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Black Culture In A "Post-Soul" Era (ENGL 068) Syllabus

Anthony S. Foy

Swarthmore College, afoy1@swarthmore.edu

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Recommended Citation

Anthony S. Foy. (2019). "Black Culture In A "Post-Soul" Era (ENGL 068) Syllabus". *Black Culture In A "Post-Soul" Era*. DOI: 10.24968/2476-2458.dhgrants.20

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BLACK CULTURE IN A 'POST-SOUL' ERA (ENGL 68)

Spring 2019

Friday, 2–5 pm

LPAC 201

Dr. Anthony S. Foy

e-mail: *afoy1@swarthmore.edu*

phone: (690) 6867

office: *LPAC 207*

hours: *By appointment*

Generations of African American writers, artists, and intellectuals have emerged since the 1960s to reconsider the meaning of Blackness in the wake of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements that preceded them. Supported by historical and critical studies, we will examine how Black novelists, playwrights, and poets in the 'post-soul' era have dealt with a complex of shifting, but interconnected, concerns, including the imperatives of racial representation in a society increasingly driven by mass consumption and global media, the contentious discourses of sexual politics, and the polarization of classes within Black America. *This course counts toward an academic program in Black Studies.*

TEXTS

All of the following texts are required

Ntozake Shange, *for colored girls...* (1975)

Nelson George, *Post-Soul Nation* (2004)

George C. Wolfe, *The Colored Museum* (1986)

Andrea Lee, *Sarah Phillips* (1984)

Danzy Senna, *Caucasia* (1999)

Percival Everett, *I Am Not Sidney Poitier* (2009)

Lynn Nottage, *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* (2013)

Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (2014)

Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah, *Friday Black* (2018)

Rivers Solomon, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* (2017)

EDITIONS

(Scribner, 1997)

(Penguin, 2005)

(Grove, 1988)

(Northeastern, 1993)

(Riverhead, 1999)

(Graywolf, 2009)

(TCG, 2013)

(Graywolf, 2014)

(Mariner, 2018)

(Akashic, 2017)

*PLUS additional readings, which I will distribute to you directly

CONTRACT GRADING

Consider this a contract: If you satisfy these requirements, then you are guaranteed a B in this course.

You must attend class promptly and regularly, without missing more than one meeting. (I will excuse absences *only* with the endorsement of your dean.)

You must participate productively and consistently in all in-class discussions, exercises, and activities.

You must satisfy criteria and meet deadlines for all assignments, as well as copyedit your work to ensure that it conforms to the conventions of standard, formal English.

Indeed, you must complete all training, exercises, and assignments for the major Wikipedia project each week according to our schedule.

You must revise and resubmit your papers as necessary.

In sum, you must submit all work on time, you must participate in class in good faith, and you must make a conscientious effort to engage our course material as a reader, writer, speaker, listener, and colleague.

This does not mean, however, that all students will receive a B simply for being registered and warming a chair every so often. You will receive a B *only* if you satisfy this 'contract'; if you don't, you won't.

If you must complete all assigned work according to this contract in order to earn a B, **then you must do all assigned work well in order to earn an A.** The distinction here is a matter of *quality*, and exceptional work will consist of the following:

During in-class discussions and activities, your participation should demonstrate your careful preparation for class, a thorough command of all assigned readings, and an ability to synthesize and express complex ideas. You should also treat the contributions of your peers both seriously and charitably.

Like your work in class, all of your written work should move beyond obvious claims to venture complex ideas about the assigned readings (including the secondary reading). In general, I will expect your written work for the course to make an argument that demonstrates your command of your literary text(s), as well as our secondary readings. Your written work should also shine with clean and sophisticated prose.

Your Wikipedia entry should be thorough and well-researched, exemplifying the encyclopedia's standards for its articles.

When considering the quality of your work, I don't expect it to be *perfect*. Rather, I am most interested in the quality of your thought and your *engagement* with your text(s), even if your arguments are not utterly tidy.

I have adopted this approach to undercut the pressures associated with conventional grades. When responding to your writing, I will focus primarily on providing you with feedback on the various elements of your work (command of your material, effectiveness of your argument, strength of your prose, etc.). Consequently, I will only use the following marks to accompany my comments on your assignments throughout the semester:

- ✓ [check]: *The most common mark*, meaning that your work satisfies the assignment.
- ✓+ [check plus]: Nice work!
- ✓- [check minus]: Your work does not quite satisfy the assignment.
- R: Please revise, according to my feedback, to satisfy the assignment.

