

FSEM 100 - To Be Real: Interrogating Authenticity

Fall 2014

Lecture 34625R

T 5-6:50PM

KAP 159

Professor: Lanita Jacobs
Office: Kaprielian Hall (KAP) 356
Email: jacobshu@usc.edu
Office Hours: T/TH 10-10:50AM also by appointment. You can also contact me Monday-Friday via email.
Course Website: FSEM 100 course materials are accessible through Blackboard; to access, click on: <https://blackboard.usc.edu/>

Required Texts:

1. FSEM 100 Reader (Available in Blackboard)
2. Lindholm, Charles. 2008. *Culture and Authenticity*. London: Blackwell.

Optional Texts:

3. Bell, Inge, Bernard B. McGrane, and John A. Gunderson. 1998. *This Book is Not Required: An Emotional Survival Manual for Students*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
4. Zinsser, William. 2001. *On Writing Well* (6th Edition). New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

NOTE: All texts are on reserve in Leavey Library.

Course Description: *“Keep it real.” “That’s real talk.” “Don’t be fake!”* Most of us have heard these charges but what, pray tell, does it mean to “be real”? And why do folks, including perhaps ourselves, invest so much stake in questions of “realness” such that we wax judgmental about who’s “real” or who’s “fake”? What informs peoples’ moral investment in questions of sincerity, whether they concern racial, gendered, and sexual identities, specific TV/film scenes and performances, questions of love and happiness, or other matters? Who gets to judge what is “real” or “fake”? Why do questions of authenticity even matter in the first place? This seminar mines for answers in and across various Black literary, performative, and visual contexts, including urban comedy clubs, movies/films, theatre, music, and other spaces and places. Our investigations will reveal one certainty – that conversations about “realness” and “authenticity” often essentialize the subject(s) in question. We will not rest easy with this observation. Our charge over the semester will be to explore both the *hows* and *whys* of authenticity. As such, we will ask: Why, despite these risks, do public interrogations and personal convictions about the “real” stubbornly persist? To address this essential question, we will observe, listen, and read closely to deepen our understandings of racial authenticity and what some call the contemporary “quest for authenticity.” We will also gain a better understanding of the issues and stakes of “authenticity” through an analysis of everyday dialogues, performances, beliefs, and conflicts that implicate enduring questions of the “real.”

Class Expectations & Evaluation: The Freshman First Year College Seminar is an integral part of a recent program created by the Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences to help incoming students discover special opportunities for study, research, and civic engagement in USC Dornsife. Students will hopefully develop an ongoing relationship with me and other members of their cohort. Some of you may become Peer Mentors to incoming students enrolled in this course next year. Class meetings will include a brief lecture and/or film with a special emphasis on discussion. This 2-unit course is graded pass/no pass and will only meet 10 times during the 15 week semester. Your course grade will be determined by your performance in the following arenas:

Class Participation: Regular attendance is expected as it will enable you to contribute a unique, informed, and collegial verse during class discussions. **(30 points - 30%)**

| Grade Criteria | |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| Participation/Attendance: | 30% |
| 3 Critical Reflection Papers: | 30% |
| Final In-Class Presentation: | 40% |

Three Critical Reflection Papers (1-2 pages): At various points in the semester, you will be asked to submit a brief critical reflection paper of 1-2 double-spaced typed pages. This paper should reflect on any one of the prior weekly themes (your choice) and should synthesize insights and/or any resulting questions emerging from assigned readings, films, guest speakers, fieldtrips, etc. Your paper should be rigorous, informed, polished (e.g., proofread); it should also display a critical stance towards issues of race, authenticity, and truth. The deadlines for these papers are noted in the Reading & Exam Schedule (below). Please note that the deadlines are fixed. Do not email papers; also no late papers will be accepted without an excuse from a doctor or a family emergency. Each of these written exercises will be worth ten points. **(30 points - 30%)**

Final In-Class Presentation: During our final class, each student will present a brief presentation of their own discoveries or meditations about authenticity. Options abound. You can deliver a Powerpoint Presentation, a written/read presentation of a particular debate or issue implicating matters of race, authenticity, and truth. Alternatively, you can share a musical creation, a dramatic/poetic/theatrical interpretation, or a cooking demonstration that goes far beyond just measuring and stirring to also speak about matters of cultural and culinary authenticity. We can discuss other options. Each presentation should be no more than **five-minutes** and should provoke us to consider matters of realness and racial, gendered, cultural, etc. “authenticity” in a deep and critical way. **(30 points - 30%)**

