

COMIC BOOKS, RACE, AND HISTORY

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a scholarly study of how comics and graphic novels explore questions of racial representation, history, and identity. Drawing mostly on works from the last decade, we will explore: 1) the role that comics play in countering specific historical narratives of racism and other forms of oppression; 2) how comics that focus on black experiences effectively explore the meaning and significance of heroism through time; and 3) the ways in which the visual elements of the medium provide fresh, creative perspectives on black cultural representation.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Your professor will provide lecture and discussion-based instruction to help you advance as a careful, thoughtful reader of sequential narratives and to explore the social and historical context that deepen their storytelling strategies. Through in-class writing prompts, small group activities, and weekly quizzes, you will apply the fundamentals of cultural critique and verbal/visual analysis to our primary texts. You will also have the opportunity, through three short essay assignments and a final project, to develop persuasive written arguments about the construction and meaning of the comics medium.

REQUIRED READINGS

- *Nat Turner*, Kyle Baker
- *Bayou, Vol. 1* Jeremy Love
- *Bayou, Vol. 2* Jeremy Love
- *Aya*, Marguerite Abouet (w) and Clement Oubrerie (a)
- *Sentences: The Life of MF Grimm*, Percy Carey (w) and Ronald Wimberly (a)
- *World of Hurt*, Jay Potts (online)
- *Birth of a Nation*, Aaron McGruder (w), Reginald Hudlin (w), and Kyle Baker (a)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

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| • Quizzes | 15% |
| • Discussion Journal | 15% |
| • Essays (3/15% each) | 45% |
| • Final Project | 25% |

GRADING SCALE

The grading scale for this course is: A (93-100); B+ (86-92); B (80-85); C+ (76-79); C (70-75); D+ (66-69); D (60-65); F (59).

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance is mandatory. You are allowed two absences without penalty for sickness, bereavement, unexpected personal emergency, and university competitions. More than two absences will affect your final grade and more than four absences may lead to a failing grade in the course. Repeated lateness and leaving early may be counted as absence.

DISCUSSION JOURNAL

Each student must keep a class journal to respond to daily discussion prompts about our readings and activities. The journal will be checked at mid-semester and evaluated for a grade at the end of the course. Please mark each entry with the date and keep the journal separate from class notes.

ESSAYS

You are required to complete three short essays that respond to analytical questions prompted by the week's primary readings. The length of each essay must be between 750-1250 words (3-5 pages). In keeping with the course work in any English class, your writing must be clear, concise, and professional. Comics and other resources should be cited according to MLA style. The papers should also be free of misspellings and other errors. Failing to meet these requirements will result in point deductions.

FINAL PROJECT: COMIC BOOK ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

For your final project, you will have the opportunity to analyze one graphic novel or two comic books from a single series of your choice. In addition to presenting an overview of your findings to the class, you are required to write an essay that consists of three parts:

- I. Summarize the story and any relevant social or historical context (this may also include background on the series, writer, or artist). (400-500 words)
- II. Identify two specific ways in which the concepts, ideas, or characterizations that we have discussed in this course can be applied to your comic. (400-500 words)
- III. Analyze a single page or scene from the comic that demonstrates one of the claims from Part II. Your close reading should be attentive to how both the visual and verbal elements of the scene convey meaning. (400-500 words)

READING SCHEDULE

(* Indicates material to be distributed in class)

- May 30:** Course Introduction, *Comic Book Confidential*
May 31: *Hatfield, "An Art of Tensions: The Otherness of Comics Reading"
June 1: *Eisner, "Ebony's X-ray Eyes," *The Spirit*, 1940;
*Feldstein and Orlando, "Judgment Day," *Weird Fantasy* #18, 1953
June 2: Gray, "[The Confessions of Nat Turner](#)" (1831);
Baker, *Nat Turner*
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- June 6:** Baker, *Nat Turner*
June 7: *Metress, "Sacramental Memory and the Lynching of Emmett Till"
Love, *Bayou Vol. 1*
June 8: Love, *Bayou Vol. 1-2*
June 9: Love, *Bayou Vol. 2*

ESSAY 1 DUE FRIDAY, JUNE 10 BY 5 PM

- June 13:** *Freund, "The Pearl of the Lagoons"
Abouet and Oubrierie, *Aya*
June 14: Abouet and Oubrierie, *Aya*
June 15: *Guerrero, "The Rise and Fall of Blaxpoitation"
Potts, "[The Thrill-Seekers.](#)" *World of Hurt*
June 16: Potts, "[The Black Fist.](#)" *World of Hurt*

ESSAY 2 DUE FRIDAY, JUNE 17 BY 5 PM

- June 20:** Carey and Wimberly, *Sentences: The Life of MF Grimm*
June 21: Carey and Wimberly, *Sentences: The Life of MF Grimm*
June 22: *Dickson-Carr, "Toward a Theory of African American Literary Satire"
McGruder, Baker and Hudlin, *Birth of a Nation: A Comic Novel*
June 23: McGruder, Baker and Hudlin, *Birth of a Nation: A Comic Novel*

ESSAY 3 DUE FRIDAY, JUNE 23 BY 5 PM

- June 27:** Class Presentations
June 28: Class Presentations
June 29: *No Class*
June 30: **COMIC BOOK ANALYSIS DUE BY 5 PM**