

AFRAS 475:
Super Black: The Politics of Representation in Comics

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AL-360

Office Hours: By email or Zoom meeting appointment.

Course Description

Super Black is the exploration of comics focused on the increased prevalence of black comic book characters and their creators. We will delve into the purposeful and audacious inclusion of these culturally specific story arcs into the sequential arts medium. Traversing from the early 20th century, Golden Age of Comics, where black representation was scarce, perpetuated stereotypes, and appearances were only secondary support characters, to their contemporary presence in comics media. Now fantastic new visions of black racial identity and symbolic political meaning are exhibited. Black superheroes are a powerful source of racial meaning, narrative, and imagination in American society that express a myriad of racial assumptions, political perspectives, and fantastic (re)imaginings of black identity. These figures overtly represent or implicitly signify social discourse and accepted wisdom concerning notions of racial reciprocity, equality, forgiveness, and ultimately, racial justice. This is an analytic history of the diverse contributions of Black artists to the medium, covering comic books, superhero comics, graphic novels, and cartoon strips.

Course Learning Outcomes

This is an Explorations Humanities and Cultural Diversity GE. Please note the connection between the class learning outcomes below and the GE goals that follow:

1. Identify the pattern of depictions of Black lead characters in superhero themed comics throughout multiple narratives. (GE Area C Goal 1; ILO 2 and 7; CD 1 and 2)
2. Evaluate the Silver Age of Comics era and its contemporary American Civil Rights movement as it pertains to the changing narratives and the appearance of Black superheroes as the main characters. (GE Area C Goal 1, 2)
3. Analyze the evolution of comics discourse with regard to African themed stories and superheroes in the diaspora. (GE Area C Goals 1, 3; CD 3 and 4)
4. Articulate the depiction of Black soldiers and associated thematic narratives in American war comics. (GE Area C Goal 2; ILO 5)
5. Identify African cultural markers in ethno-gothic themed comics. (GE Area C Goal 4; ILO 6)

Explorations Humanities Learning Outcomes

[CSU Area C]

The Humanities and Fine Arts encompass works of the imagination, such as art, literature, film, drama, dance, and music, and related scholarship. Students better understand human problems, responsibilities, and possibilities in changing historical contexts and diverse cultures, and in relation to the natural environment. Students acquire new languages and familiarize themselves with related cultures. They gain the ability to recognize and assess various aesthetic principles, belief systems, and constructions of identity. Students acquire capacities for reflection, critique, communication, cultural understanding, creativity, and problem solving in an increasingly globalized world.

Goals for GE Courses in the Humanities and Fine Arts

Goal 1: Analyze written, visual, or performed texts in the humanities and fine arts with sensitivity to their diverse cultural contexts and historical moments.

Goal 2: Develop a familiarity with various aesthetic and other value systems and the ways they are communicated across time and cultures.

Goal 3: Argue from multiple perspectives about issues in the humanities that have personal and global relevance.

Goal 4: Demonstrate the ability to approach complex problems and ask complex questions drawing upon knowledge of the humanities.

Cultural Diversity Learning Outcomes

Enhance understanding of the diverse efforts and strategies used by people of the African diaspora to transform and/or dismantle structures of oppression.

Cultivate an appreciation of African and other non-dominant perspectives, their contribution to society and culture, and models for their inclusion.

Analyze the intersection of the categories of various dimensions of difference as they affect people of the African diaspora's lived realities and/or as they are embodied in personal and collective identities.

Formulate informed views on the mechanisms for maintaining existing power structures and their impact on people of the African diaspora.

Required Text

Icon & Rocket: Season One (Icon & Rocket, 1) by Reginald Hudlin and Doug Braithwaite

Captain America: Truth by Robert Morales and Kyle Baker

Black Panther: Who Is The Black Panther? By Reginald Hudlin and John Romita, Jr.

