

HUMA 1300
RESEARCH ESSAY

Part 1: Proposal and Annotated Bibliography: **Value: 5%** **Due Date: Feb. 27, 2019**
Part 2: Research Essay: **Value: 15%** **Due Date: March 20, 2019**

DEFINING THE TOPIC:

The readings assigned in this course between January 9 and February 27 raise important questions about the representations of people of African descent in popular culture, and the constructions of gender and sexuality in North America and the Caribbean. This research assignment requires you to define your own research topic based on one of the broad themes discussed in these weeks. You may choose to discuss, for example, one of the following areas:

- The ways blackness is represented in popular culture such as film or TV
- The role of musics in constructing black identities
- The school-to-prison pipeline
- Black women and feminism/womanism
- Intersections of gender, 'race,' class, and/or sexuality in stereotypes about black men or women

This is hardly an exhaustive list! We want you to focus on a topic that is of interest to you. Once you have chosen a **broad area**, you will still need to narrow it down and refine it to identify the **specific topic** you wish to explore, the questions you will examine, or the argument you wish to make. Please consult your tutorial leader or one of the course directors if you have problems formulating and developing a topic.

THE ASSIGNMENT:

The assignment is divided into two sections: a proposal and bibliography worth 5% and a formal research essay worth 15%. The two components are described below.

Part 1: Proposal and Annotated Bibliography

Value: 5%

Due: February 27, 2019

Total Length: approx. 3 pages (750 words)

You will need to submit a **paper proposal of roughly 250-350 words** (approx. 1 page). Your paper proposal should briefly explain:

- Your narrowed-down **TOPIC**
- The current state of the conversation about your topic (scholarly conversation, or also popular conversations, depending on the nature of your topic)
- The main **QUESTION** you bring to this research (the answer to this question will become the foundation for the thesis of your final essay)
- How you will engage with your research question (for example, your methodology or approach, the themes or issues you want to examine further, the aspects of your topic you particularly wish to explore)

You will also need to include **an annotated bibliography of the resources you plan to use** (approx. 2 pages). Each entry in the bibliography should consist of the full reference for the source cited in MLA format, and a paragraph of 4-5 sentences summarizing the source and stating how it will contribute to the essay.

The bibliography should include at a *minimum* the following sources:

- 2 sources (which may include films) assigned in the second term of the course
- 2 external scholarly secondary sources that are not on the syllabus, which you have found through independent research
- If you plan to use any creative texts as primary sources of analysis (films, TV shows, an album, song lyrics, a music video, etc.) you must also list these in your annotated bibliography as well. Explain which aspects of these texts you plan to analyze and why.

Part 2: Research Essay

Value: 15%

Due: March 20, 2019

Length: 7-8 pages (approx. 2000 words)

The research essay is the main part of the assignment. In the essay you need to develop your argument(s) clearly and provide evidence to support your discussion, and demonstrate the ability to analyze and use sources critically. You are expected to take into account the suggestions made on your outline and bibliography. You are also required to include a copy of your graded outline with your research assignment. If you change your research topic after feedback from your tutorial leader, please submit copies of both the original and new outlines.

Purpose: This assignment will help you develop your critical reading and analytical skills, engage cross-textual analysis, and develop library and other research skills.

Format: The assignment should be typed, doubled-spaced and have numbered pages. A cover page should include the title of your assignment, your name, and your tutorial leader's name. Choose a title carefully that will suggest the main ideas of your paper. Your assignment should also include carefully cited references within the body of the text and a works cited page at the end using the MLA style guide.

Criteria of Evaluation:

Review this checklist of evaluation criteria as you prepare your essay:

Content and Comprehension

- Does your essay demonstrate comprehension of course texts and concepts?
- Does your essay demonstrate the ability to assess critically your subject texts?
- Does your work demonstrate the ability to apply course material and concepts in a broader context?