COURSE SCHEDULE*

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| WK 1: 8/26 | Course Introduction |
| WK 2: 9/2 | <p>Interrogating “Real” Blackness: <i>What’s at stake in communal deliberations about “real” Blackness?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readings: Lindholm: Introduction, Jackson: Real Fictions [in RDR] • Film: <i>Black Is ... Black Ain’t (1995)</i> |
| WK 3: 9/9 | <p>Interrogating Authenticity in Dance: <i>What constitutes “authentic” or “real” dance? How do choreographers and dancers imbue this art form with notions of “realness” and other expressions of “truth”?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Lindholm: Authentic Dance and National Identity • Fieldtrip: In lieu of class, we will meet at Bovard Auditorium (ADM) at 7:30PM to witness “Ballet Memphis.” |
| WK 4: 9/16 | <p>Interrogating Authentic Beauty: <i>What constitutes “real” beauty in American culture? How are skin color and hair texture politics implicated in questions of gender, identity, and Black heterosexual desire and love?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readings: Jacobs-Huey: “BTW: How Do You Wear Your Hair?” [in RDR] • Film: <i>A Question of Color (1993)</i> <p>PAPER DUE: 1st Critical Reflection Due on Friday, 9/19th in my mailbox in KAP 352</p> |
| WK 5: 9/23 | No Class – Meditate on a/the “Real” |

- WK 6: 9/30 **Comedic Riffs on Authenticity: *When and why might notions of “realness” and authenticity matter in the everyday? How do comics engage questions of “truth” and authenticity during key historical moments?***
- **Readings:** Lindholm: *An Anthropology of Authenticity*, Jacobs: “The Arab is the New Nigger” [in RDR]
 - **Film/Clips:** “*Why We Laugh*,” Excerpts from Jacobs’ African American Standup Comedy Data
- WK 7: 10/7 **Comedic Riffs on Authenticity: *How can humor/comedy intervene in real-life situations? Specifically, how do clowns play with “truth” to broker a new sense of the “real” in children’s lives?***
- **Fieldtrip:** In lieu of class, we will meet in the Board Room of the USC Davidson Conference Center at 6:30PM to witness a film, “*Doutores d’Alegria*,” and roundtable discussion. (Reception to follow)
- WK 8: 10/14 **No Class – Meditate on the/a “Real”**
- WK 9: 10/21 **“Real” Fictions/Stories: How do artists actualize a sense of “realness” and authenticity in their productions?**
- **Readings:** Quotes by Writers on Writing [in RDR]
 - **Fieldtrip:** In lieu of class, we will meet at Doheny Memorial Library (Room 240) at 6:30 for an evening with Velina Hasu Houston (The Provost’s Writer Series).
- PAPER DUE: 2nd Critical Reflection Due on Friday, 10/24th in my mailbox in KAP 352**
- WK 10: 10/28 **No Class – Meditate on the/a “Real”**
- WK 11: 11/4 **Consuming the “Real”: Food for the Soul**
- **Readings:** Lindholm: *Authentic Cuisine and National Identity*, excerpts from Bell & Gunderson
 - **Note:** We will dine in class (soul food) and consider “food for the soul” – music, poetry, stories that sustain us and reflect our various “reals” or “truths.” Be sure to bring a poetic verse, music link, etc. to share/discuss.
- WK 12: 11/11 **No Class – Meditate on a/the “Real”**
- WK 13: 11/18 **A “Real” Monster/Monster “Real”: *What makes a monster “real”? What role do monsters serve across cultures and how do they help to animate particular “reals” (e.g., psychic, imaginative, spiritual, etc.) onscreen and in our everyday lives?***
- **Readings:** TBA
 - **Fieldtrip:** In lieu of class, we will meet at 4PM in Doheny Memorial Library 240 for a “What Makes a Monster?” roundtable discussion with internationally-acclaimed visual artist Wangechi Mutu, game designer Leonard Boyarsky (*Diablo III, Fallout*), USC professor and folklore scholar Tok Thompson; the panel will be moderated by science writer and *Institute for Figuring* co-founder Margaret Wertheim. Reception to follow.
- PAPER DUE: 3rd Critical Reflection Due on Friday, 11/21st in my mailbox in KAP 352**
- WK 14: 11/25 **No Class – Meditate on a/the “Real”**
- WK 15: 12/2 **Final 5-minute Presentations**

*The Reading Schedule may be subject to modification (e.g., trimming, additions, etc.).

Course Bibliography

Jackson Jr., John L. 2005. Real Fictions. *In Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity* (1-33). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jacobs-Huey, Lanita. 2006. "The Arab is the New Nigger": African American Comics Confront the Irony and Tragedy of September 11. *Transforming Anthropology* 14(1): 60-64.

Jacobs-Huey, Lanita. 2006. "BTW: How Do You Wear Your Hair?": Gender and Race in Computer-Mediated Hair Debates. *In From the Kitchen to the Parlor: Language and Becoming in African American Women's Hair Care* (89-103). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lindholm, Charles. 2008. Culture and Authenticity. London: Blackwell.

Quotes by Writers on Writing (Compiled by Lanita Jacobs).