

Syllabus

English 342: Studies in Literary Genres African American Speculative Fiction

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Since the early twentieth century, images of and references to space, science, and technology have permeated much African-American cultural production. Black cultural workers have transformed science fiction—traditionally a pulp genre directed to and consumed by white, male adolescents—into a politicized space for the examination of fictions of science. This course explores twentieth- and twenty-first-century black science fiction and fantasy in relation to the history of the African diaspora and theories of race, gender, and sexuality. In addition, we will study the concept of Afrofuturism and the relationship of African Americans to discourses of modernity, reason, and (post)humanism. Above all, this course examines black speculative fiction as a viable space for the articulation of oppositional histories and alternative epistemologies and ontologies in and of the New World.

Required Texts

- Sutton Griggs: *Imperium in Imperio* (1899)
- Pauline E. Hopkins: *Of One Blood, or the Hidden Self* (1902)
- George Schuyler: *Black No More* (1931)
- Samuel Delany, *Nova* (1968)
- Octavia Butler, *Dawn* (1987)
- Selected readings, both creative and critical (C)

Assignments & Grading

- **PARTICIPATION (10%)**: To earn full participation credit, students must attend class regularly and demonstrate concrete and consistent engagement with the reading material and our discussion of it in class. This means that you must also complete most (if not all) of any in-class work we do, including any **small group exercises** I assign -- and I tend to assign several throughout the quarter. Please note that work done during class time cannot be made up, not even for partial credit. Participation also involves contributing regularly to classroom discussion.
- **CRITICAL SUMMARIES (40%)**: A large portion of your grade will depend on your ability to read, summarize, and respond to a piece of literary criticism, which is the mode of writing unique to the discipline of literary studies. These critical summaries will focus on an actual piece of literary criticism, including either a published scholarly article or an essay from an edited collection of scholarly essays devoted to a particular topic. Your critical summaries must demonstrate a basic understanding of the article/essay, including its main argument or thesis and its general methodological approach (which theoretical and critical modes of thinking it draws from to analyze the text). Critical summaries will be due in class and must be typed, polished, and submitted at the beginning of class.

- **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (10%):** Students are required to post discussion each week - typically on a Wednesday or Friday. Questions are to be posted in the appropriate Discussion Forum in Canvas (C) the night prior to class -- or very early the morning of class. Questions posted late will not receive full credit.
- **GROUP PRESENTATIONS (10%):** On each day that Critical Summaries are due, a small group of students will lead discussion for the day by preparing individual statements (in response to the reading) and a "Questions to Consider" for the entire class (again, questions must be in response to the day's reading).
- **FINAL EXAM (30%):** The final for this class will be a take-home exam. On the last day of classes, I will distribute the exam, which will consist of a set of writing prompts, from which you will select three (3) to respond to in essay form.