

English 5327.001/D01: Studies in Multicultural American Literatures

**“Calling all black people”:
Black Power, Black Aesthetics, and African American Creative Collectives in
the Late Twentieth Century”**

Spring 2023

Monday, 9:00am-11:50am

Professor Michael Borshuk

Office: 425 English

Office Phone: 806.834.0129

Email: michael.borshuk@ttu.edu

Webpage: <http://www.faculty.english.ttu.edu/Borshuk>

Office Hours: Wednesday, 10:00am-12:00pm, or by appointment.

This class will consider the history of African American creative collectives from the 1950s to the end of the twentieth century, to examine their participation in ongoing theoretical discussions about, and praxis in, Black art and aesthetics in that period. More specifically, we will think about how these groups of Black creators fused Black Power’s emerging political and economic sensibility with historical interrogations of art’s relationship to liberation movements and civil rights activism. We will pay close attention to how so many African American intellectuals and artists propose a turn away from individual creation in this period and imagine Black art as a necessarily cooperative exercise: bringing together different artists, of course, but also connecting African American creators to a broader Black public. We will follow all of these threads across history, geography, and expressive forms.

Among the groups we will discuss are, in literature, the Black Arts Movement, the Harlem Writers Guild, Umbra, the Organization of Black Culture, and Dudley Randall’s Broadside Press; in visual art, AfriCOBRA, Spiral, and Where We At; in film, the L.A. Rebellion movement; and in music, the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, Black Fire (Washington, DC), the Black Artists Group (St. Louis), and Tribe (Detroit).

Required Texts:

John H. Bracey, Jr., Sonia Sanchez, James Smethurst, eds., *SOS – Calling All Black People: A Black Arts Movement Reader*

Mark Godfrey and Allie Biswas, eds., *The Soul of a Nation Reader: Writings By and About Black Artists, 1960-1980*

Joseph Jarman, *Black Case: Volume I & II, Return from Exile* (Black Forms Editions)

Amiri Baraka, et al., *The Cricket* (Blank Forms Editions)

All other readings are available in .pdf form on our course Blackboard.

Course Work, Methods of Assessment, and Distribution of Grades

Blog contributions	10%	ongoing
Outreach assignment	15%	March 20 proposal
Curatorial Project (1000 words)	10%	sign-up
Paper abstract (500 words)	10%	March 27
Book review (1000 words)	15%	April 17
Conference paper (3000 words)	20%	end of semester, date TBD
Informed participation in class discussion	20%	

You have four required formal writing assignments for this course: a 500-word **conference paper abstract**, 1000-word **academic book review**, a 1000-word **curatorial statement**, and a 3000-word **conference-style paper (developed from the abstract)** on a research topic you choose. You are also required to make ongoing contributions to a **reading journal blog** that I have created specifically for the course: <http://blackartcollectives.wordpress.com>. (Each of you will want to get a Wordpress account ASAP and email me your user ID so that I can add you to the list of contributors to our course site.)

For the **book review**, I want you to select a recent book (i.e. preferably 2020 and later) that relates to our course materials in some way and prepare a 1000-word review for a specialized audience. How you interpret that relationship and the intended audience is up to you. Along with your review, I expect you to suggest **three** possible publication venues to which you might submit your finished piece of writing. **You must consult with me about the book you intend to write about before you submit this assignment.**

For the **blog**, you required to contribute **two** posts between Weeks Two and Ten, in response to weekly readings. You must sign up for dates for these posts by **January 27** via the Google Sheets spreadsheet here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1jmnoXeVSTUX60rj9TKQwDnE8NpIEMlwja-b98uE8xfM/edit?usp=sharing>

In addition, on weeks that you are not posting, you are required to post a substantive comment in response to at least **one** of your colleagues' posts. Overall, for this ongoing online forum, I expect you to record your own observations, interpretive points, questions, connections between materials, and follow-up points to class discussions. The blog is intended to keep you writing throughout the course, but without the burden of having always to produce polished prose. Use it to work through your ideas about the various readings in the course and to provide you with material to bring to class discussions. As well, on weeks that you are scheduled to post I expect you to publish your work online at **the very latest by 12pm on Sunday**, to enable each of you to view and consider what other people have written before our class meeting. Also, I encourage you to use blog contributions to stimulate class discussion (e.g. "I wanted to follow up on a point that Student X made on the class blog last week about..." etc.).

