

ENGLISH 433G: THE THEORIES AND POETICS OF BLACK STUDIES

Time: Tuesday & Thursday 9:30–10:45 a.m.
 Classroom: Griffin
 Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 11:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.
 Office: Griffin 250

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COURSE OVERVIEW

This seminar will serve as a site for sustained engagement with the theories and poetics of black studies, a discipline invested in tracing blackness and anti-blackness across the African diaspora in order to imagine a means of radical abolition and black liberation. In this course, we'll investigate the politics and aesthetics of some of the major theoretical texts in black studies published across the last decade, sketching the evolution of key questions, the formation of new archives, and the invention of fresh methods and styles for scholarly work in the field. Through discussion of such texts as Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019), Fred Moten's *consent not to be a single being* trilogy (2017–18), Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake* (2016), and Alex Weheliye's *Habeas Viscus* (2014), we'll consider the past, present, and future of black studies as a discipline and an artform. As a result, this seminar will introduce a variety of methodological approaches to the field of black studies, including those from Afro-pessimism, assemblage theory, biopolitical theory, black feminism, black Marxism, critical race theory, and queer of color critique.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Hartman, Saidiya. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*. New York: Norton, 2019. Print. ISBN: 9780393285673.

Moten, Fred. *Stolen Life*. Durham: Duke UP, 2018. Print. ISBN: 9780822370581.

Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke UP, 2016. ISBN: 9780822362944.

Weheliye, Alexander G. *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Durham: Duke UP, 2014. Print. ISBN: 9780822357018.

COURSE COMPONENTS

Reading Quizzes: The texts I've chosen for this semester will be both complex and challenging. I require that you read these texts carefully in order to be prepared to contribute to class discussion and to succeed on course assignments. I'll randomly check your attendance in class and reading comprehension of the assigned material in the form of reading quizzes given at five unannounced points across the course of the semester. Reading quizzes cannot be made up at a later date.

Research Essay Presentation: You'll complete a presentation aimed at developing your confidence in speaking about your academic work. During our final class, you'll briefly present the argument of your research essay to the class. You may wish to distribute a handout or use the classroom's multimedia equipment, and you should plan to speak and field questions for roughly five minutes.

Writing: You'll undertake a variety of writing assignments over the course of the term aimed at developing your skills in academic writing. Please use Modern Language Association (MLA) guidelines and submit written assignments in hard copy. A prompt for each assignment will be distributed two weeks in advance of its due date.

Close Readings: You'll complete two short writing assignments of 500 to 750 words aimed at developing your skills of close reading theoretical texts and turning observations into arguments.

Abstract and Annotated Bibliography: You'll write a short abstract of roughly 250 words that identifies your research question (and potentially your tentative answer to that question), the critical conversation to which you're responding, and the stakes/implications of your project. You'll also compile an annotated bibliography with eight source entries of roughly 150 words each. For each source, list a complete citation as well as a summary of the source's argument, how its argument relates to your other sources' arguments, and how you plan to position your argument in response.

Research Essay: You'll submit a roughly 3,000- to 3,500-word research essay that engages one of the theoretical texts on our syllabus and makes an argument that responds to a critical conversation within black studies. Your previous assignments may serve as a foundation for this essay.

GRADE BREAKDOWN

Reading Quizzes	15%
Research Essay Presentation	10%
Close Readings	30%
Abstract and Annotated Bibliography	15%
Research Essay	30%

GRADE SCALE

- A: 100%–90%
- B: 89%–80%
- C: 79%–70%
- D: 69%–60%
- F: 59%–0%

While individual assignments may receive half letter grades (pluses or minuses), final grades are calculated according to the above scale.

COURSE POLICIES

Cancellations/Weather: Please check your email regularly in case of class cancellations. If class is canceled, I will send alternate directions via email.

Disabilities: I am committed to ensuring that students have access to the conditions that they need to

succeed in my course. If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, please contact me as well as the Office of Disability Services as soon as possible. More information can be found at <https://disability.louisiana.edu>.

Late Assignments: I don't generally accept late assignments. That being said, life happens. If you have a situation, please contact me as soon as possible so that we can make alternate arrangements.

