

**AMETH 560: BLACK KANSAS ARTISTS**  
**KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**SPRING 2009, TU/TH 1:05 – 2:20 PM**  
**WILLARD 025**

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**Office Hours:** Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2:30 pm – 5:00 pm  
**Or by appointment**

### **Course Description & Goals**

The purpose of this course is two-fold: to cultivate understanding of important frameworks in the scholarship of Black American culture and to introduce the lives and works of Kansas artists who have significantly impacted the development of America.

Broadly, the course divides into two sections. First, we will read and discuss various perspectives on Black cultural production that will help define and provide a context for our later study of Kansas art and artists. These diverse perspectives will mainly—but not exclusively—draw from African *American* cultural theory. Next, we will study and analyze the work of various Kansas artists, paying particular attention to Midwestern roots and connections we may (or may not!) find. The art and artists we will cover includes writers, painters, illustrators, film makers, performing artists, and musicians, all of whom have some connection to Kansas. While our focus will be on twentieth-century artists, contemporary—and local—artists will be included.

When you have completed this course, you will gain:

- Increased knowledge and awareness of the rich diversity of Kansas art and artists
- Recognition and basic understandings of various frameworks (or perspectives) used to interpret cultural production
- Deeper understanding of key concepts, including *culture*, *African diaspora*, *Black*, *art*, *the relationship between the folk and the Black middle class*, *racial discrimination and racial progress*
- Improved critical thinking and critical writing skills
- Practice in working as a team to accomplish goals.

***Success in this course depends on the active participation of all class members, and assignments will reflect this.***

### **Course Texts**

- Charles E. Coulter, *Take up the Black Man's Burden: Kansas City's African American Communities, 1865-1939* (University of Missouri Press) ISBN: 0826216498
- Langston Hughes, *Not Without Laughter* (Scribner) ISBN: 0020209851
- Gordon Parks, *Half Past Autumn: A Retrospective* (Bulfinch Press/Little, Brown and Company) ISBN: 0821225510
- Reserve Texts—available through K-State Online (<http://public.online.ksu.edu/>).

## EXPECTATIONS AND EVALUATION PROCEDURES

### **Being prepared for and attending class:**

Attendance *and* participation in this class are mandatory. The kinds of critical thinking and writing skills we will practice together in this course require that we all be present, prepared, and engaged. As your instructor (and guide), I feel a strong responsibility to do all I can to make this happen. In turn, as a participant in the class, I believe you maintain a responsibility to yourself and to your classmates to do your best in this effort. If I feel you are regularly not prepared, attending, or participating in the class at an appropriate level, I will let you know. You should let me know if I can do anything to help you. Your level of attendance and participation will be reflected in your final grade.

### **Academic Misconduct (cheating and plagiarism):**

Plagiarism is cheating! It is unacceptable and could result in failing grades for individual assignments and an unwanted final course grade. Webster's New World Dictionary defines plagiarism as taking another person's ideas or writings and presenting them as your own. Please, do not do this. If you are unsure about whether or not something you plan to submit to me is plagiarized, you might want to check out those doubts with me, either in person, over the phone, or via electronic mail, before assignment due dates.

Kansas State University has an Honor and Integrity system that applies to all students who enroll in any course. The policies and procedures of the Honor and Integrity System can be accessed through the following website: <http://www.ksu.edu/honor>. A component vital to the honor system is the inclusion of the Honor Pledge, which applies to all assignments, examinations, or other course work undertaken by students. By registering for courses here, you pledge, "On my honor, as a student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this academic work." A grade of XF can result from a breach of academic honesty. The F indicates failure in the course; the X indicates a violation of the Honor Pledge.

Kansas State University is committed to creating an environment free of harassment and discrimination. As a student here, you have rights and responsibilities to share in the creation of such a learning environment. More information about university policies may be found at <http://courses.k-state.edu/catalog/undergraduate/regulations/>.

