

OutKast Course Description and Objectives

Pre-requisite: ENGL1102

Preferred Pre-requisites: ENGL2300, AADS1102

In 1995, Atlanta, GA duo OutKast attended the Source Hip Hop Awards where they won the award for Best New Duo. Mostly attended by bi-coastal rappers and hip hop enthusiasts, OutKast was booed off the stage. OutKast member Andre Benjamin, clearly frustrated, emphatically declared what is now known as the rallying cry for young black southerners: “the south got something to say.”

For this course, we will use OutKast’s body of work as a case study questioning how we recognize race and identity in the American south after the Civil Rights Movement. Using a variety of post-Civil Rights era texts including film, fiction, criticism, and music, students will interrogate OutKast’s music as the foundation of what the instructor theorizes as “the hip hop south,” the southern black social-cultural landscape in place over the last 25 years.

Objectives

1. To develop and utilize a multidisciplinary critical framework to successfully engage with conversations revolving around contemporary identity politics and (southern) popular culture
2. To challenge students to engage with unfamiliar texts, cultural expressions, and language in order to learn how to be socially and culturally sensitive and aware of modes of expression outside of their own experiences.
3. To develop research and writing skills to create and/or improve one’s scholarly voice and others via the following assignments:
 - Critical Listening Journals
 - Creative or Critical Final Project

****Explicit Content Statement (courtesy of Dr. Treva B. Lindsey)****
Over the course of the semester students will be introduced to texts that may be explicit in nature (i.e. cursing, sexual content). Students should be fully aware that these types of texts, though believed offensive, should still

be discussed with respect to the opinions of peers, the instructor, and creator of the text in question.

Required Course Materials**

Laymon, Kiese *Long Division*

Robinson, Zandria F. *This Ain't Chicago*

Ward, Jesmyn *Where the Line Bleeds*

Jones, Tayari *Leaving Atlanta*

Hobson, Maurice *The Legend of the Black Mecca: Politics and Class in the Making of Modern Atlanta*

Select readings and playlists found on D2L and on your reading schedule

**Weekly Reading

You will read an average of 50+ pages per week in addition to listening to music for this course. Please keep up with your reading and music, as this will help you successfully complete course assignments.

Select Course Assignments

Friday Reflections

Friday Reflections are short responses to writing prompts assigned by Dr. B for the **novels** we are reading this semester. Possible reflection assignments can be personal reflection about the text, close readings of select passages, or quizzes on the assigned reading.

Critical Listening Journals

The student is required to submit journal entries via D2L discussing assigned listening exercises. Your journals are a great way to engage more deeply with the musical texts being analyzed in the course. Further, these entries will help the student prepare for meetings with the instructor as well as prepare for the final project. **Journals are expected to be a MINIMUM of 500 words and a MAXIMUM of 750 words.** Some questions to address to help shape your entries include but are not limited to:

- What stands out beyond the lyricism of the musical text? What do I hear? What catches my attention? How does what the track(s) sound like impact the story/narrative being read?

- What is distinctively southern (sonically, culturally, lyrically) about the musical text?
- If this is my first time listening to this musical text, what state of mind does it put me in? If this is not my first time listening to this musical text, what has changed/caught my attention since the first time I heard the work?

Additionally, students are responsible for replying to ONE (1) listening journal that is not their own. Journal entry responses should be a **MINIMUM of 300 words** and a **MAXIMUM of 450 words**.

You MUST submit your own listening journal post before responding to another student's response. Failure to complete your own post will result in a failing grade.

Final Project

Using a critical lens and medium of their choice, students will theorize the significance of how southern hip hop impacts negotiations of race, identity, and trauma in the post-Civil Rights American South. For students who want to submit a traditional research essay, the essay must adhere to the following qualifications:

- Your research essay should be a **MINIMUM** of 3000 words and a **MAXIMUM** of 3500 words not including heading and identifying information. **Essays over 3500 words will not be graded.**
- Your essay should be supported by peer-reviewed scholarship. It should include a **MINIMUM** of two (2) secondary sources **not included on the course reading list**.

For students interested in submitting a creative project as their final, the following options are available and must be approved by Dr. B in advance of the final project deadline:

- Poetry (3-5 poems; 2500-3000 words)
- Short stories (1-2 stories, 3500-4500 words)
- Podcast episode (10-12 minutes; episode must feature critical analysis of southern hip hop album of their choice)
- Film short or one act play script (3500-4500 words)

- Visual art (2-3 images)

In addition to the creative project, students should also submit a 1 page critical memo that includes the following:

- **MINIMUM** of 500 words and a **MAXIMUM** of 750 words.
- “Critical Introduction” of project:
 - Which creative medium did you pick? Why?
 - How is your creative project useful for understanding the themes presented in the course this semester?
 - Creative project synopsis: what is your project about?

Week by Week Schedule*

*Subject to change with advanced notice

UNIT I: F.I.L.A. (Forever I Love Atlanta) OutKast Albums: *Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik* (1994) *ATLiens* (1996)

Week 1:

Course Introduction and Syllabus Review via D2L

Week 2:

Critical Reading Questions: Who is OutKast? How does hip hop help shape the contemporary Black South?