Participation/Class Behavior: This course will be conducted in a seminar style, meaning that participation from each student will be vital to everyone's success. Class discussion is a collective enterprise from which we all grow and from which we individually benefit on class assignments, so I expect that you will strive to be on time to and present in class, meaningfully contribute to our communal inquires and discussions, comport yourself with appropriate behavior and mutual respect for your classmates, and come to class with the assigned materials and having done the assigned reading. If electronic devices are fundamental to your learning process, please feel free to use them in seminar. That being said, please be mindful of your ability to distract yourself and others when using electronics for other purposes during class time.

Plagiarism: Because academic writing purports to create new knowledge, plagiarism is considered a serious ethical violation. For this reason, plagiarism of any kind will result in, at a minimum, a failing grade for the assignment, and, at a maximum, dismissal from the University. The University's official definition of plagiarism is as follows: "Plagiarism is a specific type of cheating. It occurs when a student claims originality for the ideas or words of another person, when the student presents as a new and original idea or product anything which in fact is derived from an existing work, or when the student makes use of any work or production already created by someone else without giving credit to the source. In short, plagiarism is the use of unacknowledged materials in the preparation of assignments." If you have any questions or concerns about plagiarism, please contact me.

Writing Center: The Writing Center employs tutors who can help students with their writing at any stage of the process—from brainstorming to polishing their final drafts. This service is free, and I recommend it for even the most confident writers. More information can be found at <http://english.louisiana.edu/about-us/publications-centers/writing-center>.

COURSE SCHEDULE

DATE	READINGS	DEADLINES
Tuesday 8/27	Syllabus and Weheliye, <i>Habeas Viscus</i> (1–32)	
Thursday 8/29	Weheliye, <i>Habeas Viscus</i> (33–52)	
Tuesday 9/3	Weheliye, <i>Habeas Viscus</i> (53–88)	
Thursday 9/5	Weheliye, <i>Habeas Viscus</i> (89–124)	
Tuesday 9/10	Weheliye, <i>Habeas Viscus</i> (125–38) and Sharpe, <i>In the Wake</i> (1–23)	
Thursday 9/12	Sharpe, <i>In the Wake</i> (24–67)	
Tuesday 9/17	Sharpe, <i>In the Wake</i> (68–101)	
Thursday 9/19	Sharpe, <i>In the Wake</i> (102–34)	Close Reading #1
Tuesday 9/24	Moten, <i>Stolen Life</i> (ix–xii, 1–40)	
Thursday 9/26	Moten, <i>Stolen Life</i> (40–71)	
Tuesday 10/1	Moten, <i>Stolen Life</i> (72–114)	

Tuesday 10/8	Moten, <i>Stolen Life</i> (115–51)	
Thursday 10/10	Moten, <i>Stolen Life</i> (152–82)	
Tuesday 10/15	Moten, <i>Stolen Life</i> (183–212)	
Thursday 10/17	Moten, <i>Stolen Life</i> (213–36)	Abstract and Annotated Bibliography
Tuesday 10/22	Moten, <i>Stolen Life</i> (237–67)	
Thursday 10/24	Hartman, <i>Wayward Lives</i> (xiii–xxi, 1–42)	
Tuesday 10/29	Hartman, <i>Wayward Lives</i> (43–79)	
Thursday 10/31	Hartman, <i>Wayward Lives</i> (80–120)	
Tuesday 11/5	Hartman, <i>Wayward Lives</i> (122–57)	
Thursday 11/7	No class meeting	
Tuesday 11/12	Hartman, <i>Wayward Lives</i> (159–91)	Close Reading #2
Thursday 11/14	Hartman, <i>Wayward Lives</i> (192–225)	
Tuesday 11/19	Hartman, <i>Wayward Lives</i> (227–61)	
Thursday 11/21	Hartman, <i>Wayward Lives</i> (263–94)	
Tuesday 11/26	Hartman, <i>Wayward Lives</i> (296–349)	
Tuesday 12/3		Research Essay Presentation
Thursday 12/5	No class meeting	
Monday 12/9 by 8 p.m.		Research Essay