

Masterstudiengang JFKI,  
Kultur-Modul C  
(Kulturgeschichte einzelner Medien und ästhetischer Darstellungsformen):  
Hauptseminar

## **Black Theory, Theories of Blackness: African American Political Rhetoric and Aesthetics, 1895-2020**

Prof. Dr. F. Kelleter

Tuesday, 18.15 – 19.45 (Online – Webex)  
(Winter Term 2020/21)

**Please read this syllabus carefully:** It contains detailed information about the seminar's structure, its online organization, and suggestions for preparing "your" session. Note that we will **finalize our class schedule in the first two meetings**. This means that everyone who wants to attend this course needs to **be present in the first session** (November 3) in order to **sign up for a topic (student-run session) or have contacted me beforehand by e-mail** with an alternative session proposal (no later than November 2). No additional students can be admitted after we have finalized our schedule in the initial meetings. Please understand that no exceptions can be made. If you cannot attend the first session, for whatever reason, please get in touch with me beforehand and we will find a solution.

Because of the current COVID-19 situation, this course will be offered as an **online seminar**. We will meet **every Tuesday (except January 5) at 6.15 p.m. on Webex**. All online sessions will last between 60 and 90 minutes, so please save the entire time slot from 6-8 p.m. Altogether, there will be two organizational meetings, three background sessions with substantial reading assignments (190 pages altogether), seven student-run sessions (with much shorter reading assignments, not more than 20 pages per session), and one "open" session (yet to be determined). In view of all the additional burdens of an online seminar, I will try to keep the workload of this course manageable. I will not define any additional tasks beyond the ones explained below, which are: Every participant should (try to) read (most of) the assignments, participate in our online discussions, and prepare and moderate one session together with a group of other students. As *Prüfungsleistung*, the *Studienordnung* requires a research paper, but I will check if there are any other possibilities (such as a brief final exam, an oral exam, a "group report" on the session you have organized, or other formats) that we can use instead of a final paper, so as to compensate for the additional effort involved in an online seminar with student-run sessions.

**Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns!** Feel free to do so at any time during the semester, but also before the beginning of the term, or if you're not sure yet if you want to take this course or not. This goes especially for first-semester M.A. students! We will probably have no face-to-face office hours at the JFKI this winter, but I will be available for consultation by any medium you prefer (e-mail, webex, skype, Blackboard discussion forum, telephone). If you have technical difficulties or other important concerns that make it difficult for you to participate in our online activities, please reach out to me and we will make special arrangements. My e-mail address is: Frank.Kelleter@fu-berlin.de

**Course Description:** This seminar deals with **select examples of African American political rhetoric and aesthetics** between 1895 and 2020. Three initial sessions will be dedicated to key historical moments of Black protest rhetoric in the U.S. (Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey; Civil Rights Movement and Black Power movements; Black feminism). Additional sessions, to be prepared and organized by students, will cover the following theorists and theoretical paradigms: James Baldwin, the Combahee River Collective, Audre Lorde, Afropessimism, Black Marxism, Claudia Rankine, Hortense Spillers and Saidiya Hartman. All participants are expected to have **familiarized themselves with these topics** before the start of the semester so that they can sign up for a session in our first meeting—or propose an alternative group topic by advance e-mail. If some topics turn out to be more “popular” than others, it may happen that not everyone will get to work on the topic they would like to sign up for. In this case, some participants will be asked to join a different group, preferably one that is thematically close to their first choice.

**Course Organization:** This seminar serves as **Hauptseminar** within Culture-Module C in the JFKI’s Master’s program. **It is strongly recommended that you take this seminar together with the lecture course “American Culture after World War II”!** If you cannot do so, you might want to choose a different seminar offered in Module C.

**There is no auditing this course.** This means that every participant will have to join a group that will organize and conduct one of our sessions. Alternatively, if you want me to supervise your Master’s Thesis, you can also use this seminar to discuss your M.A. project (as a substitute for *Master-Kolloquium*; see “M.A. Policy” below).

As of December 8, all **sessions** (except the last) **will be student-run**, i.e., a group of students will be in charge of the design, assignments, timing, and moderation of “their” session. (In the unlikely event that only 7 students attend this course, each participant will organize one session individually.) If you want to propose topics not listed for sign-up below, you may organize in groups of 3-4 participants before our first session and propose alternative session topics as a group by advance e-mail.