Reading/Viewings: Regina Bradley, “The Mountaintop Ain’t Flat” AND “The Demo Tape Ain’t Nobody Wanna Hear” (D2L); Netflix, *Hip Hop Evolution* S3E4, “Dirty South;” *Bottom of the Map* podcast, “25 Years of OutKast” (D2L)

Week 3:

Critical Reading Questions: What is the Black New South? What influences Southern Black Urbanity?

Readings: Zandria Robinson, *This Ain’t Chicago* “Introduction;” Maurice Hobson, *Legend of the Black Mecca* “Introduction;”

Week 4:

Critical Reading Questions: What does Atlanta life and culture look like in the immediate aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement? How does the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement influence Black Atlanta music and culture?

Readings and Media: Hobson “The Sound and the Fury;” OutKast, *Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik*

Week 5:

Critical Reading Questions: What were the Atlanta Child Murders? How did the Atlanta Child Murders influence Atlanta Hip Hop?

Readings and Media: Hobson, “The Sorrow of a City;” Michelle Hite, “André’s Dread” (D2L); Bottom of the Map, “Thought Process” AND “The Ends of Dread” (D2L)

Week 6:

Critical Reading Questions: How does Tayari Jones use race and class to talk about the Atlanta Child Murders? What position does Jones assume about Black children and innocence in the contemporary South?

Reading: Tayari Jones, *Leaving Atlanta*

Week 7:

Critical Reading Questions: What is Afrofuturism? How does Afrofuturism help OutKast and Black southerners think about themselves in the present and in the future?

Readings and Media: Robinson, “Finding the Black South;” Howard Rambsy II, “Beyond Keeping it Real: OutKast, the Funk Connection, and Afrofuturism” (D2L); Bottom of the Map, “Culture in the Cosmos” (D2L); OutKast, *ATLiens*

**UNIT II: Da Art of Storytelling’
OutKast Album: *Aquemini* (1998)**

Week 8:

Critical Reading Questions: How does Kiese Laymon use hip hop to talk about his experiences growing up and coming-of-age in Mississippi? What are some of the ways southern hip hop is infused in Laymon's writing?

Readings and Media: Kiese Laymon, "Hip Hop Stole My Southern Black Boy" (D2L); "The South STILL Got Something to Say" (D2L); OutKast, *Aquemini*

Week 9: NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

Week 10:

Critical Listening Questions: What is the significance of Laymon's story taking place across three different historical periods (1964, 1985, and 2013)? How is southern hip hop infused in Laymon's plot about love, freedom, and southern Black people's purpose in the shadow of the Civil Rights Movement?

Reading: Kiese Laymon, *Long Division*

Week 11:

Critical Reading Questions: What is Trap rap? Why is it important in understanding southern Blackness? How does trap help the listener recognize trauma and grief in the contemporary Black South?

Readings and Media: Jesmyn Ward, "Joshua Adam Dedeaux" (D2L); Regina Bradley, "Still Ain't Forgave Myself" (D2L); Rodney Carmichael, "Culture Wars" (D2L); T.I.P., *Trap Muzik*

Week 12:

Critical Reading Questions: How does Ward humanize poor Southern Black people? What are some of the ways Ward utilizes southern hip hop, especially

trap music, to show the complexity and challenges of young southern Black men?

Reading: Jesmyn Ward, *Where the Line Bleeds*

DEADLINE: CREATIVE PROJECT OPTION APPLICATION DUE

UNIT III: The Place From Which All Funky Things Come...

**OutKast Albums: *Stankonia* (2000) and
Speakerboxxx/The Love Below (2003)**

Week 13:

Critical Reading Questions: What does recognizing a contemporary southern Black community contribute to larger discussions about race, region, and identity taking place in American (popular) culture? Why is popular culture most useful for understanding the complexity of contemporary southern Black life?

Reading and Media: Robinson, “Southern is the New Black;” OutKast, *Stankonia*

Week 14:

Media: OutKast, *Speakerboxxx/The Love Below*

Week 15:

Critical Reading and Listening Questions: How do younger generations of southern rap artists continue OutKast’s tradition of pushing back against the norm? How is southernness represented in young southern rap artists’ music?

Reading and Media: Bottom of the Map, “Forever is Now: Big K.R.I.T. and the American Standard” (D2L); Yoh Phillips, “How EarthGang Leveled Up to Make the Next Great Atlanta Rap Album” (D2L); Leslie Pariseau, “Tobe Nwigwe Never Planned to Go Viral” (D2L)

Playlist:

Big K.R.I.T. – “Mt. Olympus”

Tobe Nwigwe – “Purple Rain Thing”

Earthgang and Spillage Village – “Baptize”

Future – “Stick Talk”

J. Cole – “Middle Child”

Childish Gambino – “3000”

Week 16:

INDEPENDENT WORK WEEK. PLEASE WORK ON YOUR FINAL PROJECTS