

CAS AA 270/EN395/WS270
 Spring 2022
 Room: CAS 225

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Race, Sex and Science Fiction: Afrofuturism

Science Fiction and its various sub- or accompanying genres (Fantasy or Speculative Fiction for example) have from their inception been engaged in complex conversations about history, culture and politics. These conversations have been had in addition to its more conventional interests in technology, exploration and adventure. This course takes seriously the presence of issues such as race, gender, identity, the environment and others that have become increasingly foregrounded in the genre over the last hundred years or so; especially as new readers and social groups have begun to consume and engage it. Though the class will not pretend to be a complete history of the genre or a full exploration of all the issues listed here, each iteration of the class will hone in on some aspect of these cultural and political conversations and explore them.

This iteration of the class will be focused on Afrofuturism, Black Science Fiction and Fantasy because the last two decades have borne witness to a remarkable increase of literary production by Black writers all over the world. These writers have rapidly become some of the most celebrated authors in the literary world, reshaping those genres and expanding readership and fandom. This interest has been paralleled by a surge of new work by Black artists in music, film, the visual arts as well as criticism and scholarship that has begun to coalesce into a growing “movement” or cultural tendency called Afrofuturism. Arguably, it becomes publicly recognized in the consciousness of mainstream culture due to the Marvel film, *Black Panther* as well as other works in its wake. Our class is an introduction to the various shapes that this work comes in. You will be introduced to major participants and progenitors as well as central themes and critical problems. This material will include literary texts but also scholarly, musical and artistic work. The class is also an exploration of the various historical contexts, themes and tendencies in this work as well as its cultural impact and political ramifications; so why “Afrofuturism” currently matters will be as important as where it has come from and why it has developed.

Required Texts available at Barnes and Noble or via any convenient and affordable source. Ebooks are fine as library copies.

<i>Kindred.</i>	Octavia Butler
<i>Bloodchild and Other Stories.</i>	Octavia Butler
<i>Black God's Drums.</i>	P Djeli Clark
<i>Aye, and Gomorrah and Other Stories.</i>	Samuel R. Delany
<i>Lagoon.</i>	Nalo Hopkinson.
<i>How Long 'til Black Future Month?</i>	NK Jemisin.
<i>Black No More</i>	George Schuyler
<i>Dark Matter.</i>	Shiree Renee Thomas (ed)

Course requirements and expectations:

The course will be held primarily in lecture format; however, much conversation will be expected. Your participation will be evaluated based on your level of engagement. It is also your responsibility to help maintain a positive, respectful environment. This is particularly important given that many of the texts feature opinions, experiences and modes of expression that range from unpopular to unconventional and may challenge you.

Two short writing projects (3-4 pages); a midterm exam; and a comprehensive final.

Writing projects should be emailed as a word document (not pdf) and double spaced, spell and grammar checked. Late projects will be automatically docked a half grade per day, and none will be accepted if it is more than a week overdue. Any written work you hand in should be done by you and be original. It is your responsibility to know the provisions of the Academic Conduct Code. Cases of suspected academic misconduct, like plagiarism, will be referred to the Dean's office:

<http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/>

Attendance is required, and a poor attendance record will adversely affect your grade. You are permitted one unexcused absence, but will be held responsible for all the material covered on those days. All assignments and projects must be completed to pass this class.

The relative weight of each assignment is as follows:

Two short writing projects=30% (15 points each).

Midterm exam=20%

Participation, and attendance=20%

Final exam=30%

You should complete all writing and reading assignments by the established due dates. I will assume that you have done the readings and conduct lectures and discussions accordingly. Much of the learning will take place in class and will involve discussions and activities that cannot be made up (films and sound recordings for example). The syllabus is merely a general guide to coursework and assignments may change over the course of the quarter.

Screen/Device Policy

If you are texting, updating your status, checking your e-mail, or otherwise using device(s) for purposes other than consulting the readings or taking notes, you will be asked to leave and you will be counted as absent for that day. If you choose to do your readings on a laptop or tablet, you should be prepared to talk about them without frequent visual consultation during class.

You are always welcome to meet with me during office hours or by appointment.

Schedule:

1/21: Introduction.

Week One:

1/24: Monday: “The Necessity of Tomorrows”

(<https://americanfuturesiup.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/delany-tomorrows.pdf>); “Samuel R. Delany; “Positive Obsession,” Octavia Butler (in *Bloodchild and Other Stories*); “Introduction,” NK Jemisin (*How Long ‘Til Black Future Month?*).

