AMST 418A
Cultural Themes in America: African-American Visual and Material Culture

Weekly Seminar
W 4:00-6:40      Hornbake 0123

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Course Description

Moving from the shores of Africa to the birth of African American culture to the study of African diasporic cultural influences, this class will explore the active role of visual and material culture in the shaping and defining of identity. Our goal is to develop visual literacy as we discover the historical uses of the arts in service of the struggles for freedom and equality. Visual art, material culture, politics, popular culture, music, literature, philosophy, theater, film, poetry, and anthropology will shape the inquiry through which we examine both the diasporic dimensions of African American aesthetics and its economic exploitation in the service of global capitalism. Understanding the multi-layered impact of African American history and cultural influences on a personal, societal, and global scale will be the mission of this class.

Course Goals

By the conclusion of this class, the student will be able to:

1. Analyze the meaning conveyed through images and material culture.
2. Identify and discuss prominent people who shaped African American cultural history.
3. Understand the fluidity and internal/external factors in the construction of racial identity.
4. Identify, introduce, use, and analyze appropriate visual and other cultural forms in your scholarship.
5. Incorporate visual sources into historical and other forms of documentation.
6. Discuss the visual and cultural messages conveyed through the media.
7. Define the elements of culture and distinguish among the various types and forms of cultural production.
8. Explain the uses of visual and material art as social commentary and social protest.
10. Understand the legal dimensions of racialized coercion, violence, and oppression.
11. Articulate the relevance of the past for the present.
Course Materials


Assignments

1) Image Analysis 10% Due September 26
Utilizing the steps outlined in Elspeth Brown’s article, “Reading the Visual Record” and the 3 chapters from “Signs of Life in the U.S.A.,” students will write a 3-4 page analysis of a visual image, which the instructor will provide. The goal of this assignment is to provide tools that enhance students’ ability to read images critically.

2) Class Presentation and Written Analysis 20%
Each week two students will deliver a 10 minute class presentation highlighting important themes, images, ideas, and concepts from the class. One week after you make your presentation, you will hand in a minimum of a 1000 word written paper to accompany your presentation, demonstrate your mastery of the subject matter, and incorporate any relevant class discussion.

Your class presentation should reflect themes and ideas that drew you to this course. The presentation can be a visual, material culture, photographic, film, music, or electronic production, which draws from any aspect of the course and should have a relevant cultural component. You presentation should demonstrate mastery of themes associated with the study of black culture that relate to discussion topics throughout the semester. You may use this project to introduce a visual or cultural element into assignments for other classes. You may use black cultural venues such as the MLK Jr. Memorial, the Anacostia Museum, the Frederick Douglass home or the Great Blacks in Wax Museum or choose other sites. You may choose to look at cultural venues, public art or sculpture and explain how the history and meaning relate to the themes of the course. Your work may draw inspiration from sports, music, toys, video games, rap and hip hop, political cartoons or other forms of art or historical sources, postage stamps, archaeological sites, an exhibition, or a play or musical experience, for example. You may draw inspiration from family photos or an album cover. If you prefer, you may choose current topics in the news, popular songs or lyrics that contain historical or cultural references and develop a music-based presentation of historical themes. Your final presentation is expected to have a strong visual component. You should have a working knowledge of PowerPoint or be able to formulate an electronic presentation in a format appropriate to the class.

Due weekly, according to your assigned week.
Oral presentation is 10% of your grade, peer grading.
Due one week after your presentation.
Written paper with images-10% of your grade. Images can be submitted electronically.
Response paper 15%
On October 3, Ty Gray-El will be a guest speaker and give a narrative performance, “The Ancestors Remember.” Write a 4-page response paper that includes a discussion of what Gray’s performance evoked for you, what did you learn and how does his performance apply to the themes of the course.

Response paper 15%
On October 31, the class will attend African American Art Since 1950 at the David Driskell Center in Cole Student Activities Center. Write a 4-page response paper that discusses the relevant components of the exhibit in terms of how these exhibitions exemplify, extend and/or challenge course themes, arguments, and assumptions.

Class Participation 15%
Class participation is extremely important to the success of this class. Students should be prepared to contribute substantive discussion of visual sources, the readings, film assignments, and current events that relate to class materials. Students are expected to contribute to one another and provide thoughtful feedback. Each week, students will be responsible for writing a summation of the major themes of the weekly readings, and assignments and each student responsible for that week’s readings will post three questions in Blackboard that will be discussed in class. In the event that you must miss class, your on-line participation is required.

Midterm Exam 25% of your grade. The test will be a factual based examination.

Academic Integrity
The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council.

This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. To further exhibit your commitment to academic integrity, remember to sign the Honor Pledge on all examinations and assignments:

"I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this examination (assignment)."

In the event of academic dishonesty, I will report the incident to the University and all University procedures and grading guidelines will apply.