Each of you is required to complete a **curatorial project** on a select art collective from the list below. This project, to be posted to our class blog, and discussed in class with you as conversation leader, will instruct us on the history of the collective you choose and introduce us to select works by those artists, posted as images or recordings online. You will also assemble selected readings—including, but not limited to, critical writings on the collective, statement(s) of purpose, or autobiographical reminiscences from members—that we will read in advance of the day we discuss your project in class. (You should send your readings to me as pdfs **two weeks** in advance of the discussion date so I can post them to Blackboard, or indicate other readings from either of our two course readers.) Finally, you will compose a 1000-word curatorial statement, to be posted on the course blog with the primary works you curate, offering your assessment of the collective's importance historically and/or commenting on how this group realized theoretical ideas about Black art.

Visual Art:

AfriCOBRA

Spiral

Where We At

Kamoinge Workshop

Black Emergency Cultural Coalition

Music:

Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM)

The Art Ensemble of Chicago

Black Fire Records (Washington, DC)

The Black Artists Group (St. Louis, MO)

Tribe (Detroit)

All of you must have chosen a project and date by **January 30**. Sign up for dates and projects is via this Google link:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1jnCIIGrcUDie50GhHK4I3DMBbbKg0bjy-qCYvldMOIM/edit?usp=sharing>

As a collective, we will engage in an **outreach assignment**. This assignment is in keeping with the spirit of the political energy at the heart of our reading list and materializes our academic discussions and the intellectual mission of our department's Literature, Social Justice, and the Environment initiative. For this assignment, you will work in **groups of three or four** to conceptualize how we might bring our critical consideration of race, place, and culture to a population beyond our seminar table. On **March 20**, each group will present a proposal for an **Outreach Event or Activity** to the rest of the class. We will then decide, as a full class, which to pursue and come together to realize that proposal by semester's end. I do not intend for this assignment to be limiting and, in fact, hope to integrate multiple ideas. For example, if one group proposes making posters or broadsides in the department's Letterpress Studio and the winning group proposes a film showing and panel discussion, or another proposes some kind of online archive, we might still integrate these various plans into our final outreach endeavor. I encourage you to think creatively about what resources are available to us here on campus and in the area (like the technological resources for podcasting and streaming video in the department's media lab, the print capabilities of the Letterpress Studio, Student Organizations committed to Activism and Awareness, East Lubbock Art House, the Caviel Museum of African American History, the Louise Hopkins Underwood Center for the Arts, etc) as you work on your proposals.

The **abstract** will be a 500-word summary of the critical intervention you'll be making in your conference paper, with a concise statement of your thesis. (I can provide you with sample abstracts as a template if you'd like.) This document should identify the issue, academic problem, or critical lacuna your paper addresses, and the texts with which you will be dealing, and then articulate clearly how your argument redresses said problem and/or engages this context. **I also expect you to identify a real conference to which you might propose this paper for presentation.**

The **conference paper** allows you to engage in recent critical debates on a topic of your design, adapting the ideas and readings from our course to a project that best aligns with your own research. Because I hope to promote critical writing for possible conference presentation and publication, I encourage you to begin thinking about this assignment from early on in the course. The approach that you take is entirely up to you, as long as the paper investigates in detail some critical topic from our discussions. Once you have decided on a topic (or at least have some ideas) I would encourage you to meet with me to discuss it in order to sharpen focus, offer potential critical resources that might be of help, or work through any blocks or challenges you might have.

Informed participation assumes that you will not only read all assigned texts in time for their discussion in class, but also consider that material carefully and be prepared to contribute to our collective contemplation of them.

