

# Black Popular Culture

CES 336, Section 1

Fall 2014, 3 Credit Hours

Tuesday, Thursday @ 10:30AM – 11:50AM, CUE 219

Michael Johnson Jr., Ph.D.

Office: Wilson-Short 107A

Office Hours: 4:00 – 5:00pm Tuesday/Thursdays and by appointment

Email: [mjohnso9@wsu.edu](mailto:mjohnso9@wsu.edu)

## Course Description

This course is a post-civil rights multidisciplinary examination of contemporary African American issues of identity, social justice, cultural expression, film, music, art, the media, and general community issues and dynamics. Key areas of focus include an emphasis on race, class, gender and political discourse. This course will critically examine the role of the media in enabling, facilitating, or challenging the social constructions of “Blackness.” Paying particular attention to images of race, culture and gender, this course will examine historical and contemporary representations of women and men of African diaspora descent in the various mediums that serve to construct what is known as “popular culture” (television, cinema, advertising, music, fashion, etc.). We will explore the ways these cultural exemplars influence basic assumptions about social roles, expectations, and “norms” for women and men who define themselves as of African descent (and those for whom such designations are involuntarily made). Finally, and most importantly, students will be encouraged to develop a critical and political consciousness about the complex issues of “Black” identity, their own participation in embracing and/or resisting “Black” representations and the impact of “Black” popular culture on their lived experiences. *Please Note: Your continued enrollment beyond the first week of class affirms your willingness to abide by the conditions set forth in this document.*

## Student Learning Outcomes

- Learn and know basic concepts, methods and analyses of Comparative Ethnic Studies
- Conduct critical analyses of significant post-civil rights era sociocultural events, historical figures and structural hierarchies of power relevant to the development of “Black” identities
- Develop and successfully apply racial identity development and theory
- Define and articulate the social justice principles endorsed by hegemonic “Black” society
- Examine issues related to music and entertainment as it relates to “Black” popular culture

## Required Text(s)

Forman, Murray; Neal, Mark Anthony. *That’s The Joint! The Hip Hop Studies Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Wisniewski, K.A. *The Comedy of Dave Chappelle: Critical Essays*, McFarland (2009)

Discussion Board Posts	100 Points		
Research Paper	100 Points		
Presentation	100 Points		
Participation	100 Points	Total:	400 Points

## Course Policies

**Academic Etiquette:** Class will begin promptly at 10:30AM. Arriving late or leaving early is not acceptable. Your participation in this course is predicated on principles of reciprocal respect, tact, courtesy, and professionalism. I require your attention and tolerance for a diversity of voices expressed in class (especially voices espousing unpopular views) likewise, disruptive behavior (like arriving late, leaving early, talking during lecture, reading the newspaper, talking during films/presentations/guest lectures, sleeping, making hostile comments, *texting*, etc.) will not be tolerated. In order for us to learn from each other, we have to allow each other to make mistakes and to offer unpopular positions for debate. Failure to adhere to these principles of academic etiquette will result in students being asked to leave the class, and *such requests will count as an absence for the purposes of attendance.*

**Communication:** I encourage students to be in close contact with me and I'm happy to meet with students during office hours to discuss anything that they'd like to talk about, but especially as it relates to their coursework and their academic life at the institution. I'm happy to help as much as I can, provided that students *come prepared* to our meetings. Additionally, I'm happy to sign Junior Portfolio documents, so long that students bring their originally graded papers with them for my evaluation. Rarely do I write recommendations, but it never hurts to ask and if you've performed exceptionally well in class I will strongly consider such requests!! Email is the most convenient way to communicate with me and I attempt to answer inquiries within 24 hours. However thanks to past abuses, I have set a limit on certain forms of communication. In particular, the following types of email will not be answered:

1. The answer to your question can be found within the syllabus
2. You ask me "what did I miss" for a class for which you were absent
3. You're asking for a grade on an assignment
4. You're attempting to argue for a better grade; see me during office hours
5. You're emailing me and 24 hours hasn't passed yet
6. Your email doesn't include a salutation, or your class & number in the subject line
7. Your email's tone is rude, disrespectful, demanding, insulting or incomprehensible
8. Your email includes attachments of assignments without advanced permission

**Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices:** Please turn off your cell phones, mp3 players, and other electronic devices *before* entering the classroom! Do *not* wear headphones, earbuds, etc. in the classroom. If your device goes off more than once during the semester, or I discover you texting in class, you may be asked to either surrender your device or leave class – it's disrespectful for both me and your peers. Not only are such devices disruptive, but very often their use during class can be abused. Students are both allowed and encouraged to use laptops and/or tablets judiciously – meaning if you're caught doing anything other than assigned work, taking notes, etc. your participation grade will suffer and this privilege may be denied you for the rest of the semester.