#### Principles of community

Kansas State University is a land-grant, public research university, committed to teaching and learning, research, and service to the people of Kansas, the nation, and the world. Our collective mission is best accomplished when every member of the university community acknowledges and practices the following principles:

We affirm the inherent dignity and value of every person and strive to maintain an atmosphere of justice based on respect for each other.

We affirm the right of each person to freely express thoughts and opinions in a spirit of civility and decency. We believe that diversity of views enriches our learning environment and we promote open expression within a climate of courtesy, sensitivity, and mutual respect.

We affirm the value of human diversity for community. We confront and reject all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including those based on race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, religious or political beliefs, economic status, or any other differences that have led to misunderstandings, hostility, and injustice.

We acknowledge that we are a part of the larger Kansas community and that we have an obligation to be engaged in a positive way with our civic partners.

We recognize our individual obligations to the university community and to the principles that sustain it. We will each strive to contribute to a positive spirit that affirms learning and growth for all members of the community.

**Evaluation:**

I believe the process of learning is just as important as the attainment of the end outcome. In this course it will be vital that you both attend regularly and that you come to class fully prepared to participate. You **MUST** keep up with the assigned readings. Grades will be calculated as follows:

*Participation . . . . . 20%*

For this portion of your grade I will assign points for class attendance, attendance at scheduled meetings with me outside of class time, preparation for class, participation in classroom discussion, and completion of in-class and outside, non-graded, writing and other assignments. Extra credit points may be awarded for attendance of outside lectures and performances and/or for completion of additional projects if approved by me. I will let you know as these opportunities arise and will provide more information about the guidelines for earning points for these projects. Feel free to come to me with questions or suggestions about possible extra-credit projects at any time.

*Discussion Group Assignments . . . . . 4 x 10% = 40%*

In order to facilitate a vibrant class discussion, each week I will ask you to participate in an online discussion group through K-State Online. I require that you complete at least two postings for each weekly assignment as follows: **First**, you should prepare and post an initial response to the assigned reading(s) that thoughtfully analyzes and synthesizes the material offered by the authors/artists, and from which you draw some initial conclusions. (We will talk more in class about analysis and synthesis strategies that lead thoughtful conclusions.) **Your initial response is due by class time on Tuesday.**

**Second**, you should respond to at least one of your classmate’s initial responses. I encourage you to respond to more than one response—and to respond multiple times—if you should feel moved to do so. **Your follow-up response is due by class time on Thursday.**

I will randomly choose postings to grade each week, so that each person gets graded 4 times throughout the semester. A grading rubric for this will be provided.

*Research Essay and Team Presentation . . . . . 40%*

For your final research essay, you should choose a topic **in consultation with me** that will allow you to utilize frameworks employed during this course and will deepen your understanding of something or someone discussed. Keeping this in mind, I suggest you think about looking more closely at a particular artist, a series of works, or even one specific artwork. I will be happy to discuss your options in more depth during office hours.

Requirements for this research essay are simple. Plan to use at least 5 resources (books, journal articles, online sources [though you may want to check these out with me first], oral interviews, primary resources, visual texts, audio texts, film, etc.). The essay itself should be double-spaced, typewritten, 10-15 pages. You should include a bibliography of the sources used. I am not particular about styles (e.g. Chicago Manual of Style format, MLA format, etc.), but please be consistent. **This essay will be worth 40% of your grade in this class.**

Your essay should include (but not be limited to) clear, close descriptions of the cultural works under study—talk to me if you are not sure what this means. In addition, you should include contextual (background) information about the art or artists under discussion in order to place them within a space (timeline, geography, influences, teachers, environment, etc.). In addition, you should provide an analysis of the topic using the lens of one of the theoretical frameworks used during this course. This should include discussion of how the art or artist fits within those frameworks, and, perhaps, ways that the work pushes or re-configures, or even conflicts with, those frames of understanding.