BLACK CULTURE IN A 'POST-SOUL' ERA' (ENGL 68)

COURSEWORK

Your coursework will consist of a Wikipedia entry, a series of short critique papers, and a midterm paper. If you choose to do so, you are welcome to write a final paper, but this assignment is optional.

• **Wikipedia Article**

Working in pairs, you will write (or substantially revise) a Wikipedia article on a topic relevant to African American literature and culture from the 1970s to the present. Although you will choose your own topic, I will provide you with guidance as you make your decision. In addition, you will each write a short reflection about your experience once you complete this assignment at the end of the semester.

This will be your major project for the semester, and it will involve a complex timeline of weekly training, exercises, discussion, and peer review. You will work through the course dashboard, and I will provide you all with the link to our dashboard directly.

Finally, Nabil Kashyap, Librarian for Digital Initiatives and Scholarship and subject specialist in English Literature, will provide you with additional training and invaluable support as you research, contemplate, and write throughout the semester.

• **Critiques**

Beginning in the third week of the semester, you will each present a brief weekly critique paper (2-3 pages each), which you will read aloud to the class; in total, you will write three critiques for the course. You must provide each member of the class (including me) with a hard copy of your weekly critique, which will serve as the basis for our discussion that day. According to the schedule in the syllabus, you will read your critique aloud in class in the following groups:

Group A:

Group B:

Group C:

You should consider these critiques an extension of your weekly preparation for class. Rather than summarizing the story or declaring your opinion about it, your critique should identify a key idea or theme and explain its significance, trace interesting patterns in the text, connect or contrast our reading to a text we've already discussed, or consider the usefulness of the secondary reading. In short, your critiques should venture and test ideas.

• **Midterm Paper**

For your midterm paper, you will write an original essay (no fewer than 4 full pages) based on a prompt I will provide you.

• **Final Paper** (optional)

At the end of the semester, you will have five days to produce an original paper (no fewer than 8 full pages) based on a prompt I will provide you. This is not an extra credit assignment, but it will give those of you who are interested in earning higher than a B in the course an opportunity to boost your grade.

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

• Participation & Attendance

I will conduct this course like a seminar. Because I will grade you on both the consistency and quality of your participation, you should prepare carefully by reading all assigned texts and then reflecting on them before class; you should also engage thoughtfully with these texts—and each other—during our meetings.

Your prompt attendance is mandatory. Because we meet just once per week, your grade will suffer for more than one unexcused absence. I will only excuse an absence (regardless of the cause) with the endorsement of a dean.

I expect your full attention during class. For this reason, *you are not permitted to use phones, laptops, or tablets during class*, unless your electronic device is expressly required to accommodate a disability or we are specifically working on our Wikipedia assignment. (For an eloquent pedagogical defense of such a prohibition, see Darren Rosenblum's recent column in the *New York Times*, 'Leave Your Laptops at the Door to My Classroom.')

Before class begins, please silence and store all devices to ensure that you do not disrupt class, embarrass yourself, or annoy me.

• Plagiarism

I expect you to undertake your work in this course with the highest integrity and honor, and I will not tolerate plagiarism (i.e. the use of others' words as if they are your own, regardless of whether this is the result of your intent, inexperience, or ignorance).

I will submit any suspected case of academic dishonesty for review by the College Judiciary Committee.

In order to avoid failure in this course, suspension, or expulsion, see to it that all submitted work is wholly your own; also, see to it that you cite accurately and consistently all sources (including those found on the internet) that you have consulted, referenced, and quoted in your papers. For Swarthmore's policies regarding academic dishonesty, please refer to the College bulletin.

For guidelines on proper citation, start here:

<http://www.swarthmore.edu/academics/english-literature/how-to-cite-sources.xml>

• Support for Students with Disabilities

If you believe you need accommodations for a disability or a chronic medical condition, please contact Student Disability Services via e-mail (studentdisabilityservices@swarthmore.edu) to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs. As appropriate, the office will provide a formal 'Accommodations Letter' to students with documented disabilities or medical conditions. Accommodations are not retroactive and they require early planning, so please contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. For details about the accommodations process, [visit the Student Disability Services website](#). You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs, but all disability-related accommodations must be arranged, in advance, through Student Disability Services.

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COURSE SCHEDULE

This course involves substantial reading that demands your full attention so you should spread all required reading over the week.

Your Wikipedia project also requires you to complete small assignments every week in order to stay on pace; you should complete these by Wed. each week.