**Academic Integrity:** In all instances, you must do your own work. Please read *WSU's Academic Integrity Policy*. Academic misconduct may result in a grade of "F" for the assignment in question, or a grade of "F" for the entire course, reporting to the Office of student conduct, or any combination thereof - at my sole discretion. In such circumstances, I will always first discuss the situation with you first and then with the Chair of department.

**Disability Accommodation:** Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please visit the Access Center (Washington Building 217) to schedule an appointment with an Access Advisor. All accommodations **MUST** be approved through the Access Center.

**Campus Safety Plan/Emergency Information:** In the interest of campus safety and emergency procedures, please become familiar with the information available on the following websites: (1) <http://safetyplan.wsu.edu> (Campus Safety Plan); <http://oem.wsu.edu/emergencies> (Emergency Management Plan); and (3) <http://alert.wsu.edu> (WSU Alert Site).

## Course Requirements

**Attendance and Participation:** Attendance is mandatory and will be checked. You are allowed **3 absences, period**. Missing a 4<sup>th</sup> class will result in the reduction of your final grade by one letter (e.g. A- reduced to a B-). On the **5<sup>th</sup> absence** you will receive an "F" grade in the course. Only approved and documented "sponsored university events" will be exempted from this rule<sup>1</sup>. You can't obviously participate if you're not present so is to your benefit to be in class and on time. You should also note that I construe "present" to mean both physical and active mental engagement, so no zoning out! *Because you have enrolled in this course I assume that you are interested in the material and want to be here.* You are expected to come to class having completed all of the readings assigned for that day. It is also to your advantage to listen closely to lecture material and to take notes during lectures and films.

**Coursework Expectations:** 25% for Discussion board posts and 25% participation constitutes the 50% of your final grade, while 25% for your Final Paper and 25% for your Presentation constitute the remaining 50%. As such, this course asks you to read texts closely and responsively. Generally, material covered in the readings will be also covered in lecture, which shall be the primary source of content found on exams. Students, who by virtue of their absence have missed an exam, must reschedule **no later than the next** normally scheduled class meeting. If you fail to schedule your make up exam within this window and/or fail to take your make up exam on the rescheduled date, you will receive **zero** on that exam.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.registrar.wsu.edu/Registrar/Apps/AcadRegs.ASPX> #73

Arrangements for makeup work must, therefore, be made **at least one week** in advance pursuant to *University Regulation no. 73*

**Course Performance:** As you can gather from the detailed syllabus I have provided for you, the only thing you can do to get a passing grade in the class is complete the work assigned in the syllabus on time and without excuses; essentially perform well on both exams which is the primary mechanism by which your class performance is assessed. What does this mean? Essentially, I am warning you that the level of effort you put into the class, *may not correspond to the results* you produce. That is, sometimes a person's best effort may only earn them a "C". Therefore, please know that I *will tolerate no drama at the end of the semester* about how you "wanted an A in this class" and are actually getting a C and can I do something to help you "improve your grade." My standard response to that kind of request will always be: "sorry, but you had an entire semester to work on improving your grade."