The students in charge of a session need to **coordinate their efforts both logistically and thematically**, so that their session will be a joint and coherent endeavor, not a collection of individual presentations. As a group, you should focus strongly on **one text or excerpt of your own choice**, not exceeding 20 single pages (book pages, not copied pages).

By contrast, **readings for the initial three thematic sessions (not run by students) will be more extensive** (about 190 pages). They will be collected in a **Course Reader** that can be downloaded from Blackboard (go to “Kursmaterialien”; you may have to click on “open Course Reader here” to download it; if this doesn’t work, try a different browser: students have reported problems with the Chrome browser). Please start preparing these texts right away, preferably before our first session, even though we will only start discussing them on November 17. I encourage you to try to do all these readings, but I will not monitor if you have done so or not. If, for whatever reason, you find it difficult to prepare the texts assigned for our three background sessions, try to focus on only *one* text by each author or group of authors (i.e., one text, each, by Washington, Du Bois, and Garvey on November 17; one text, each, by King, Malcolm X, and a Black Power/Black Panther author on November 24).

**Registration:** To gain credit for this course, you need to **have registered on Blackboard and Campus Management System**. Please do so before our first session! Please be aware that **all communication about and within this class will be channeled through Blackboard**. If you are not a student of Freie Universität or cannot register on Blackboard, please contact Regina Wenzel, administrator of the Kennedy Institute’s Department of Culture, who will set up an account for you or manually register you for this class. Please note that your **registration is only finalized after you have signed up for a session topic** or proposed an alternative group topic (not listed for sign-up below; the latter can be done by advance e-mail until November 2).

**Structure and Requirements of Student-Run Sessions:** Each participant will be part of group that organizes and conducts one session on one of the following topics: James Baldwin, the Combahee River Collective, Audre Lorde, Afropessimism, Black Marxism, Claudia Rankine, Hortense Spillers and Saidiya Hartman. The topic in question will be represented by **an assigned text (or excerpts)**, which will be **chosen by the group in charge, distributed at least two weeks before the day of**

**class, and then studied by all course participants.** Assigned material should **not exceed 20 pages** per session.

In the beginning of “your” session, I will transfer all hosting rights (including screen-sharing rights) to the designated moderator of your student group. Afterwards, you and your group are completely in charge of all details of the session, including time management. However, all student-run sessions should (roughly) follow the same structure:

- **A.** Please always start with a **brief introduction**, in which you tell us about the structure and aim of your session. This part should not take longer than **5 minutes**.
- **B.** This should be followed by an “**expert**” **presentation**, in which you introduce and “frame” your topic. In this part, you essentially want to do three things: **(1)** very briefly fill us in on the intellectual backgrounds of the author(s) and the work(s) to be discussed; **(2)** situate them historically in their time and within the larger spectrum of Black political rhetoric, making reference to “surrounding” texts and/or explaining key concepts of relevant debates; and **(3)** briefly sketch important positions and controversies in the research literature on them. Please note that this section requires substantial previous research! It cannot be prepared over night or by a simple internet search. You will want to consult a variety of sources—both primary and secondary texts beyond the one you have assigned. All these sources should be cited (e.g., in a power point slide) at some point during the session. In general, the use of power point or some other presentation tool (via screen sharing) is strongly encouraged for this part. But keep in mind its introductory function: This part should last no longer than **20 or 25 minutes**. In particular, avoid reciting lengthy biographical or historical data if they serve no analytical purpose; everything presented should be functional to your analytical goal in the next part!
- **C.** What follows is the central—and longest—part of your session: a detailed discussion of the assigned text (20 single pages), together with all participants. In this part of your session, you want to **reconstruct the logic of the text you have assigned**, focusing on individual passages: What central ideas are put forward? How are rhetoric and argument related? Is there a specific trajectory or hierarchy to the development of the argument? Which underlying assumptions can be identified? **How does this text situate itself (explicitly or implicitly) towards other positions** we have discussed in this course? Which methodological, theoretical, or political consequences need further discussion? To pursue these questions, together with all participants, you may want to **prepare a set of questions**, but also **a number of short passages for close rhetorical or stylistic analysis** (e.g., on power point slides). Whichever structure you prefer, this part should **not be done in the form of one uninterrupted presentation but in more interactive ways**, such as a moderated discussion; Q&A; short “prompts” about core concepts; pre-assigned tasks for all participants (via Blackboard); shortly presenting a canonized reading in order to challenge it or to carry it forward; or other strategies. This part should last **at least 25 minutes but no longer than 40 minutes**.
- **D.** A **brief conclusion** in which you summarize the session’s results, compare them to your initial goals, and give yourself and everyone else (including me) some time to “critique” the session: What worked well? What didn’t? Are there any lessons for future session organizers? This part of your session should take **about 5-10 minutes**. This is also the point where I may step in and add additional observations and summaries of my own.