Argumentation and Development

- Does your essay have a clear thesis, or argument, that is consistent throughout the paper?
- Does the body of your essay support your thesis with evidence drawn from the relevant texts (quotations, examples)?
- Have you avoided unfounded generalizations in your argument?

Style and Structure

- Does your essay have a consistent and organized style?
- Are your sentences and paragraphs coherent and well structured?
- Do you avoid words or phrases that are repetitive, wordy, or vague?

Presentation

- Is your essay polished and professionally presented in format and appearance?
- Did you proofread your work for punctuation, spelling and grammatical errors?
- Have you included and properly formatted all necessary citations using MLA format?

Originality

- Does your work show evidence of critical, creative thinking?
- Are you demonstrating your own ideas?

York University

Violence Against Black Queer People:

The Intersections of Antiracism and Antiqueness in North American Society

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(Brian Fitzgerald) Sherrell Faulkner was assaulted and left [to die] beside a dumpster. The victim died [in hospital] from injuries sustained in the attack... No other details were provided.

– LaVendrick Smith, “Charlotte Assault Victim Found by Dumpster in November Dies”

Even in death, black queer bodies are denied identity, recognition and humanity. Her existence was tossed out with the rest of trash.

Violence Against Black Queer People:

The Intersections of Antiblackness and Antiqueness in North American Society

Unpacking violence against black queer people involves analyzing the social construction of both black and queer bodies as culpable and inherently *deserving* of violence. The intersection of black terror and queer sexual deviance works to construct black queerness in Canada and the US as dangerous, pathological, and warranting of regulation. Systemic violence against black queer people involves a complex interdependency between antiblackness and antiqueness within dominant society, positioning black queerness in the farthest reaches of society, and rendering black queer bodies as particularly victimizable. Through the evaluation of antiblack homophobia within dominant North American society, coupled with the further marginalization of black queerness from white queer communities and black diasporic communities in North America, violence against black queer people can be understood as socially constructed to contain black terror and queer sexuality and perpetuate white heterosexual hegemony.

Violence is a socially constructed concept that varies across time, space, and people.

Violence is gendered, racialized and sexualized. According to Richardson and May,

We understand and explain violence differently in relation to *who* the victim is rather than the circumstances in which the violence occurs. Underlying the issue of how

violence is socially defined and understood, therefore, are fundamental assumptions about humanity, particularly what constitutes a ‘*person*’ with a ‘*right to life*’. (309)

In accordance with Richardson and May, violence can be understood as an extension of power. Every form of violence – visible or invisible, public or private, self-directed, interpersonal, or collective (World Health Organization 3, 6) – involves exchanges of power in which perpetrators exercise the power to define the limits of the victim’s right to safety, the victim’s right to life, and the victim’s proximity to personhood. Violence, as a social construction, is reproduced and rearticulated through all levels of society. The interpersonal violence enacted from one stranger to another, is rooted in the same foundation as the violence experienced in the privacy of one’s own home. The collective systemic violence enacted on all black bodies and/or queer bodies is rooted in the same foundation as the violence enacted on one’s own body. Examining how power circulates through society fosters an understanding of how violence is defined, punished, or privileged based on the victim.

In the US, 78 unarmed black men and women were killed by the police between 1999 and 2015. Only 13 cases resulted in the indictment of the perpetrating officer. [Black humanity] is recognized only 16% of the time.