Late Assignments
The instructor does not accept late assignments. A grade of 0% will be entered for each assignment missed. If you are absent from class when an assignment is due, you may submit your work electronically in Blackboard by midnight of the due date.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Readings/Assignment(s)</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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| Week 1| Ways of Seeing       | Introduction and Discussion  
Please post a brief bio on the Discussion Board in Blackboard  
The Danger of a Single Story: Chiamanda Adichie  
| Week 2| Understanding Images | “African-American Women’s Quilting: A Framework for Conceptualizing and Teaching African American Women’s History” by Elsa Barkley Brown, pp. 921-929 (pdf in Blackboard) or j-stor  
| Week 3| Why Black History?   | “The Negro Digs Up His Past” (in Blackboard)  
*Life Upon These Shores*, pp. 3-23 and pp. 49-51,  
*The Birth of African American Culture*, pp. vii-41  
**Film**: *Sankofa* PN 1997.S 1716 1993 | Sept 12, 2012 |
| Week 4| From the Shores of Africa | **Guest lecturer: Dr. Joshua Woodfork, Race and Identity**  
*Life Upon These Shores*, pp. 27-45 and 52-70  
*Birth of African American Culture*, 42-84, or pdf in Blackboard or  
**Film**: Race the Power of an Illusion (in class) | Sept 19, 2012 |
| Week 5| From the Shores of Africa | **Image Analysis Assignment Due**  
*Life Upon These Shores*, pp. 73-115  
| Week 6| Slavery and Freedom  | **Ty Gray-El narrative performance, “Ancestors Remembered”**  
*Life Upon These Shores*, pp. 119-157  
My Escape from Slavery, Frederick Douglass  
| Week 7 | Slavery and Freedom | **MIDTERM EXAM**  
In class lecture | Oct 10, 2012 |
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| Week 8 | Slavery, Emancipation, the Civil War | *Life Upon These Shores*, pp. 157-180  
Sherman’s Field Order # 15 [http://www.history.umd.edu/Freedmen/sfo15.htm](http://www.history.umd.edu/Freedmen/sfo15.htm)  
| Week 9 | Reconstruction, Jim Crow | *Life Upon These Shores*, pp. 183-222  
Lynching, movie, [http://withoutsanctuary.org/movie1.html](http://withoutsanctuary.org/movie1.html)  
Jim Crow Museum, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQNQvyuGt0o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQNQvyuGt0o)  
**Film:** Ethnic Notions, E184.A1 E83 2004 | Oct 24, 2012 |
| Week 10 | Education | *Life Upon These Shores*, pp. 225-264  
“A Girl Like Me” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWyI77Yh1Gg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWyI77Yh1Gg)  
Jane Elliot Eye Experiment (optional) [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/divided/etc/view.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/divided/etc/view.html)  
**Class visit to David Driskell Center** | Oct 31, 2012 |
| Week 11 | Jim Crow | *Life Upon These Shores*, pp. 265-293  
“Harlem Renaissance 1919-1940” (Blackboard) | Nov. 7, 2012 |
| Week 12 | WW I and a Growing Authority | *Life Upon These Shores*, pp. 297-342  
“The Black Arts Movement and Hip Hop” (J-Stor)  
**Film: A Question of Color, E185.625 .Q47 1992**  
**Response Papers Due** | Nov 14, 2012 |
| Week 13 | | **No class  Thanksgiving Holiday**  
**Film:** “Eyes on the Prize”: Episode 5: Mississippi: Is This America? (1962-1964), E185.61 .E94 1999 no.5 | Nov. 21, 2012 |
| Week 14 | WW II, Civil Rights Era | *Life Upon These Shores*, pp. 345-403  
“The Possessive Investment in Whiteness” George Lipsitz  (Blackboard) or J-Stor, pp. 369-387  
[http://www.jstor.org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/stable/2713291?seq=1&Search=yes&term=george&term=lipsitz&list=hide&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dgeorge%2Blipsitz%26x%3D0%26y%3D0%26v%3D0%26w%3D0%26n%3Don&item=14&ttl=1249&resultsServiceName=null](http://www.jstor.org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/stable/2713291?seq=1&Search=yes&term=george&term=lipsitz&list=hide&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3Dgeorge%2Blipsitz%26x%3D0%26y%3D0%26v%3D0%26w%3D0%26n%3Don&item=14&ttl=1249&resultsServiceName=null)  
Introduction to *The New Jim Crow* (Blackboard)  
Foreclosures and race  
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| Week 15 | White Privilege | *Life Upon These Shores*, pp. 407-442  
“Tim Wise (Man That Goes In On White Folks For Their Ignorance): The Pathology of Privilege, Racism, White Denial & the Costs of Inequality”  
“White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”  
By Peggy McIntosh  
| Week 16 | Final Exams | Dec 13-19, 2012 |