When preparing “your” session, please remember that **your goal is a coordinated group effort**, not a sequence of individual contributions. For this purpose, all group members should start having (virtual) meetings to coordinate their tasks at least four weeks prior to the session itself (and probably more than once or twice). **Allow at least a month for intensive preparation**—this is why the student-run sessions only start in the sixth week of the semester, almost halfway through. You may also want to agree upon a clear division of labor within your group (e.g., distributing the tasks of compiling a bibliography; library work and literature procurement; PDF conversion and text distribution; online moderation; expert presentation; discussion of assigned text; summary; technological supervision; time management; etc.)

The **reading assignments for your session should be made available at least two weeks (14 days) in advance**, as indicated in the time schedule below. Keep in mind that it will take some time to get a hold of all material and to scan and convert the assigned text to PDF format. Once you have done so, please distribute the assigned text (or excerpts) using the Blackboard group-email function. Remember

that your reading assignment should not exceed 20 single pages (book pages). Do not add “bonus” material or extra pages!

**Important:** All material you distribute needs to include **proper bibliographical information**, ideally documented directly on the text document itself (not just in your e-mail), so that students can assess its publication contexts and cite it in their own research. Please **follow either MLA or Chicago Style citation standards!** If more than one version of a text exists, make an informed choice about which edition/variant you are using. You may want to address this issue in the beginning of your session.

**Attendance Policy:** To participate in this course, you must be present in the first session to sign up for student-run sessions individually or as a group. If you cannot attend the first session, please let me know in advance (e-mail). Students who miss more than two classes altogether without any notice whatsoever will be taken off the class roster.

**Final Papers:** As explained above, I will try to find out if there are ways to exchange the research paper required by the *Studienordnung* for another, less work-intensive examination format that honors the additional effort involved in an online seminar with student-run sessions (e.g., a brief final exam, an oral exam, or a “group report” on your session, etc.).

If this is not possible, your grade for this course will be determined after you have submitted a research paper of approximately 20 pages, 1.5-spaced, according to the requirements specified in the *Modulkatalog / Studienordnung*. For citation, use MLA style throughout. The topic of your final paper can—but does not have to—be based on the topic of your session. Paper topics need to address a **focused research question** (that is, a question to which you don’t know the answer yet) connected to a **suitable set of material**. Thus, your paper should **foreground analytical engagement** with a **manageably sized research corpus**. Particularly welcome are paper topics that engage in **original and archival research** (making new material accessible) or topics that **“follow” their texts into their wider spheres of cultural activity** (investigating subsequent debates in newspapers; paratexts; intertextual dialogues; media effects, etc.). Master’s Theses, in particular, should engage in original/archival research.

If you’re interested in writing a paper that “applies” a specific theoretical framework to a concrete research problem, you can do so if your paper explicitly reflects on the methodological “test” character of this project. Avoid picking a “master theory” to project it onto the material (as in “A[n] ~ist/ ~ian reading of ...”).

A Note on Video Essays: If you want to produce video essays (or if you want to learn more about the video essay as an educational and scholarly genre), have a look at *[in]Transition: Journal of Videographic Film & Moving Image Studies*: <http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/intransition/>. Your final paper can consist of a video essay plus short written discussion. Please contact me if this is your goal.

The deadline for papers (or video essays) is **April 11, 2021**. If you need an extension, it can be granted if you ask for it before this date. Please specify the reasons for your delay, indicate the exact date on which you intend to submit your paper, and document the current state of your work.

Participants who don’t have to write a paper can gain credit for participation (*Teilnahmeschein*) by organizing and conducting a session according to the model described above.