Wednesday: “Black to the Future,” Walter Mosely; “Why Blacks Should Read (and Write) Science Fiction,” Charles Saunders; “The Comet,” WEB Dubois (all in *Dark Matter*).

Friday: “The Goophered Grapevine,” Charles Chesnutt; “Ark of Bones,” Henry Dumas; “Rhythm Travel,” Amiri Baraka (all in *Dark Matter*).

Week Two:

1/31: Monday: “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” Langston Hughes:

(http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/hughes/mountain.htm); “The Negro Art Hokum,” George Schuyler: (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5129/>): start *Black No More*.

Wednesday: *Black No More*.

Friday: *Black No More*.

Week Three:

2/7: Monday: *Black No More*.

Wednesday: *Black No More*.

Friday: “The Space Traders,” Derrick Bell (in *Dark Matter*).

Week Four:

2/14: Monday: “Racism and Science Fiction,” Samuel R. Delany (*Dark Matter*); *Aye, And Gomorrah* (stories 1-3).

Wednesday: *Aye, And Gomorrah* (stories 4-8).

Friday: *Aye, And Gomorrah*.

Week Five:

2/21: Classes Suspended.

Wednesday: *Aye, And Gomorrah*.

Friday: *Aye, And Gomorrah*.

Week Six:

2/28: Monday: “Bloodchild,” Octavia Butler.

Wednesday: “The Evening and the Morning and the Night,” and “Amnesty,” in *Bloodchild and Other Stories*.

Friday: “The Book of Martha,” in *Bloodchild and Other Stories*; **Ytasha Womack online event. Short writing assignment #1:** Response to Ytasha Womack’s presentation considering the films (due after break).

--Over the break watch *The Last Angel of History*

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EEbjMrl-GXc>) and *Space is the Place*

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7iAQCPmpSUI>).

Week Seven: Spring Break: 3/5-3/13.

Week Eight:

3/14: Monday: “Black to the Future Interviews,” Mark Dery:

(https://www.researchgate.net/publication/278667733_Black_to_the_Future_Interviews_with_Samuel_R_Delany_Greg_Tate_and_Tricia_Rose_FLAME_WARS_THE_DISCOU

[RSE_OF_CYBERCULTURE](#)). Read stories by Charles R. Saunders, Steven Barnes, Tananarive Due and Jewelle Gomez in *Dark Matter*.

Wednesday: Read stories by Ishmael Reed, Kalamu Y Salaam, Robert Fleming, Akua Leslie Hope (*Dark Matter*).

Friday: **MIDTERM.**

Week Nine:

3/21: **Monday:** *Kindred*.

Wednesday: *Kindred*.

Friday: *Kindred*. **Short writing assignment due by 5pm.**

Week Ten:

3/28: **Monday:** *Kindred*.

Wednesday: *Kindred*.

Friday: stories by Nisi Shawl, Tony Medina, Kiini Ibura Salaam, (all in *Dark Matter*).

Week Eleven:

4/4: **Monday:** *Black God's Drums*.

Wednesday: *Black God's Drums*.

Friday: *Black God's Drums*.

Week Twelve:

4/11: **Monday:** *Lagoon* (first half); "African Futurism Defined," Nnedi Okorafor (<http://nnedi.blogspot.com/2019/10/africanfuturism-defined.html>).

Wednesday: "Afrofuturism, Africanfuturism, and the Language of Black Speculative Literature," Hope Wabuke (<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/afrofuturism-africanfuturism-and-the-language-of-black-speculative-literature/>): *Lagoon*.

Friday: *Lagoon*.

Week Thirteen:

4/18: **Monday:** **Classes Suspended.**

Wednesday: *Lagoon*.

Friday: Stories by Anthony Joseph, Darryl A. Smith, Ama Patterson (*Dark Matter*).

Short writing assignment: "Future History." Envision the future of race based on current trends (use readings from *Dark Matter* or extrapolate).

Week Fourteen:

4/25: **Monday:** *How Long 'til Black Future Month?*

Wednesday: "Selkie Stories Are for Losers," Sophia Samatar

(<http://strangehorizons.com/fiction/selkie-stories-are-for-losers/>); "Mpendulo: The Answer," Nosipho Dumisa (<https://slate.com/technology/2019/02/mpendulo-the-answer-nosipho-dumisa-short-story.html>); *How Long 'til Black Future Month?*

Friday: *How Long 'til Black Future Month?*

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Week Fifteen:

Monday: 5/2: *How Long 'til Black Future Month?*

Wednesday: *How Long 'til Black Future Month?* **Short writing assignment due by 5pm.**