– Cassandra Chaney and Ray V. Robertson, “Armed and Dangerous? An Examination of Fatal Shootings of Unarmed Black People by Police”

The violence experienced by black queer people is rooted in the systemic perpetuation of black queer bodies as victimizable. Simultaneously positioned in the spheres of blackness and queerness, black queer bodies are understood as deserving of violence because their identities and their existence must be regulated and maintained as the inferior Other. Chaney and Robertson argue that police brutality against black bodies is an extension of white supremacy (50). The justice system works to enforce values and beliefs that maintain social hierarchies and

power stratification from the top down. The erasure, silencing and privileging of police violence is a powerful form of violence: collective systemic violence that is fundamentally necessary to perpetuate “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks 134). “The weather”, as described by Christina Sharpe, is the pervasive antiblack climate that permeates within every crevice of our society (106). The climate of antiblackness in the Americas extends from chattel slavery and continues to maintain black inferiority and black sub-humanity in the contemporary period. Thus, as described by Chaney and Robertson, police brutality is simply the continuation of violent black regulation. Police brutality is the continuation of systemic black oppression, with lynchings and citizen slave patrols upgraded into police-issued 9mm handguns and on-duty officers (51). Both exist(ed) to serve and protect. Both exist(ed) to maintain difference and enforce institutionalized understandings of who has the right to life. With the violent regulation of blackness embedded into the foundation of North American society, any act of violence against black queer people is an extension of hegemonic power, an application of social norms. Black queerness is trapped in a position of perpetual inferiority and victimization, with no protection, no support, and no sanctuaries of safety and belonging. “How can the very system that is designed to unmake and inscribe [us] also be the one to save [us]?” (Sharpe 92).

[White] Democratic political donor Ed Buck’s apartment has been the scene of two [gay] black men’s apparent overdose deaths in the last two years... The Los Angeles County district attorney’s office reviewed and rejected four charges: murder, voluntary manslaughter and furnishing and possessing drug. This is more than a coincidence: this is raced, classed, and political.

– Hailey Branson-Potts, et al., “Deaths as Democratic Donor’s California Home Spark Debate Over ‘Dark Underbelly of Gay Culture’”

To reiterate Christina Sharpe, “antiblackness is pervasive *as* climate” (106). As a reflection of the dominant society, antiblackness is perpetuated and maintained within queer

communities, “one subordinated group subordinating another” (Washington 123). Queer communities in Americas are not homogenous. They have distinct cultures and identities, represent different values and attitudes, and practice widely differing forms of social inclusion. However, queerness continues to privilege whiteness and patriarchy, maintaining the white male as the archetypal queer: “Historically, homosexuality has been associated with whiteness because it was viewed as a means of preventing white reproduction and, therefore, viewed as a threat to the white heterosexual family” (Meyers 48). This association, coupled with the link between blackness and excessive heterosexuality (Meyers 49), positions black bodies outside the realm of queerness within the imagination of dominant North American societies. Black queer bodies are denied the sanctuary of queer belonging and queer community, and white male queerness is positioned closer to humanity and personhood. Violence against white queer people is a social norm. Sexual deviance must be regulated to maintain heterosexual hegemony. As Dave Meyers argues,

The most privileged LGBT people have been favoured by traditional understandings of anti-queer violence, while marginalized LGBT people, many of who experience violence at higher rates, have been excluded. This reflects the privilege granted to white and middle-class men’s experiences in the dominant US society. LGBT communities are not unique in privileging white and middle-class men but reflect the norms of main stream society... Consequently, individuals with less privileged identities – poor, trans*, black and Latin[x], and gender non-conforming people – are less likely to be viewed as “real” victims, given that their experiences and identities do not align with the traditional representation. (5-6)

Thus, white queer victims of violence constitute a certain type of victim, a *perfect* victim: a victim who garners media attention and social recognition, a victim who can still access certain protections and privileges, and at the very least, a victim who is understood to be a casualty of systemic violence, rather than the reason for it.

Seven gay black women fight back against sexual harassment and land in jail. Buckle [a straight black male] threatened to rape the young women 'straight' and threw a punch. He ripped hair from one girl's head and choked another. Buckle claims, "he was the victim of a hate crime against a straight man." Four of the women were sentenced to 3.5 to 11 years at Riker's Island.