**Plagiarism:** Always indicate your sources, even when you’re “only” paraphrasing them. Everything else constitutes plagiarism and is a serious breach of academic ethics that will not only result in immediate failure of this course but can endanger your career as a student at this Institute. Please take this issue very seriously, because plagiarism is a severe scholarly offense! This goes for papers as well as for presentations. To find out more about what constitutes plagiarism, see definitions and examples collected in the *MLA Handbook* (and similar textbooks). **All cases of plagiarism involving exchange students will be reported to the student’s home institution. There are no exceptions to this rule.**

**A Note on the Selection of Course Material:** The material for this course has not been selected in order to canonize, celebrate, or condone it. Rather, this is a course in cultural history that analyzes powerful American self-descriptions and self-performances from a non-U.S. perspective. Thus, some canonical sources have been selected precisely *because* they are canonical, i.e., because of their prevailing agency within the cultural system we’re investigating as observers (not contributors). As

always, studying cultural history can be intense and disturbing. This course assumes that students are able to engage with material that is challenging in its representations and agendas; in fact, engaging with (political or aesthetic) discomfort is a significant part of an American Studies education and an opportunity for discussion and learning. However, there are some instances where a student may have experienced personal trauma that creates specific triggers for severe emotional distress. If this applies to you, please take responsibility to research all material we will be reading ahead of time, and let me know if you think that studying a particular text would create a significant issue for you—we can then work out alternative arrangements.

**A Note on Language:** We will not voice the N-word (or other racial invectives) in this course, also not when we're quoting the word (visually) from a primary source and even when this source text uses it not as an invective, but as an in-group expression (as in a rap song). I would like to ask all non-Black students to follow the same practice. By contrast, the word "negro" has a different semantic history. In the texts we will study in this course, it is used quite frequently and almost always as an accepted term of ethnic identification without overt motivations to voice an insult. As a self-attribution in the writings of writers such as W.E.B. Du Bois or Martin Luther King, Jr. (or in the poetry of Langston Hughes and in the self-attribution of the Harlem Renaissance as the "New Negro Movement"), it is not used as an exclusive in-group marker but as an unmarked expression term in accordance with the political parlance of the day. Therefore, I will quote the word whenever it occurs but will not use it as a descriptive term myself (outside of quotations). We will address the word's increasingly critical usage, and its subsequent substitution by (often semantically related) terms in the writings of thinkers and activists such as Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, and bell hooks. To the extent that we're students of communicative history, it is important to understand that the English word "negro" is not completely identical with its German dictionary translation. Both terms, however, and also their French and Spanish equivalents, are ultimately rooted in colonialist discourse. Therefore, if anyone in this course feels personally offended by these quotations, please do not hesitate to let me know and I will try to find individual ways of historicizing our texts without de-historicizing their language.

**M.A. Policy:** If you want me to supervise your Master's Thesis (*Abschlussarbeit*), you should have written at least one paper in one of my seminars. Alternatively, you can use one of my seminars (such as this one) as an M.A. colloquium, preferably in conjunction with the corresponding lecture course. You will have to choose a topic connected to the seminar's material; please get in touch with me before the first session (preferably by e-mail) to discuss possible options. Similar arrangements can be made for B.A. Theses. Seminar topics are always broad enough—usually covering an entire period—to provide fruitful material and interesting M.A. research questions for all students of American cultural history.

**Semester Schedule and Topics:** see next page.

## **SEMESTER SCHEDULE**

3 November 2020

### **Organizational Matters**

**Assignments:** Please have read this syllabus carefully and be ready to sign up for a student-run session.

You also may want to start preparing the reading assignments for the first two Background Sessions (November 17 and 24), because these assignments cover approximately 150 pages.

10 November 2020

### **Semester Schedule**

**Assignments:** None. But please start preparing the readings for the next two sessions already (November 17 and November 24: more than 150 pages).

## **BACKGROUND SESSIONS: THREE KEY MOMENTS OF HISTORICAL CONFLICT**

17 November 2020

### **Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey**

**Assignments:** Booker T. Washington, from *Up from Slavery*: “14. The Atlanta Exposition Address” (1895/1901); Booker T. Washington, from *The Future of the American Negro*: “Plan to Achieve the Rights of Citizenship” (1899); W.E.B. Du Bois, from *The Souls of Black Folk*: “The Forethought,” “1. Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” “3. Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others” (1903); W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth” (1903); Marcus Garvey, “The Challenge of Black Nationalism” (1922/1923); Marcus Garvey, “W.E. Burghardt Du Bois as a Hater of Dark People” (1923).

**Note:** The readings for this session are approximately 60 pages long. Please start preparing them in the first week of the semester or even earlier.

