

Ghosts, Monsters and Zombies: Exploring Race through The Horror Genre

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Course Information: Tue, Thu 10:30 AM - 12:30 PM at GATES100.

Office Hours: By appointment via email

Course Description:

How do artists of color use the horror genre to negotiate, represent, and challenge issues of race? What do ghosts, monsters, and zombies come to signify beyond the exotic, exploitative, or ornamental? This course considers how race, identity, and power intersect in the horror genre. Our discussions will focus on how artists of color transform haunted histories into spaces of resistance and reclamation. Students will consider plays, performances, visual art, and film paired with theoretical essays that critically assess horror's possibilities and limits.

Learning Goals:

By the end of this course students will be able to:

1. Analyze how horror can be used as a strategy by artists of color to discuss issues of race
2. Explore the historical and cultural context in which different horror genres were developed in relation to race
3. Understand that horror is always already coded and socially conditioned
4. Develop critical thinking and analytical skills through the examination of literary, visual, and performance texts
5. Cultivate the ability to articulate original arguments through written, oral, and creative expression

Assignments:

- Attendance and Participation: 20%
 - Active engagement is essential in a course that relies on discussion-based learning. Students are expected to attend all classes, participate thoughtfully in discussions, and contribute meaningfully to peer conversations. Participation includes not only speaking, but also active listening, engaging with assigned materials, and bringing questions or insights into the dialogue. Students will also be encouraged to connect course themes to contemporary issues or their own experiences with the horror genre. Attendance ensures a cohesive, dynamic learning environment where everyone's perspectives are valued.
- Weekly Reading Responses: 20%
 - Each week, students will submit brief reading responses (approximately 300-400 words) reflecting on the assigned texts. These responses should demonstrate critical engagement with the readings, raising questions or identifying key themes that connect to larger course discussions about race, identity, and the gothic/horror genres. The goal is not merely to summarize the texts but to think analytically and creatively about their implications. Responses will also help fuel class discussions and allow students to explore connections between different materials throughout the course.
- Mini-writing Exercises 30%

- Close Reading Exercise (15%): Students will select a short passage from a **primary text** and produce a close reading analysis (approximately 500-750 words). This exercise requires careful attention to language, structure, and tone. Students should identify key themes, interpret significant details, and consider how the passage reflects broader course concepts. The goal is to develop analytical precision and deepen engagement with the text. (Due Week 3)
- Making an Argument Exercise (15%): Based on the close reading analysis written for the first exercise, students will research one **secondary source** on the chosen primary text. Students will then craft an argumentative essay (approximately 750-1000 words) in which they construct a clear, evidence-based argument using that secondary source. This exercise emphasizes building a compelling thesis, using textual evidence effectively, and anticipating counterarguments. The assignment is designed to strengthen argumentative writing skills and prepare students for larger analytical projects later in the term. (Due Week 5)
- Final Project: 30%
 - The final project allows students to synthesize their learning from the course into a larger creative OR analytical piece. Students can choose to write a traditional research paper (8-10 pages) OR propose an alternative format such as a creative project (e.g., writing a short story, producing a short film, or creating a performance piece) that engages with the course's central themes. In the case of the second option, students must also submit a reflective essay (2-3 pages) explaining how their creative project connects to the readings and class discussions. Students are required to meet with the instructor at least once to discuss their topics in advance. The final project encourages students to apply their critical thinking and creativity, pushing them to explore how race and the horror genre intersect in complex, original ways.

Week 1 - Introduction: The Uses of Horror

Tuesday (Jun 24th)

- READ The Uses of Anger, Audre Lorde
- In class: watch *Horror Noire: A History of Black Horror* together

Thursday (Jun 26th)

- READ John Jennings “Scratching at the Dark”
- READ Noel Carroll, Intro to *The Philosophy of Horror* Noël Carroll, “The Nature of Horror”
- READ Toni Morrison, Chapter 2 of “Playing in the Dark”

Week 2 - Theorizing Ghosts

Tuesday (Jul 1st)

- READ Adrienne Kennedy’s *The Alexander Plays*

Thursday (Jul 3rd)

- READ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, Chapter 1
- READ Chapter 7. “We Are Standing in My Ancestor’s Longhouse”: Learning the Language of Spirits and Ghosts” in *Phantom Past, Indigenous Presence: Native Ghosts in North American Culture and History*

Week 3 - The Korean Shaman

Tuesday (Jul 8th)

- READ *Dictee*

- READ Cathy Park Hong, “Portrait of an Artist,” in *Minor Feelings*
- WATCH Do hee Lee https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_41sQN_g7g
- PERUSE <https://www.doheelee.com/>

Thursday (Jul 10th)

- WATCH *Exhuma* (2023)
- READ Merosé Hwang, “The Mudang: The Colonial Legacies of Korean Shamanism” OR LISTEN to “[The Korea Now Podcast #61](#)”

Week 4- Historicizing the Zombie

Tuesday (Jul 15th)

- READ Zora Neale Hurston on Zombies in *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*
- READ Chapter 1 “New South, New Immigrants, New Women, New Zombies: The Historical Development of the Zombie in American Popular Culture” in *Race, Oppression and the Zombie*.
- READ article, [Zoinks! Tracing The History Of 'Zombie' From Haiti To The CDC](#)
- READ short story, “[Unknown Painter](#)”

Thursday (Jul 17th)

- WATCH *Get out*
- CHOOSE AND READ any one chapter in Dawn Keetley’s anthology, *Jordan Peele's Get Out: Political Horror*
- READ “[The Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism](#)”

Week 5 - Choreographing the Zombie

Tuesday (Jul 22nd)