Course Policies:

Grades and Written Assignments:

1. Grades will be assigned as percentage scores (0-100) throughout the term. Ultimately, your final grade will be converted to the university's letter grade system using this scale:

A+= 97-100	A=94-96	A-=90-93
B+=87-89	B=84-86	B-=80-83
C+=77-79	C=74-76	C-=70-73
D+=67-69	D=63-66	F=62 or below

Please note that I reserve A-range marks for work of superior quality. Marks in the A-range are by no means the default grade for completing all the assignments in this course.

2. Late papers will be penalized with a **10%** deduction for each day they are handed in after the due date, including weekend days. Even after deductions have guaranteed that a paper will receive a failing grade, you **must** still submit that paper to pass the course.
3. If extenuating circumstances will prevent you from handing a paper in on time, talk to me **before** the paper is due. I am not likely to make allowances after the deadline has come and gone.
4. All papers are to be typed (in a font no bigger than 12-point), double-spaced, and printed on one side of the paper. Please adhere to MLA guidelines for formatting and bibliographical citations.
5. I do **not** accept email submissions of written assignments.

Plagiarism and Cheating:

I expect you to adhere to the highest standard of honesty and academic integrity. All work that you complete in this course must be your own. All written work must be organized around your own ideas and arguments. (In the interest of aiding the resolution of any potential disputes about plagiarism, I encourage you to retain all drafts of your work until the completion of the course.) Any material that is not your own—including verbatim quotations from outside work or paraphrases of other writers' ideas or arguments—must be referenced explicitly. Plagiarizing materials will warrant a failure on, at least, the plagiarized assignment, and, likely, the course overall.

Absences:

I will allow each student **one** absence without penalty (though since the class only meets once per week I encourage you not to think of this as a “free” class to miss but one to keep in reserve only if an emergency arises). Each class that you miss after one absence will warrant a reduction of your **overall** course grade by 20%. If you are seriously ill or have another legitimate reason for missing class, you should provide a written explanation for your absence. Absences due to illness can be excused only with a written explanation from a physician. For an explanation of university-approved absences, consult your student handbook.

Classroom Civility and Access:

I expect each of you to assist in creating and maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. At the bottom level, this assumes that you will always be respectful to me and to your fellow classmates. Our classroom space will be open to differences of opinion and ideology, and accessible to all students without regard to gender, race, ethnicity, creed, sexual orientation, or physical limitation. I will **not tolerate** the use of any derogatory or demeaning language. Always extend the same courtesy to other members of the class that you wish to see extended to you. Listen quietly when others are speaking; raise your hand to ask questions or introduce new points; do not have side conversations apart from our main discussion. I encourage dissent in discussion, but insist that you articulate your ideas in a respectful manner. You are welcome to bring food and drink to class.

ADA Statement:

Any student who, because of a disability, may require special arrangements in order to meet the course requirements should contact the instructor as soon as possible to make any necessary arrangements. Students should present appropriate verification from Student Disability Services during the instructor's office hours. Please note: instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodations to a student until appropriate verification from Student Disability Services has been provided. For additional information, please contact Student Disability Services in West Hall or call 806-742-2405.

Tentative Schedule of Readings and Lectures:

WEEK ONE:

January 23: Introduction to course

WEEK TWO:

January 30: *Conceptualizing Black Power:*

Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) and Charles V. Hamilton, "Black Power – Its Need and Its Substance," from *Black Power* (pp. 34-56, on Blackboard); William L. Van DeBurg, "What Is Black Power?" from *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (pp. 11-28, on Blackboard); Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., "Introduction: Black Power Revisited" from *Is It Nation Time?: Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism* (pp. 1-21, on Blackboard); Peniel E. Joseph, "Black Power: A State of the Field" (on Blackboard)

WEEK THREE:

February 6: *Overview: The Black Arts Movement:*

James Smethurst, "Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 2" from *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (pp. 1-99, on Blackboard); Margo Natalie Crawford, "Chapter 2: The Politics of Abstraction" from *Black Post-Blackness: The Black Arts Movement and Twenty-First Century Aesthetics* (pp 42-81, on Blackboard)