Working in teams, you will present your research to the class using appropriate presentation resources (PowerPoint slides, music, video, etc.) to support your discussion. Each team member is expected to contribute equally, but you are encouraged to work together closely in deciding the format and material included in your group presentation. The overall group presentation should cover 45-60 minutes (based on 15 to 20 minutes per person, groups of 3, with a few minutes for group introduction and conclusion). I value creativity and originality in these presentations and will be supportive of non-traditional presentations, as appropriate.

I will assign periodic deadlines (topic choice, preliminary bibliography, annotated bibliography/sentence outline, group presentation overview) throughout the semester. These dates will be clearly posted on K-State Online. Your research essay (the paper) will serve as your final project in the course and will be due on the scheduled final examination day for this class.

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**Grading Scale: 90-100 = A; 80-89 = B; 70-79 = C; 60-69 = D; Below 60 = F.**  
**ALL ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE COMPLETED TO PASS THIS COURSE.**

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### **Additional Support Services**

**The Writing Center:** 122D English/Counseling Services, offers free, one-on-one consulting services for writers within the K-State community. You may discuss your writing at any stage of the process. Appointments can be made in person, or by calling the Writing Center at 532-2179. I highly encourage you to check out this service, no matter what your current skill level. We all are always becoming better writers!

**Disability Support Services (DSS):** 202 Holton Hall, 785-532-6441, [dss@ksu.edu](mailto:dss@ksu.edu), coordinates accommodations and academic support services for students with permanent or temporary disabilities. Students with disabilities are welcome in my classroom! Please talk to me if you have a disability and need particular accommodations. All such conversations are confidential.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Please come to class prepared to discuss the readings assigned on the days listed.

*Week 1: Let's get it started!*

Thursday: Introductions to me, each other, and to the material.  
Discuss Nikki Giovanni, "Black is the Noun"

### LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

*Week 2: What is this "Black" in Black American Culture?*

TEXTS: K-State Online: Selection from Richard J. Powell, *Black Art and Culture* AND  
Selection from Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*

Tuesday:

Thursday:

*Week 3: The Role of the Folk*

TEXTS: K-State Online: Selections from LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, *Blues People* AND  
Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*

Tuesday:

Thursday: BEACH MUSEUM: Tour of Roger Shimomura, An American Diary with  
Katherine Schlageck

*Week 4: Coming from Where I Come From: That Midwestern Flavor*

TEXTS: Charles E. Coulter, *Take up the Black Man's Burden*

Tuesday: GUEST SPEAKER: ?

Thursday:

### ARTISTS AND THEIR WORK

*Week 5: Langston Hughes*

TEXTS: *Not Without Laughter*; from K-State Online: "The Negro Artist and the Racial  
Mountain"

Tuesday:

Thursday:

*Week 6: Kansas (City) Jazz*

TEXTS:

Tuesday: GUEST SPEAKER: Dr. Alfred Cochran, Professor of Music, Kansas State  
University

Thursday:

*Week 7: Aaron Douglas*

TEXTS:

Tuesday:

Thursday: GUEST SPEAKER: Chanon Judson

*Week 8: Gordon Parks*

TEXTS: *Half Past Autumn: A Retrospective*

Tuesday:

Thursday:

*Week 9: Gwendolyn Brooks*

TEXTS:

Tuesday:

Thursday:

SPRING BREAK: MARCH 15 – 21

*Week 10: Black Film Part I: Oscar Micheaux*

TEXTS:

Tuesday:

Thursday:

*Week 11: Black Film Part II: Kevin Willmott*

TEXTS:

Tuesday:

Thursday:

*Week 12: African American Performance: Williams & Walker to Hattie McDaniel*

TEXTS:

Tuesday:

Thursday:

WHAT'S GOING ON?

*Week 13:*

TEXTS:

Tuesday:

Thursday:

*Week 14:*

TEXTS:

Tuesday:

Thursday:

*Week 15: IN-CLASS PRESENTATIONS*

*Week 16: IN-CLASS PRESENTATIONS*

**PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus serves as a general guideline for the course and is subject to change throughout the semester. Changes will be announced in-class and posted to our course page at K-State Online. Once the changes have been announced, you are responsible for being prepared for posted changes.**