– Nicole Pasulka, “How 4 Gay Black Women Fought Back Against Sexual Harassment – and Landed in Jail”

The concepts of nature and deviance are dominant themes in dehumanising and depersonalising blackness and queerness. The naturalization of heterosexuality asserts the pathology of homosexuality, working to dehumanize queer bodies and establish the boundaries within which personhood should be understood (Richardson and May 317). Antiqueer violence works to simultaneously punish queer bodies and reinforce heterosexual hegemony. ‘Naturalized’ heterosexuality coupled with the construction of black bodies as inherently diseased, creates a climate of antiblack antiqueerness in dominant society that is internalized and perpetuated within black communities. Antiqueerness within black communities reflects the racialized antiqueerness within dominant society that works to position black queer people in a precarious space of (un)belonging, positioning them at the mercy of multiple forms of systemic oppression and violence. It is important to highlight also that black communities across the Americas are not homogenous. These communities are diverse: they span multiple nations and cultures; contain multiple identities and customs; and experience varying forms of oppressions and inclusion within societies. However, living with the history of chattel slavery etched on black bodies works to maintain enduring constructions of blackness that become internalized.

Through the regulation of hypersexualized black bodies, the maintenance of hypermasculinity to erase failed masculinity, the emphasis of a homogenous “respectable” representation of blackness, and a historically-rooted dependence on the black church, black communities work to marginalize their own, policing black sexual deviance as they continue to fight for the respectability of blackness in the white imagination (Ford 212; Medovarski; Ward 494).

A [black] Dallas man was charged with ‘mob violence’ against a trans [black] woman. The man repeatedly punched her as she tried to escape. Other men in the crowd joined the assault, kicking her, before she got away.*

– Christine Hauser, “Dallas Man Charged in ‘Mob Violence’ Against Transgender Woman”

Hypersexualizing the aggressive black brute and the promiscuous black jezebel worked to justify the violence inflicted on black bodies during and after slavery. Contemporary “incarnations [of] the domineering matriarch, the welfare queen, and the violent and sexually promiscuous black man” maintain black sexuality as deviant and excessively sexual (Ward 495). Thus, black sexuality is understood to be deviant, aggressive, and excessively heterosexual. In the struggle to contain the construction of excessive black sexuality in the white imagination, black communities are hesitant to challenge it (Ward 495). Black queerness spotlights black sexuality, simultaneously challenging it while rendering it hyper-visible. Therefore, violence against black queer bodies within black communities is used to regulate excessive black sexuality and position blackness closer to dominant sexual norms. Spaces of resistance – spaces that have allowed black communities in the Americas to (re)define and (re)claim their identities – are the very same spaces that have worked to homogenize black sexuality and deny black queerness. Hypermasculinity, as it continues to be a platform for black men to reclaim the masculinity denied to them by white patriarchal systemic oppression, is the reiteration of the hypersexualized, aggressive, violently heterosexual black brute (Medovarski). The deviance of

the queer black male defiles the image of the strong heterosexual black male – an image that black communities precariously hold on to. Operating under the socially imposed dichotomy of hypermasculinity versus failed masculinity (Medovarski), hypermasculinity works to police and regulate every form of failed masculinity that could work to degrade black men and move them further from the ideal of hegemonic masculinity. Similarly, the spaces of resistance black women create work to homogenize black femininity through the erasure and silencing of “deviant” black female sexuality. The promiscuous hypersexual jezebel is a damaging stereotype that is reincarnated through contemporary stereotypes of welfare queens and sapphires. Black women work to resist these images through desexualizing their bodies and hiding their sexual practices (Davis). Black female queerness, as a hyper-visible expression of black sexuality must be regulated and silenced, violently if necessary.

[Black] Detroit pastor is charged with the murder of a [black] transgender woman. Prosecutors say her gender identity was a motivating factor in her murder.