24 November 2020

### **Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Theorists and Activists of Black Power**

**Assignments:** Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (1964); Martin Luther King, Jr., “Address to the March on Washington (I Have a Dream)” (1963); Malcolm X, “Message to the Grass Roots” (1963); Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet” (1964); Stokely Carmichael, “What We Want” (1966); Chicago Office of SNCC: “We Must Fill Ourselves with Hate for All White Things” (1967); The Black Panther Party: “We Must Destroy Both Racism and Capitalism: The Black Panther Program and Interview with Huey Newton” (1966/1968); Eldridge Cleaver, “An Open Letter to Stokely Carmichael” (1969); Eldridge Cleaver, “Discusses Revolution: An Interview from Exile” (1969).

**Note:** The readings for this session are more than 90 pages long. Please start preparing them in the first week of the semester or even earlier.

**For the students working on James Baldwin:** Please distribute the reading assignment for your session today!

1 December 2020

## **bell hooks**

**Assignments:** bell hooks, from *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*: “1. Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory” (1984); bell hooks, from *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*: “3. Postmodern Blackness”; “9. Sitting at the Feet of the Messenger: Remembering Malcolm X” (1990).

**Note:** The assignments for this session are approximately 30 pages long.

For the students working on the Combahee River Collective: Please distribute the reading assignment for your session today!

## **STUDENT-RUN SESSIONS**

8 December 2020

### **James Baldwin**

Positioned uneasily between the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, and Black Marxism (Black Panther Party), James Baldwin is not easy to place in the cultural debates of the 1950s-1980s. Perhaps this explains his renewed appeal in our own time. An obvious choice for textual analysis would be (excerpts from) *The Fire Next Time* (1963), his most famous essay, consisting of two letters. His take on the conflict between Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and the Black Panthers can be found in *No Name in the Street* (1972). But he also wrote (gay) fiction and film criticism from an explicitly Black perspective (in *The Devil Finds Work*, 1976). Interesting topics for your introductory frame are Baldwin's complicated friendship with Norman Mailer (whose essay “The White Negro” we will discuss in the lecture course) and the Baldwin revival of our time (including his influence, or supposed influence, on Ta-Nehisi Coates).

Session Organizer(s):

Assignment:

15 December 2020

### **The Combahee River Collective**

The choice of text for this session is obvious: It's got to be the 1977 “Combahee River Collective Statement” (about 13 pages long), a key document both of Black feminism and of various 1970s lesbian movements. The best current edition, with very good background material, can be found in Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor's recent book *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017). In your introductory framing, you may want to think about the Combahee River Collective's relationship to the Black Power movement and the Black Panthers, but also to other Black feminists of the time, especially Angela Davis and Assata Shakur.

Session Organizer(s):

Assignment:

For the students working on Audre Lorde: Please distribute the reading assignment for your session today!

5 January 2021

— **[no session]** —

For the students working on Afropessimism: Please distribute the reading assignment for your session today!

12 January 2021

## **Audre Lorde**

Lorde was both a poet and a theorist—and her oeuvre in both fields is so wide-ranging and prolific that it will be difficult to decide on a single text for discussion. Perhaps you want to combine a short poem with a theoretical piece (or excerpt) and discuss their inter-dependence, but also potential conflicts (rhetorically and aesthetically) between both forms. In the case of Lorde, designing a well-targeted introductory “frame” will be particularly interesting and important for the following text discussions. You might want to think about how her work illuminates the emergence of a “New” (culturalist) Left in the 1970s, with consequences all the way to our own time. You might also want to look at Lorde’s time in Berlin (affiliated with the JFKI) and what this meant for—or how it has been historicized and recently also problematized by—Afro-German groups and movements. Other interesting perspectives are provided by Lorde’s political notion of lesbianism and her equally political way of writing about her disease in *The Cancer Journals* (1980).

Session Organizer(s):

Assignment:

For the students working on Black Marxism: Please distribute the reading assignment for your session today!

19 January 2021

## **Afropessimism**

The term “Afropessimism” covers an extremely wide and diverse field of theoretical and aesthetic practices. What they have in common is, arguably, an ontological (sometimes: para-ontological) notion of “blackness,” developed in critical dialogue with, or sometimes even open hostility to, traditionally leftist and Marxist liberation movements (to be discussed in our next session). Orlando Patterson’s concept of “social death” is a frequent point of departure, sometimes critically so. Afropessimist texts tend to be written in a register of (postmodern) philosophy rather than historiography or sociology. In other words, these are usually very difficult and challenging texts, and meant to be. An interesting author is Frank B. Wilderson III., who just published a memoir-like book called *Afropessimism* (2020). Another brilliant writer in this vein—though he distances himself from the term “Afropessimism”—is Fred Moten, author of *The Undercommons* (with Stefano Harney, 2013), *Black and Blur* (2017), *Stolen Life* (2018), and *The Universal Machine* (2018). Sometimes Alexander Weheliye’s *Habeas Viscus* (2014) is also discussed in this context. For all these cases—but especially for Wilderson—you might want to consult critical perspectives on the US-centrism of academic “Afropessimism.”

