubric provided on D2L for a description of how your discussion in this class will be graded.

I will be reading the discussion forum regularly and will also be participating in the discussion. This will be the primary way we collectively interact as a class over the course of the summer term, so it is important that every participant enthusiastically, cogently, and in a timely fashion. Failure to keep up with the discussion-forum-based written assignments in the course may result in a WA grade (Withdrawn-Absences), in accordance with the university attendance policy described here:

<http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/#attendance>

EMAIL

Students in this class are required to check their official Marquette email account—whatever account D2L sends its emails to—at least once a day, in case there are any last-minute announcements or disruptions.

I endeavor to respond to all emails within several hours, usually much less—but please understand that I do travel frequently and face the same constraints on my time as you have during the summer season. Please do not send me urgent emails regarding your assignments on the night before they are due and expect an immediate reply.

FLEXIBILITY

If it will benefit the class, changes may be made to the above.

ACCOMODATIONS

Students with disabilities who believe they may require accommodations in this course should contact me early in the semester so your learning needs can be appropriately met.

I am of course more than happy to work with you to make sure you are successful in this course and to make this course most accessible for you. However, without documentation, I am limited in what I am able to do. Therefore, in order for me to help you most effectively, I need you to be proactive in contacting Marquette University's Office of Disability Services

(located on the fifth floor of the 707 Building). ODS can be reached by phone at (414) 288-1645 or by email at ods@marquette.edu.

GROUP WORK

Module Five, on *Lagoon*, is intended to be completed in small breakout groups; I invite you to find ways to work together that make sense for your schedules and workflow. However you complete the assignment works for me.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Students are expected to abide by the academic honesty policy outlined in your undergraduate bulletin. I urge you all to examine this material and consult me with any questions you may have about plagiarism or academic integrity *before* it becomes an issue.

Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not an acceptable excuse for plagiarism. **Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course.** No exceptions or special dispensations will be made.

Marquette students now sign an Honor Pledge, which states:

- *I recognize the importance of personal integrity in all aspects of life and work.*
- *I commit myself to truthfulness, honor, and responsibility, by which I earn the respect of others.*
- *I support the development of good character, and commit myself to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity as an important aspect of personal integrity.*
- *My commitment obliges me to conduct myself according to the Marquette University Honor Code.*

Full details of Marquette's academic integrity policy are available on the Internet at <http://www.marquette.edu/provost/academic-integrity.php>.

On a personal level, I (like everyone) hate being lied to. Please, do not feel you need to concoct elaborate stories. Simply be honest with me about whatever is going on and we will work it out.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

We all enter this classroom with preexisting political, ethical, philosophical, and intellectual commitments. You are all required to engage the material—but you are absolutely *not* required to agree either with any of the writers we will discuss, or with me, in whole or in part.

RESPECT

This classroom is a community. It is crucial that we treat each other with the appropriate level of courtesy and respect. No one should be made to feel unwelcome here.

Failure to treat other students with the respect they deserve will **severely** negatively impact your class participation grade.

KEEP THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN!

I want this class to be a meaningful and valuable experience for you, both in its own terms and in service of the development of your larger college experience. If you have any ideas, suggestions, or concerns about the way things are going, my door is always open.

COURSE SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class as they become necessary.

Module	Assignment Title	Assignment Type	Due Day of the Week	Due Date (before midnight)
Prep Activity	Who Am I?	Discussion	Tuesday	7/12
Prep Activity	Symbolic Icon	Discussion	Tuesday	7/12
Prep Activity	Opening Reflection	Discussion	Tuesday	7/12
Module 1	1.1 First-time Viewer	Discussion	Wednesday	7/13
Module 1	1.2 Rewatchers	Discussion	Wednesday	7/13
Module 1	1.3 Everyone Discussion	Discussion	Wednesday	7/13
Module 1	1.1-1.3 Response	Discussion	Thursday	7/14
Module 1	1.1-1.3 Response	Discussion	Friday	7/15
Module 1	1.4 Alternative Ending Discussion	Discussion	Friday	7/15
Module 2	2.2 Dirty Computer Discussion	Discussion	Monday	7/18