– Tim Fitzsimons, “Detroit Pastor Charged with Transgender Woman’s Murder”

Religion is fundamental in shaping and maintaining antiquesqueer values within the Americas. The naturalization of heterosexuality is continually paired with the religious propriety of heterosexuality. This belief is strongly perpetuated in the black church. The black church emerged out of suffering, resilience, and hope within enslaved and colonized black communities. It was a necessity for the preservation and survival of blackness in the Americas (Ward 495). Thus, the black church is deeply entrenched in many black communities across the Americas. It governs the practices of black respectability and acceptable black sexuality. Religion, and by extension – church leaders, influence the structure of black communities and black families (Wad 494). Employing religious beliefs, literal interpretation of biblical scripture, and “race

survival consciousness” the black church works to ostracize queerness from black communities (Ward 494). The influence of the black church and respectability politics (Davis) within black communities work to emphasise a homogenized ideal of blackness. This ideal mirrors dominant social norms, feeding on internalized stereotypes of black terror and black sexual deviance. Black queers fall short of this ideal. The preservation of ideal blackness coupled with the definition of ideal queerness permanently mark black queerness as deviant and unnatural – oppressed to maintain hegemonic ideals within dominant society and black communities.

Social understandings of blackness and queerness have been created to be mutually exclusive; however, lived experiences of systemic oppression and systemic violence against black queers are always influenced by the intersection of multiple axes of oppression. The racism perpetuated by queer communities and the homophobia perpetuated by black communities work to reinforce what Audre Lorde describes as the “mythical norm”: the ideal citizen of North American society; the ideal against which all others should be measure (116). As Lorde describes,

It is within this mythical norm that power resides within this society. Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we may be practising ourselves. (116)

Queer communities and black communities homogenize their distinct axis of oppression across their entire communities. Those facing multiple axes of oppression are forced to choose and conform. If conformity is not possible, they are marginalized from their already marginalized communities. They are pushed to the furthest reaches of society; the furthest reaches of humanity and existence. The fight for black queer existence does not look like the fight for black existence.

The fight for black queer existence does not look like the fight for queer existence. Thus, black queerness is forced to face forms of oppression and violence unique to their identity, constructed and tailored for the regulation of their (non)existence.

The marginalization of black queerness from dominant society and black and queer communities leaves black queer bodies twice displaced, left to occupy what Rinaldo Walcott describes as the “black queer diaspora” (234). The black queer diaspora allows for the existence of multiple conflicting identities and “functions simultaneously as an internal critique of black homophobia and a critique of white racism” (Walcott 235). Here in the black queer diaspora lies a space of belonging. Here lies a space of resistance; a space that reinserts black queerness into the forefront of society, announcing the fact that “how we live is not the social problem. It is our relation to the white world that is the problem” (Hartman 23).

The bodies of Brandi Mells, 22, her girlfriend Shanta Myers, 36, and Myers’ children Shanise, 5, and Jeremiah, 11, were found 5 days after their murder with their feet bound and their throats cut in the family’s basement apartment. The indictment alleges the 2 men were committing a burglary when they killed the women and children. They made off with an Xbox and a TV. Police Chief John Tedesco said he believes the killings were “not a random act”, but the possibility of it being a hate crime, specifically, has not been brought up.

– Marie Lyn Bernard, “Black Lesbian Couple and Two Children Found Brutally Murdered in Upstate New York”

Violence against black queer people involves the systemic regulation and oppression of black terror and queer sexual deviance to emulate and perpetuate white heterosexual hegemony. It involves a pervasive understanding of black queer bodies as victimizable and deserving of violence for they occupy a space of non existence within society. Black queerness is positioned on the fringes of society, in the outermost limits of their own communities, binding them to a permanent position of precarity: a position in which their mere existence is a crime against society; a position in which their identities forfeit their right to life. Their resistance is their

existence. The strength, courage, and resilience demonstrated by black queer people allow their identities to exist in spaces of nonexistence, exist in the face of oppression, violence and erasure. Their resistance is acknowledging the fact that “[*they*] *were never meant to survive*, and yet [*they*] are still here” (Hartman 29-30).

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