Session Organizer(s):

Assignment:

For the students working on Claudia Rankine: Please distribute the reading assignment for your session today!

26 January 2021

## **Black Marxism**

An important source and natural textual choice would be Cedric Robinson’s 1983 landmark study *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (which can perhaps also be seen as a counterstatement of sorts to Harold Cruse’s more polemical *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, 1967). There are important forerunners of Robinson, however, most notably W.E.B. Du Bois with *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), his most Marxist work (which we discussed at some length in last semester’s lecture course), and C.L.R. James with *The Black Jacobins* (1938). But in your session, you may want to (also) think about—or perhaps even discuss in detail—more contemporary examples that draw on these sources. An excellent



collection of texts on the continued relevance of Robinson is *Futures of Black Radicalism*, edited in 2017 by Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin. Another contemporary Black Marxist—and feminist—you may be interested in, at least for comparison, is Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (who is included in the Course Reader for the lecture course with selections from her 2013 book *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* and who just published a new book on Black home ownership, redlining, and eviction: *Race for Profit*, 2019). And then, of course, there is Cornel West, whose critique of Ta-Nehisi Coates’s (supposed) “Afropessimism” may be worth looking into.

Session Organizer(s):

Assignment:

For the students working on Hortense Spillers/Saidiya Hartman: Please distribute the reading assignment for your session today!

2 February 2021 –

## **Claudia Rankine**

Like Audre Lorde, Claudia Rankine is both a poet and a theorist. But in her case, the relationship between both modes of writing is so close that it’s sometimes difficult to say which genre we’re reading. Her most famous and most influential book, *Citizen: An American Lyric*, published in 2014, was the only book ever to be nominated for a National Book Award *both* in the categories of Poetry and Criticism. (It won in Poetry.) *Citizen* is an excellent source for short texts that lend themselves to rhetorical and stylistic analysis. Its focus on “micro-aggression”—a term Rankine helped to popularize—is characteristic of the age of social media and it intersects with the Black Lives Matter movement in many ways worth analyzing. In your introductory framing, you may also want to look at Rankine’s (institutional) engagement with Critical Whiteness Studies, which updates the important work done by Toni Morrison in this regard (which we will discuss in the lecture course).

Session Organizer(s):

Assignment:

9 February 2021

## **Hortense Spillers and/or Saidiya Hartman**

Two of the most frequently quoted Black scholars of our time are Hortense Spillers and Saidiya Hartman. Their texts are often so rich, dense, and sophisticated that I would advise you to focus on only *one* of them in your analysis section, but it will be helpful to keep the other writer always in close view for purposes of theoretical and historical framing. Spillers’s most influential essay is “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” from 1987. It was an important inspiration for “Afropessimist” and ontological thinkers like Frank Wilderson and Fred Moten, but also for the—much more accessible, but no less sophisticated—archival practices of Saidiya Hartman. Of central importance (and relevant for our own compositional and pedagogical practices) is Spillers’s critique of “pornotroping,” which you should definitely address in your introductory section, because it is pertinent to *any* academic approach to African American history. If you focus on Hartman, the question of archival work will almost necessarily become important. Hartman’s writings about Africa also raise questions about the US-centrism of Black Studies in their current institutional form.

Session Organizer(s):

Assignment:

16 February 2021

## **Open Session / M.A. Projects**

M.A. Project Presentation(s):  
Or additional assignment(s):  
Session Organizer(s):

**You may propose authors / texts / theoretical frameworks that are not included in this list!** If you want to do so, please let me know by e-mail before our first session, preferably together with other students who are willing to form a group with you. You can also focus on **one important contemporary book or article** that is perhaps not yet representative of a larger field but has already produced numerous discussions or has simply proven valuable to your own work. Alternatively, you can also focus on the intellectual work of **a specific journal**—or on how a journal has developed in its theoretical outlook and allegiance—or **other topics and other kinds of material!** If you're not sure if a topic is suitable or not, feel free to contact me by e-mail!