Module	Assignment Title	Assignment Type	Due Day of the Week	Due Date (before midnight)
Module 2	2.2 Response	Discussion	Tuesday	7/19
Module 2	2.4 Bloodchild Forum	Discussion	Wednesday	7/20
Module 2	2.5 "Speech Sounds" and "The Evening and the Morning and the Night"	Discussion	Thursday	7/21
Module 2	2.6 "Book of Martha"	Discussion	Friday	7/22
Module 3	3.2 Black Panther Movie Discussion	Discussion	Monday	7/25
Module 3	3.2 Black Panther Movie Discussion Response	Discussion	Tuesday	7/26
Module 3	3.4 Black Panther Comic Book 1 Discussion	Discussion	Wednesday	7/27
Module 3	3.5 Black Panther Comic Book 2 Discussion	Discussion	Thursday	7/28
Module 3	3.6 Black Panther Comic Book 3 Discussion	Discussion	Friday	7/29
Module 3	3.7 Final Project Proposal	Dropbox	Friday	7/29
Module 4	4.2 District 9 (Documentary Section)	Discussion	Monday	8/1
Module 4	4.3 District 9 (Narrative Section)	Discussion	Tuesday	8/2
Module 4	4.4 District 9 Sequel Discussion	Discussion	Wednesday	8/3
Module 4	4.4 District 9 Sequel Discussion Response	Discussion	Thursday	8/4
Module 4	4.6 "Pumzi" Discussion	Discussion	Thursday	8/4
Module 4	4.7 District 9 and "Pumzi" Comparison	Discussion	Friday	8/5
Module 5	5.1 Lagoon Group Discussion	Discussion	Monday - Thursday	8/8-8/11
Module 5	5.2 Group Assignment Submission	Discussion	Friday	8/12
Module 5	5.3 Group Survey	Discussion	Friday	8/12
Module 6	6.1 In the United States of Africa (First Half) Discussion	Discussion	Monday	8/15
Module 6	6.2 In the United States of Africa (Whole Book) Discussion	Discussion	Tuesday	8/16

Module	Assignment Title	Assignment Type	Due Day of the Week	Due Date (before midnight)
Module 6	6.3 Revisiting Your Opening Reflection	Discussion	Wednesday	8/17
Module 6	6.4 Final Project	Dropbox	Friday	8/19
Module 6	6.5 Final Project Post	Discussion	Friday	8/19

APPENDIX: FINAL PROJECT GUIDELINES

25% of your grade in this class derives from a final project. In this respect this course is being organized much more like an upper division or even graduate seminar than a conventional general education class—which necessarily puts the impetus on you to manage your time effectively in order to produce a successful final project.

Brief Project Description: due by the end of module three

Final Project Due to Me via D2L: due by the end of module six

You have two general options for your final project:

OPTION #1 A creative project like a short story, a short essay, or a short film, roughly the labor equivalent of a 6-to-8 page academic paper.

OPTION #2 A curational project (a video, a podcast, a website, or some other mode of academic curation), also roughly the labor equivalent of an 6-to-8 page academic paper.

You should think of your project as the pointed answer to a controversial question about Afrofuturism, taking a position on some aspect of the genre that you think is interesting and important, and exploring that question through your own creation. For the creative project, your work might be a twist on one of the stories we studied in class, or take up a thematic question or a narrative point of view you wish one of the stories had considered. For the curational project, you might expand the work we did in class by looking at some Afrofuturist texts we didn't study, or critically examine one or more of our texts in more detail than our weekly discussion forums allowed. A curational project could also be directed at educating people outside our course about the material we studied.

Your final project is due to me by the last day of the course.

To help you prepare, I ask that you provide a brief project description by the end of module three. This can be only a paragraph or two—I just want you to think about what you plan to do, and in what timetable you plan to do it, and let me know so I can see if I agree that your idea is achievable in the time provided. I cannot stress enough how open I am to your personal interests and approaches. I want this paper to be something you are excited about and enjoy creating, not a chore.

I am also of course very happy to discuss your project-in-progress with you at any stage of the writing process, from pitch to finished product.

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.

—Kenneth Burke, "The Philosophy of Literary Form"