After the Rain by Nnedi Okorafor and John Jennings

Bitter Root Vol. 1: Family Business by David Walker, Chuck Brown and Sanford Greene

Blue Hand Mojo: Hard Times Road by John Jennings

Genius Vol. 1: Siege by Marc Bernardin, Adam Freeman

Course Requirements

Weekly Discussion Board Posts:	(40%)
Essay #1 1000 words	(15%)
Essay #2 1000 words	(15%)
Scholarly Paper Presentation (10 mins):	(15%)
Group Panel Presentation (20mins):	(15%)

Grading

100 Point Scale:

A(95-100); A-(90-94);B+(86-89);B(83-85);B-(80-82);C+(76-79);C(73-75);C-(70-72);D+(66-69);D(63-65);D-(60-62); F(0-59)

Reading Assignments

Assigned readings will come from the required reading list. Supplemental articles may be posted to the Canvas classroom should they enhance the discussion.

Discussion Board Posts

A high degree of flexibility will be given to focus their writing to their own interests and strengths. The following requirements will apply to all students except where otherwise noted.

Essays

These will be critical papers on a topic of your choice. Depending on your own interests and area(s) of expertise this may take the form of either a (1) Literary analysis (2) Critical discussion (3) Philosophical exploration of an argument or (4) Interdisciplinary Hybrid.

Grading Rubric for Essays

A Essays (90-100 points): These well-focused and persuasive essays identify a theme, issue, idea, problem, concern and analyze how it functions in the work as a whole to reveal something significant about the Africana experience. These essays exhibit the writer's ability to discuss a literary work with significant insight and understanding; to sustain control over a thesis; to use ample and specific textual details and examples; and to write with clarity, precision, and coherence. These writers are able to anchor their discussions by paying attention to the confluence of content, form, and context.

B Essays (80-89 points): These competent essays identify a theme, issue, idea, problem, concern and analyze how it functions in the work to reveal something significant about the Africana experience.

These essays have insight and understanding, but the analysis is less thorough, less perceptive, and/or less specific in supporting detail than the A Essays. References to the text may not be as apt or persuasive. These essays generally maintain control over a thesis, are well-written, and free from significant surface errors. The writer shows awareness of the confluence of content, form, and context.

C Essays (70-79 points): These essays respond to the assigned, but they tend to be superficial in their analysis and/or focus on the blatantly obvious. They often rely upon plot summary that contains some analysis, implicit or explicit. Although the writers attempt to identify and discuss a theme, issue, idea, problem, concern and how it functions in the work as a whole, they may demonstrate a rather simplistic understanding of the work or fail to reveal something significant about the Africana experience. Typically, these essays reveal unsophisticated thinking and/or immature writing. The writers demonstrate adequate control of language, but their essays lack effective organization and may be marred by surface errors. The writer shows only a limited awareness of the confluence of content, form, and context.

D Essays (60-69 points): These essays reflect an incomplete or oversimplified understanding of the work, or they may fail to demonstrate how a theme, issue, idea, problem, concern . . . (or for an essay examination they may fail to even respond to the basic ideas of the premise) functions in the work as a whole to reveal something significant about the Africana experience. They may rely on plot summary alone. Generally there is no evidence of literary analysis present. Their assertions may be unsupported or even irrelevant. Often wordy or repetitious, these essays lack control over the elements of college-level composition. Essays in the D range may contain significant mis-readings and demonstrate inept writing. Writers demonstrate no understanding of the confluence of content, form, and context.

F Essays (0-59 points): Although these essays may make an attempt to identify a theme, issue, idea, problem, concern, they compound the weaknesses of the essays in the D range. These essays may be unacceptably brief or are incoherent in presenting their ideas. They may be poorly written on several counts and contain distracting errors in grammar and mechanics. The writer's remarks are presented with little clarity, organization, or supporting textual evidence.

Essay Guidelines

The essays will be typed 1000 words, doubled spaced, using New Times Roman 12-point font, with left/right and top/bottom margins of 1". Papers are to be typed on one side only. A Title Page is not required; however, include Your Name, Class Title (AFRAS 475), Professor's Name (Brown) and the Assignment Title (Essay #) on the first page, upper left-hand corner.