- WATCH *US*
- WATCH *Lovecraft Country* Episode 8 “Jig-a-Bobo”
- WATCH Childish Gambino, [This is America](#)

Thursday (Jul 24th)

- READ from Hershini Bhana Young, *Falling, Floating, Flickering: Disability and Differential Movement in African Diasporic Performance*
- READ Chapter 1 “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” in *Souls of Black Folk* W.E.B. Du Bois

Week 6 - Haunted Spaces and Objects

Tuesday (Jul 29th)

- *Spirit House* exhibit: artists (Tommy Kha, Heesoo Kwon, Timothy Lai, Binh Danh, Tidawhitney Lek, Jarod Lew, Cathy Lu, Lien Truong)
- READ *Spirit House: Hauntings in Contemporary Art of the Asian Diaspora*

Thursday (Jul 31st)

- READ Jessica Nakamura, “Lingering Legacies of the War Performance and Specters at Yasukuni Shrine” in *Transgenerational Remembrance: Performance and the Asia-Pacific War in Contemporary Japan*

Week 7 - Monsters and Superheroes

Tuesday (Aug 5th)

- READ *Bitter Root* Comic book series
- READ Chapter 1. “Hope and Freedom Technologies” in *Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement*

Thursday (Aug 7th)

- WATCH Lovecraft Country, Episode 6 “Meet me in Daegu”
- READ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture: Seven Theses”

Week 8 - Performing the Other

Tuesday (Aug 12th)

- Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña “The Couple in the Cage”
- READ Diana Taylor *Performance*
- READ Coco Fusco, “The Other History of Intercultural Performance”

Thursday (Aug 14th)

- *Performance Project Day*

Policies and Other Information:

Content Warning – Students in this class will study a series of horror texts in their original historical context. Some of these texts will be shocking or upsetting. In particular, please be aware that most of the texts for this course contain references to the physical and symbolic violence of conquest and colonization, sexual assault, and racial discrimination, along with gruesome and disturbing scenes. Some of the texts and images in this class may be troubling to everyone, but especially to those who are experiencing or have experienced trauma in their lives. If you are interested in this topic, but do not feel equipped to enroll in an entire course with such a content warning at this time, feel free to email me and I can provide you with a reading list that is somewhat more curated, for you to read on your own time. As a final note, please be aware of Stanford student resources, such as community centers, well-being services, and sexual violence support.

Technology – You will need to have a device that connects to the internet so that you can access email and Canvas. All course details and materials will be posted on our Canvas course site. Students can borrow equipment and access other learning technology from the Lathrop Learning Hub. Please print out materials in advance; short stories are easy to consume and then toss aside, but holding them physically and preventing distraction is helpful for their study. For tech support, see Student Tech Resources and Support.

Honor Code – You will be evaluated in this course as an individual and are expected to cite sources and individuals from whom you have learned and borrowed as a display of academic, intellectual, and creative integrity. Failure to do so is a violation of Stanford’s Honor Code and is a serious offense, even when the violation is unintentional. Conduct prohibited by the Honor Code includes all forms of academic dishonesty, among them unpermitted collaboration and representing others’ work as one’s own. Please review Stanford’s Honor Code and documentation and citation resources from the Hume Center for Writing and Speaking.

ChatGPT – While you are allowed to dialogue with ChatGPT or other generative AI services as a form of brainstorming, you are not permitted to copy text from generative AI services or ask it to generate text for you that you plan to use in class, even in a slightly modified form. Essentially, you should not be using generative AI services to the extent that the text written, had it been found in an academic article, would need to be cited as a direct source or paraphrase. However, I suggest you avoid ChatGPT for environmental reasons: earth.org/environmental-impact-chatgpt/.

Course Privacy Statement – As noted in the university’s recording and broadcasting courses policy, students may not audio or video record class meetings without permission from the

instructor (and guest speakers, when applicable). If the instructor grants permission or posts videos herself, students may keep recordings only for personal use and may not post recordings on the Internet or otherwise distribute them. These policies protect the privacy rights of instructors and students, and the intellectual property and other rights of the university. Students who need lectures recorded for the purposes of an academic accommodation should contact the Office of Accessible Education.

Academic Accommodations – Stanford is committed to providing equal educational opportunities for disabled students. Disabled students are a valued and essential part of the Stanford community. If you experience disability, please register with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate your needs, support appropriate and reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Academic Accommodation Letter for faculty. To get started, or to re-initiate services, please visit oea.stanford.edu. Academic Accommodation Letters should be shared at the earliest possible opportunity so I may partner with you and OAE to identify any barriers to access and inclusion that might be encountered in your experience of this course. Student athletes who anticipate challenges in being able to participate in class or submit assignments on time should speak to me as soon as possible about available alternatives or allowances.

Campus Resources – I have included links to various campus resources you may find helpful in your journey through Stanford.

- Writing tutors from the Hume Center for Writing and Speaking, to sharpen your essay-writing skills.
- Academic coaches from the Center for Teaching and Learning, to help you manage your time and work effectively.
- Study halls, organized by the Center for Teaching and Learning, to work and learn in quiet companionship with other students.
- Study Tips and Tools, from the Center for Teaching and Learning.
- Undergraduate Advising Directors, Academic Advising.
- Well-Being services, including well-being coaches, Vaden Health Center.
- Subject Matter Tutoring, Center for Teaching and Learning.
- Language Conversation Partner Program, Center for Teaching and Learning.
- Tutoring for Student Athletes, AARC.
- Student Tech Resources & Support, includes support for personal devices and Stanford services.