1. **Be respectful of others;** in terms of engaging and listening to lectures, peer comments, and other course materials.
2. **Acknowledge** that racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and other institutionalized forms of oppression exist.
3. **Acknowledge** that one mechanism of institutionalized racism, classism, sexist, heterosexism, etc. is that we are all systematically taught misinformation about our own group and about members of other groups. This is true for members of privileged and oppressed groups.
4. **Read in an engaged way;** recognizing the ideology and politics imbedded in every text. Make notes in the margins – "dialogue" with the text, using exclamation points, questions or issue complete statements, questions or critiques. Ask yourself: what is significant in this piece, what elicits anger/sadness/laughter, but go beyond emotional responses to be prepared to make specific statements about the reading!
5. **Be aware of your own subject position;** ideologies, privileges and prejudices. Recognize your own relationship to institutions of power and structures of domination. This can help you make specific connections to the reading, class discussions and other forms of feedback. Rather than proclaiming, "This article sucks," or "You are wrong," you should attempt to speak with specificity about the basis and origins of your reactions while also questioning your rationale.
6. **Reflect on our choice of language;** in and outside of class. Recognize that your choice of words reflect your own ideological position and may affect others (think about how others may react to your words – not just content, but the way we chose to express those thoughts)
7. **Create a safe atmosphere for open discussion.** If members of the class may wish to make comments that they do not want repeated outside the classroom, they can preface their remarks with a request that the class agree not to repeat the remarks. Also, think about your language (including body language), posture, etc. contributes to safe/empowering or disempowering/unsafe learning environment. Discussion in this class isn't about proving, embarrassing, showing off, winning, losing, convincing, holding one's argument to the bitter end – it's about dialogue, debate and self-reflections. *Listen to others!*

8. **Take Risks:** I want this class to be a space where everyone should feel comfortable enough to disagree with each other. This needs to be safe space so reflect on the ways you engage others with your own pronouncements and how you react (with words, body language) to their statements – react privilege and positionality
9. **Speak with evidence and “facts” on your side.** Despite the popular pronouncements that there are no wrong answers, there are incomplete, problematic, superficial, surfaced, and unsubstantiated answers. Reflect on your own answers and the basis of your conclusions
10. **Go beyond an either/or dichotomy.** Incorporate a both/and approach rather than an “either/or.”

**Last, But Not Least is the “How Is That My Problem” Clause:** I am a very busy person, and as an instructor, my role in this class is to teach you about effects of intersecting social markers and to generally prepare you for the professional world. I feel the need to warn you, then, that often times I will have a standard response to many of your “problems” or “conflicts.” The response will usually be a variation of “*How is that my problem?*” **Before** you raise any issue with me, understand that your personal matters should bear **no effect** on me or on how this class is conducted. It is ultimately up to you to make your own decisions, but decisions, even in college, have consequences attached to them. Please keep that in mind. Many students’ low grades are a result of not closely following assignment directions, class policies or not expending enough effort. It is your responsibility to be aware of the policies on this syllabus and follow them appropriately. If you miss class it is your responsibility to check with your classmates to find out what you have missed. And though you are always welcome to follow up with me if you are absent, **do not** ask me if you “missed anything important.”

**Grading Procedures:** I will try to remain as faithful as possible to this syllabus. However, I reserve the right to amend any and all readings, assignments, presentations, exams, etc. which are subject to change without notice. However I will endeavor to announce these changes as far in advance as possible and to grade assignments as efficiently as practicable. Exam grades will be rounded up from the raw numerical score according to the grading scale on pg. 7. Incompletes will only be awarded upon convincing proof of a serious emergency, subject to my discretion.

## Course Assignments

**Discussion Board Posts (100pts):** There will be a total of ten (10) posts throughout the semester, each worth a possible ten points (10.00) each. They will be posted on Tuesdays; by Thursday of the same week students must have posted their reply to the original prompt as well as have responded to at least two other students. The purpose of your discussion board postings is to ostensibly (1) assess your ability to analyze particular concepts, theories or issues raised in the reading and apply them to the provided prompt, (2) relate the concepts, theories or issues identified to other course materials, (3) cogently engage in productive scholarly discussion of the materials with their peers and (4) successfully accomplish these tasks with mechanical precision and argumentative finesse.

**Research Paper (100pts):** You will author a research paper of no less than 10 pages, on a subject of your choice related to the content of the course. This research paper will attempt to assess the current status of your subject of study, its relevance to US constructions of race, social class, gender and human sexuality within larger discourses of power and oppression. The paper will conform in all respects to the standard conventions of writing, e.g. 1" margins, Times New Roman 12 pt. font, double spaced, an attached Bibliography of scholar sources, etc. Students are to submit their work via the Angel Dropbox in Microsoft Word format; the date recorded in here will be the official receipt date. Students will receive additional instructions for this assignment later in the semester.