Academic Expectations

This course will refer to topics from across the Africana Studies Department Curriculum and also issues that touch courses from other disciplines. Some issues and socio-cultural dynamics have no clearly defined answers. We will discuss these as a class. Let us respect each other's thoughts. Disagree academically if we must, but offer sound disputation in defense of a position.

Academic Honesty

The University adheres to a strict policy prohibiting cheating and plagiarism, including

- Copying, in part or in whole, from another's test or other examination.
- Obtaining copies of a test, an examination, or other course material without the permission of the instructor.
- Collaborating with another or others in coursework without the permission of the instructor.
- Falsifying records, laboratory work, or other course data.
- Submitting work previously presented in another course, if contrary to the policies of the course.
- Altering or interfering with grading procedures.
- Assisting another student in any of the above.
- Using sources verbatim or paraphrasing without giving proper attribution (this can include phrases, sentences, paragraphs and/or pages of work).
- Copying and pasting work from an online or offline source directly and calling it one's own.
- Using information found from an online or offline source without giving the author credit.
- Replacing words or phrases from another source and inserting one's own words or phrases.

Under CSU policy, instructors must report instances of academic misconduct to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities for disciplinary review by the University, which may lead to probation, suspension, or expulsion. Instructors may also, at their discretion, penalize student grades on any assignment or assessment discovered to have been produced in an academically dishonest manner.

Essential Student Information

- Compliance with CSU / SDSU vaccination and facial covering policies is required.
- Your SDSU email address will be used for all course-related communications.
- The Student Conduct Code prohibits conduct disruptive to instruction, including academic dishonesty and the unauthorized recording, dissemination, or publication (including on websites or social media) of lectures or other course materials.
- SDSU provides disability-related accommodations via the Student Ability Success Center (sascinfo@sdsu.edu | sdsu.edu/sasc). Please allow 10-14 business days for this process.
- The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) mandates the protection of student information, including contact information, grades, and graded assignments. I will not post grades or leave graded assignments in public places. Students will be notified at the time of an assignment if copies of student work will be retained beyond the end of the semester or used as examples for future students or the wider public.

- As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment on our campus. I am required to share information regarding sexual violence on SDSU's campus with the Title IX coordinator, Gail Mendez (619-594-6464), who will contact you to let you know about support services at SDSU and possibilities for holding accountable the person who harmed you. If you do not want the Title IX Officer notified, you can speak confidentially SDSU's Sexual Violence Victim Advocate (619-594-0210) or Counseling and Psychological Services (619-594-5220, psycserv@sdsu.edu).
- **Student Use of Electronic Devices:** As noted in the Resources section above, electronic devices are important for accessing many of the texts for this class. However, students must refrain from all uses of technology in the classroom that are not directly related to class activities of the moment.
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- Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. Please let me know if you would prefer an alternate name and/or gender pronoun.
- Need help finding an advisor, tutor, counselor, emergency economic assistance, or other support? Contact the SDSU Student Success Help Desk Monday through Friday, 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM.
- For technical or computing assistance, contact the Library Computing Hub

Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Ability Success Center (SASC) at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact SASC as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from SASC. Before making an appointment to see me, please contact SASC at (619) 594-6473. Their office is in Calpulli Center, Third Floor, Suite 3101.

Absences

- If you plan to be absent for a religious observance or holiday, notify me by the end of the second week of classes.
- If you are absent more than five days due to illness or injury, you may contact Student Health Services for help in communicating your absence.
- If you miss class because you have been diagnosed with or are required to quarantine due to exposure to COVID-19, contact vpsafrontdesk@sdsu.edu to notify the university.

Course Calendar

Week 1

Introduction to the Course & the Comics Medium.

