

Spring 2020 | University of North Carolina, Greensboro
Prof. Watson Jennison | Email: wwjennis@uncg.edu | Office: HHRA 2143 | Phone: 336-334-4092
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. and by appointment

HIS 403: Topics in African American History
“From Blaxploitation to the Birth of the B-Boy: Black Popular Culture in the 1970s”
Course Syllabus

The 1970s witnessed an explosion of black popular culture unseen since the Harlem Renaissance of a half century before. A product of the economic, political, and social transformations that shaped black life in this critical decade, black art, both high and low, represented the voice of a people articulating their distinctive vision of American identity. This course will examine the history of black popular culture as well as the context and controversies connected to its creation. In addition to the rise of black artists in music, television, and film, this course will explore other topics such as Afrofuturism, black theater and literature, and the birth of hip hop.

Course Requirements: The requirements for this course include assigned readings and audiovisual materials, in-class assignments, short papers, and one presentation. Assignments submitted in class are due at the beginning of the class period. Students who submit assignments after the deadline will be penalized with a grade deduction based on the lateness of the assignment. No assignments will be accepted one week after the due date. All assignments must be submitted in hard copy.

Assigned Course Materials: There are two books and several articles and excerpted chapters assigned for this course. The books can be purchased at the University Bookstore and the shorter readings are available on Canvas. In addition, students are required to purchase, rent, or stream various audiovisual materials.

Electronic Devices: The use of laptops, tablets, cellular phones, or any other type of electronic device is prohibited during class.

Attendance and Late Policy: Attendance in class is mandatory. The door will close ten minutes after class starts. Once the door closes, students will no longer be admitted to the class and will be considered absent. Students are allowed one absence, excused or unexcused, without an impact on their grade. For the second and every subsequent absence, students will receive a five-point grade deduction.

Plagiarism Policy: The University defines plagiarism as intentionally or knowingly “representing the words of another, as one's own in any academic exercise.”¹ (See [academic integrity violations](https://osrr.uncg.edu/academic-integrity/violations-and-sanctions/plagiarism/) for further information.) All sources (books, articles, documents, etc.) used in any paper or assignment must be properly cited or will be considered plagiarism. Any instance of plagiarism will receive a zero and will be referred to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities for appropriate action, including suspension or expulsion from the University.

¹ <https://osrr.uncg.edu/academic-integrity/violations-and-sanctions/plagiarism/>

Final Grade Composition

- | | |
|------------------------|-----|
| ▪ Participation | 25% |
| ▪ In-Class Assignments | 10% |
| ▪ Papers | 50% |
| ▪ Presentation | 15% |

Participation: Participation in discussion is mandatory. **Students should be prepared to discuss the course materials on the day that they are assigned.** Attendance alone is not sufficient for full participation credit.

In-Class Assignments: Students will be given brief in-class assignments on readings, lectures, and other course work. There will be no make-up assignments in the case of a missed class.

Papers: Students are required to write nine double-spaced 2- to 3-page papers on various forms of popular culture. All sources in the papers should be properly cited according to the guidelines laid out in [*The Chicago Manual of Style*](#), which is available on-line.

Presentation: Students will give a five- to seven-minute oral presentation on **April 29**.

Class Schedule

Assignments are subject to change. Consult the most recent version of the syllabus on-line for updates or alterations.

Week 1 (January 15): Introduction

Week 2 (January 22): The Great Divergence

- Reading Assignment: William Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 88-182 on Canvas

Week 3 (January 29): The Rise and Fall of Chocolate Cities

- Reading Assignment: Zachary Green, "Black Is Beautiful But So Is Green: Capitalism, Black Power, and Politics in Floyd McKissick's Soul City," in *The New Black History: Revisiting the Second Reconstruction*, eds., Manning Marable and Elizabeth Kai Hinton (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 267-286 on Canvas; David R. Colburn, "Running for Office: African-American Mayors from 1967 to 1996," in *African-American Mayors: Race, Politics, and the American City*, eds. David R. Colburn and Jeffrey S. Adler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 23-56 on Canvas; Heather Anne Thompson, "Rethinking the Collapse of Postwar Liberalism: The Rise of Mayor Coleman Young and the Politics of Race in Detroit," in *African-American Mayors: Race, Politics, and the American City*, eds. David R. Colburn and Jeffrey S. Adler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 223-245 on Canvas

Week 4 (February 5): The Black Community or Communities?

- Reading Assignment: Michele Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of Superwoman* (New York: The Dial Press, 1978), 89-177 on Canvas.

Week 5 (February 12): Black Films I

- Viewing Assignment: “Super Fly” (1972)
- Writing Assignment: 2- to 3-page paper

Week 6 (February 19): Black Films II

- Viewing Assignment: “The Spook Who Sat By the Door” (1973)
- Writing Assignment: 2- to 3-page paper

Week 7 (February 26): Blacks on TV I

- Viewing Assignment: Selected episodes from “The Jeffersons” (1975)
- Writing Assignment: 2- to 3-page paper

Week 8 (March 4): Class Cancelled – Spring Break

Week 9 (March 11): Blacks on TV II

- Viewing Assignment: Selected episodes from “The Jeffersons” (1975)
- Writing Assignment: 2- to 3-page paper

Week 10 (March 18): Black Literature

- Reading Assignment: Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (1977)
- Writing Assignment: 2- to 3-page paper

Week 11 (March 25): Black Theater

- Viewing Assignment: Ntozake Shange, *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* (1976)
- Writing Assignment: 2- to 3-page paper

Week 12 (April 1): Afrofuturism

- Reading Assignment: Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (New York: Doubleday, 1979)
- Writing Assignment: 2- to 3-page paper

Week 13 (April 8): Class Cancelled

Week 14 (April 15): Music

- Listening Assignment: Marvin Gaye, “What’s Going On” (1971); Curtis Mayfield, “Super Fly” (1972); or Stevie Wonder, “Innervisions” (1973)
- Writing Assignment: 2- to 3-page paper

Week 15 (April 22): Birth of the B-Boy

- Reading Assignment: Steve Hager, *Hip Hop* (1984) on Canvas
- Viewing Assignment: “Beat Street” (1984)
- Writing Assignment: 2- to 3-page paper

Week 16 (April 29): Class Presentations

- Presentation Assignment: five- to seven-minute oral presentation