WEEK FOUR:

February 13: *Black Arts Theory, Manifestos, Statements of Purpose*:

Ron (Maulana) Karenga, "Black Cultural Nationalism" (pp 51-54, SOS); Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement" (pp. 55-66, SOS); James T. Stewart, "The Development of the Black Revolutionary Artist" (pp. 77-81, SOS); Barbara Ann Teer, "Needed: A New Image" (pp. 82-85, SOS); Sarah Webster Fabio, "Tripping with Black Writing" (pp. 145-150, SOS); OBAC [Organization of Black Culture] Statement of Purpose" (p. 221, SOS); *Soulbook*, "To the Peoples of Afroamerica, Africa, and to all the Peoples of the World" (pp. 223-224, SOS); Umbra, "Foreword" (pp. 232-233, SOS)

WEEK FIVE:

February 20: *Theorizing Black Poetry*:

Stephen E. Henderson, "The Form of Things Unkown," from *Understanding the New Black Poetry: Black Speech and Black Music as Poetic References* (pp. 4-69, on Blackboard); Sonia Sanchez, "The Poetry of the BAM: Meditation, Critique, Praise" (pp. 243-253, SOS); Carolyn M. Rodgers, "Black Poetry – Where It's At" (pp. 188-197, SOS); Lorenzo Thomas, "The Shadow World: New York's Umbra Workshop and Origins of the Black Arts Movement" (1978, on Blackboard)

WEEK SIX:

February 27: *Selected Black Arts Poetry*:

Jewel C. Latimore (Johari Amini), "On Being Black One Friday Night in July"; Amiri Baraka, "Black People"; Mari Evans, "Black jam for dr. negro"; Joe Goncalves, "Sister Brother"; Don L. Lee (Haki Madhubuti), "But He Was Cool, or: he even stopped for green lights"; Sonia Sanchez, "Summary"; Etheridge Knight, "Portrait of Malcolm X"; Larry Neal, "Malcolm X – An Autobiography"; Sonia Sanchez, "Malcolm"; David Henderson, "Elvin Jones Gretsck Freak"; Don L. Lee (Haki Madhubuti), "Don't Cry, Scream"; Sonia Sanchez, "a/coltrane/poem"; Mari Evans, "I Am a Black Woman"; Nikki Giovanni, "Woman Poem" [all in SOS]

WEEK SEVEN:

March 6: *Music and Art in the Age of Black Power*:

Amiri Baraka, "The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)" (pp. 123-131, SOS); George E. Lewis, "Chapter 4: Founding the Collective," from *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (on Blackboard); Mark Godfrey, "Introduction" (in *Soul*, pp. 16-38); Romare Bearden, et al, "The Black Artist in America: A Symposium" (in *Soul*, pp. 114-134); Larry Neal, "Any Day Now: Black Art and Liberation" (in *Soul*, pp. 153-159); Frank Bowling, "It's Not Enough to Say 'Black is Beautiful'" (in *Soul*, pp. 326-332);

WEEK EIGHT:

March 13: **Spring Break, no class.**

WEEK NINE:

March 20: **Outreach project proposals and workshop; *The Cricket***

WEEK TEN:

March 27: **Paper abstracts due;** Joseph Jarman, *Black Case, Volume I & II*

WEEK ELEVEN:

April 3: **Curatorial Projects**

WEEK TWELVE:

April 10: **University holiday, no class**

WEEK THIRTEEN:

April 17: **Book Reviews due; Curatorial Projects**

WEEK FOURTEEN:

April 24: **Curatorial Projects**

WEEK FIFTEEN:

May 1: **Film:** Charles Burnett, dir., *Killer of Sheep* (1978, available through the library on Kanopy); David E. James, "Cinema and Black Liberation" (on Blackboard); Clyde Taylor, "One Upon a Time in the West ... L.A. Rebellion" (on Blackboard); "L.A. Rebellion Oral Histories" (on Blackboard)