I

1/25 Introduction

II

1/30 (Wed.) *Wikipedia:*

- Read *Editing Wikipedia* booklet (1–5) & *Evaluating Wikipedia* booklet.
- Complete week's training ('Wikipedia Policies' and 'Sandboxes, Talk Pages, and Watchlists').
- Create your Wikipedia account.

2/1

- * LeRoi Jones, *The Dutchman* (1964)
- * L Neal, 'And Shine Swam On' (1968)
- * A Gayle, 'Cultural Strangulation: Black Literature and the White Aesthetic' (1971)
- * H Fuller, 'Towards a Black Aesthetic' (1971)
- * AA Ongiri, "We Waitin' on You," from *Spectacular Blackness* (2010)

III

2/6 (Wed.) *Wikipedia:*

- Complete the week's training & exercise (on evaluating articles, etc.).

2/8

- Ntozake Shange, *for colored girls who have considered suicide...* (1975)
- * M Wallace, from *Invisibility Blues* (1990)
- * A Lorde, 'Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference' (1984), from *Sister Outsider*

CRITIQUE: GROUP A¹

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IV

2/13 (Wed.)

Wikipedia:

- Complete the week's exercise ('Choose your topic').
- After consulting with your partner, choose your article topic.
- Read the subject guide most pertinent to your topic.

2/15

Nelson George, *Post-Soul Nation* (2004)

* N George, 'Introduction' and 'Introduction to the New Edition,' from *Buppies, B-Boys, Baps & Bobos* (2001)

* G Tate, 'Cult-Nats Meet Freaky-Deke' (1986), from *Flyboy in the Buttermilk*

* T Ellis, 'New Black Aesthetic' (1989)

* BD Ashe, 'Theorizing the Post-Soul Aesthetic' (2007)

CRITIQUE: GROUP B¹

V

2/20 (Wed.)

Wikipedia:

- Complete the week's training and exercise ('citations').

2/22

George C. Wolfe, *Colored Museum* (1986)

* A Lorde, 'Learning from the 60s' (1982), from *Sister Outsider*

* b hooks, 'Postmodern Blackness,' from *Yearning* (1990)

* SL Parks, 'An Equation for Black People Onstage' (1994), from *The America Play*

CRITIQUE: GROUP C¹

VI

2/25 (Mon.)

Midterm paper DUE by 4 pm

2/27 (Wed.)

Wikipedia:

- Complete the week's training ('Plagiarism' and 'Drafting').
- Start drafting your article.

3/1

Andrea Lee, *Sarah Phillips* (1984)

CRITIQUE: GROUP A²

VII

3/6 (Wed.)

Wikipedia:

- Peer review two articles.

3/8

Danzy Senna, *Caucasia* (1999)

CRITIQUE: GROUP B²

SPRING BREAK

VIII

- 3/20 (Wed.) *Wikipedia:*
- Read *Editing Wikipedia* (12–14).
 - Respond to your peer review and revise.
- 3/22 Percival Everett, *I Am Not Sidney Poitier* (2009)
CRITIQUE: GROUP C²

IX

- 3/27 (Wed.) *Wikipedia:*
- Complete the week's training ('Moving group work live').
 - Move your revised article draft to Wikipedia's 'mainspace.'
- 3/29 Lynn Nottage, *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* (2013)
CRITIQUE: GROUP A³

X

- 4/3 (Wed.) *Wikipedia:*
- Complete the week's training ('Contributing images') and exercise.
 - Continue improving your article.
- 4/5 Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (2014)
* C Rankine, 'The Condition of Black Life Is One of Mourning,' *New York Times* (22 June 2015)
* C Rankine, 'The Meaning of Serena Williams,' *New York Times* (25 August 2015)
CRITIQUE: GROUP B³

XI

- 4/10 (Wed.) *Wikipedia:*
- Polish your work.
- 4/12 Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah, *Friday Black* (2018)
CRITIQUE: GROUP C³

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XII

4/17

Wikipedia:

- Finalize your article.
- Write reflection essay (DUE 4/17)

4/19

Rivers Solomon, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* (2017) [to 222]

* M Dery, 'Black to the Future' (1994)

CRITIQUE: OPEN

XIII

4/24 (Wed.)

Wikipedia:

- Complete your article!

4/26

Solomon, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* [222–349]

XIV

5/3

Conclusion

F

5/15 (Wed.)

Final Exam DUE by 4 pm (optional)