Reading: Begin Icon and Rocket Season One

Watch: Milestone Generations Documentary

Discussion Board: Posts due Week 2

Week 2

Reading: Icon and Rocket Season One

Watch: Robert Kirkman's The Secret History of Comics, Sn.1, Ep. 5 -The Color of Comics

Discussion Board: Posts due Week 3

Week 3

Reading: Icon and Rocket Season One

Discussion Board: Posts due Week 4

In-Class Lecture: The "Other" Hero

Week 4

Reading: Captain America: Truth

Discussion Board: Posts due Week 5

In-Class Lecture: The Black Soldier in American War Comics

Essay #1 DUE

Week 5

Reading: Captain America: Truth

Discussion Board: Posts due Week 6

Round Table Discussion

Week 6

Reading: Black Panther: Who is Black Panther?

Discussion Board: Posts due Week 7

In-Class Lecture: The African Superhero

Week 7

Reading: Black Panther: Who is Black Panther?

Discussion Board: Posts due Week 8

Round Table Discussion

Watch: Black Panther the Animated Series

Week 8

Reading: After the Rain

Discussion Board: Posts due Week 9

In-Class Lecture: African Folklore in Comics

Essay #2 DUE

Week 9

Reading: After the Rain

Discussion Board: Posts due Week 10

Round Table Discussion

Week 10

Reading: Bitter Root Vol. 1: Family Business

Discussion Board: Posts due Week 11

In-Class Lecture: Ethno-Gothic Horror in Comics

Week 11

Reading: Bitter Root Vol. 1: Family Business

Discussion Board: Posts due Week 12

Round Table Discussion

Week 12

Reading: Blue Hand Mojo: Hard Times Road

Watch: Horror Noire Documentary

Discussion Board: Posts due Week 13

Scholarly Paper Presentations DUE

Week 13

Reading: Blue Hand Mojo: Hard Times Road

Watch: Horror Noire Documentary cont'd

Discussion Board: Post due Week 14

Week 14

Reading: Genius Vol. 1: Siege

Discussion Board: Post due Week 15

Round Table Discussion

Week 15

Reading: Genius Vol. 1: Siege

Discussion Board: Posts due Week 16

In-Class Lecture: Social Justice Themes in Comics

Week 16

Group Panel Discussions DUE

Panel Discussion Format

Your team will have **five (5)** minutes to prepare for the discussion. It is imperative that you and your teammates show up to class on time because lateness will take away from your team's prep time.

You are expected to adhere to the speech format explained below:

Role	Time	Tasks
First speaker	3 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- state the main position- outline your panel's main points- focus on 1 or 2 points- summarize the overall presentation
Second speaker	3 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- acknowledge opposing points- focus on 1 or 2 opposing points- summarize the overall objections
Third speaker	3 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- present evidence/support for main points- summarize the overall support/evidence
Fourth speaker	3 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- present evidence/support for opposing points- summarize the overall opposing support/evidence
Fifth speaker	3 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- summarize/evaluate both sides- explain how original position is stronger

Overall Debate Grading Criteria:

Debate Outline: /20

Timing: /20

Ability to follow the debate role: /20

Engagement with Readings: /20

Consistency in Argument(s): /20

100 points total/15% of final grade

AFRAS 475 - TEAM MEMBER PEER EVALUATION FORM
NOTE: This form is confidential and will only be reviewed by the instructors.

Name: _____

List and evaluate each member of your team. Use the following scale to rate your team member(s) in the spaces below—1 = never/rarely, 2 = occasionally/sometimes, 3 = most of the time/always.

Team member #1: _____

- _____ did fair share of work
- _____ was cooperative/did agreed upon task
- _____ contributed to ideas/planning
- _____ was available for communication
- _____ was positive, helpful
- _____ contributed to overall project success

Additional comments about this team member:

Team member #2: _____

- _____ did fair share of work
- _____ was cooperative/did agreed upon task
- _____ contributed to ideas/planning
- _____ was available for communication
- _____ was positive, helpful
- _____ contributed to overall project success

Additional comments about this team member:

Rate yourself:

- _____ did fair share of work
- _____ was cooperative/did agreed upon task
- _____ contributed to ideas/planning
- _____ was available for communication
- _____ was positive, helpful
- _____ contributed to overall project success

Write a brief sentence or two justifying your self-evaluation:

What parts of this team project went really well?

If you had to do this project over again, what would you do differently?