**Presentation (100pts):** Students will create a presentation using any variety of tools at their disposal (e.g. Power Point, Presi, YouTube clip, etc.) of the research that they are either in the process of conducting for their paper or anticipate pursuing for their paper. The presentation grade will be assessed according to a rubric that will be posted to the course space on Angel. 50% of the Presentation score will be derived from your peers and 50% from me, averaged together. Students will receive additional instructions for this assignment later in the semester.

**Participation (100pts):** Your contributions to class discussion are assessed based *not on quantity but quality*; e.g. moving the discussion forward in new directions while linking theoretical concepts to tangible examples. Student participation grade is generally comprised of my critical assessment of your contributions to the course's progress. This determination is based on two objective criteria; *first* the frequency (e.g. regularity) of your comments and *second*, (and more importantly) the quality of those comments.

## Grading Scale

100 – 94 = A  
93 – 90 = A –

Suggests that a student's work is outstanding to excellent; the student's work reflects an engaged comprehension of the course content and shows thoughtful insight into the complexities of the course. Student shows an attentive engagement with the course.

89 – 87 = B+  
86 – 83 = B  
82 – 80 = B-

Suggests that a student's work is very good to good; the student's work reflects a very strong, engaged, and solid understanding of course material. Occasionally, the student's work doesn't go the extra step in critical analysis.

79 – 77 = C+  
76 – 73 = C  
72 – 70 = C-

Suggests that a student's work is adequate; the student's work reflects a fair, but essentially disengaged, grasp of the course material and doesn't go very far in comprehension, or reflects a lack of understanding of the issues represented in the material. Student's work is un- or underconsidered and unclearly written.

69-67=D+  
66-63=D  
62-60=D-  
59-0=F

Suggests that a student's work shows some, but very little effort; the student's work does not reflect a comprehension of the course material, is disengaged, or reveals a lack of reading, attention, and/or attendance.

Week 0	8/26	Introduction & Syllabus Review
	8/28	<i>Vocabulary and Theory Review</i>
Week 1	9/2	“The Politics of Graffiti”, “Zulus on a Time Bomb”
	9/4 *	“Hip Hop’s Founders Speak the Truth”, “Physical Graffiti”, “Hip Hop Turns”
Week 2	9/9	“On the Question...”, “Looking for the Real Nigga”, “Race and Other Four”
	9/11*	“Black Empires, White Desires”, “Rap’s Dirty South”
Week 3	9/16	“I Used To Be Scared”, “Cover Your Eyes”, “Scared Straight”
	9/18*	<i>Guest Lecture</i>
Week 4	9/23	“Empowering Self, Making Choices, Creating Spaces”, “Hip-Hop Feminist”
	9/25*	<i>Documentary Film</i>
Week 5	9/30	“Intergenerational Culture Wars”, “The Challenge of Rap Music...”
	10/2*	“Voyeurism and Resistance”, “Postindustrial Soul”
Week 6	10/7	“The Rap Career”, “The Business of Rap”
	10/9*	“I don’t Like to Dream...”, “Black Youth”
Week 7	10/14	“Exploring Niggardom” <i>Chappelle Reader</i>
	10/16*	“Comic Genius or Con Man” <i>Chappelle Reader</i>
Week 8	10/21	“The Comedian is a Man” <i>Chappelle Reader</i>
	10/23*	“Laughing Whiteness” <i>Chappelle Reader</i>
Week 9	10/28	“Impersonating Hollywood” <i>Chappelle Reader</i>
	10/30*	“Gramsci, Selling Out and the Politics of Race Loyalty” <i>Chappelle Reader</i>
Week 10	11/4	“When Keeping It Real Goes Wrong” <i>Chappelle Reader</i>
	11/6*	“When Keeping it Real Goes Right” <i>Chappelle Reader</i>
Week 11	11/11	<i>Veteran’s Day – No Class!!</i>
	11/13	<i>Library Instruction Day</i>
Week 12	11/18	<i>Independent Research – No Class!!</i>
	11/20	Student Presentations
Week 13	11/25	<i>Thanksgiving Vacation – No Class!!</i>
	11/27	<i>Thanksgiving Vacation – No Class!!</i>
Week 14	12/2	Student Presentations
	12/4	Student Presentations
Week 15	12/9	Student Presentations
	12/12	Student Presentations

\* Indicates the date on which your weekly Discussion Board Post is due (by start of class) on Angel