AMST 285gm: African American Popular Culture

Section 051-10400R Summer 2023 MTW 9:30AM-12:20PM ONLINE (Virtual+Synchronous)

Professor: Lanita Jacobs

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Office Hours: T/Th 1-2PM; also by appt. You can also contact me Monday-Friday via email.

Course Website: Course materials course materials are accessible through Blackboard; to access,

click on: https://blackboard.usc.edu/webapps/login/

Required Texts (NOTE: I've requested e-copies of all books from the USC Library; if available, they will be freely accessible in <u>Ares Reserves</u>):

- 1. AMST 285 Reader (Available in Blackboard under "Course Resources" folder in "Content" section)
- 2. brown, adrienne maree. 2020. We Will Not Cancel Us: And Other Dreams of Transformative Justice. Chico, CA: AK Press.
- 3. Jemisin, N.K. 2018. How Long 'Til Black Future Month? New York: Hachette Book Group, Inc.
- 4. Katherine, Anne. 2013. Boundaries in An Overconnected World: Setting Limits to Preserve Your Focus, Privacy, Relationships, and Sanity. Novato, CA: New World Library.
- 5. Katherine, Anne. 1991. Boundaries: Where You End and I Begin. Center City, MN: Hazeldon Publishing.
- 6. Morrison, Toni. 2019. Mouth Full of Blood: Essays, Speeches, Meditations. London: Vintage.
- 7. Nash, Laura and Howard Stevenson. 2004. Just Enough: Tools for Creating Success in Your Work and Life. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- 8. Waheed, Nayyirah. 2013. Salt. London: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- 9. williams, Rev. angel Kyodo, Lama Rod Owens with Jasmine Syedullah, Ph.D. 2016. Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

Course Description: This seminar takes a radical departure from prior iterations of this course. (How could it not? We are still living during a pandemic wherein our hearts and bodies are attuned not merely to covid-19 but enduring issues of racial inequality and the imperative of social justice as well.) As such, this course pursues two ends. In the first half of the course, we will examine how authenticity – or notions of "the/a real" act as a galvanizing force in African American popular culture, shaping the way African Americans are represented and perceived in the world. This preoccupation with "a/the real" no doubt beckons another; namely, what does it *mean* to "be real? Further, isn't realness and notions of "authentic Blackness" subjective at best? Such questions (and sure-fire answers) will be addressed in this course with considerable optimism and trust – trust that the tools of social analysis will help us unpack the socially-constructed and historically-contingent nature of race, representation, and authenticity during uncertain times, and hope that if we are present, prepared, and open, we'll collectively discover how and why notions of "the real" have animated Black popular culture in the past, present, and (likely) the unforeseen future. In the second half of the course, we will move beyond academic scholarship "proper" to mine other narrative genres and formats (e.g., films, webcasts, science fiction); our goal is to distill theories and practical methods - "ways of being and thinking" – in the world wherein we might not only "survive, but also thrive" in real and meaningful ways.

Learning Objectives: Upon the successful completion of this course, you should also be able to:

- Understand and explicate the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and other modalities of identity in the everyday work and systems (e.g., popular culture) of representation
- Articulate concepts, theories, and methods of Cultural Studies, African American Studies, and Media Studies scholarship as they relate to the humanities
- Understand, develop, and articulate an analysis of race, representation, and authenticity and their complex relationships to social and economic justice
- Critically situate popular culture as a critical arena for racial identity and representation as a site for liberation and social change
- Actualize a mindful and conscientious way of doing "being" you in this brave new world

Grading: Your grade for this course will be determined by an open-book short answer+essay <u>midterm</u> and FOUR <u>critical journal posts</u> in Blackboard's *Discussion Board* module during the second half of the course. The midterm is worth 30% (30 points), and each of the four critical journal posts will be worth *up to* 15 points, cumulatively accounting 60% of your overall grade. The remaining 10% (10 points) of your grade will be determined by your <u>class participation</u>, namely, your substantive response to at least TWO of your peers' critical journal posts in Blackboard before the term ends. A total of TWO extra-credit points can be earned on the midterm via a Bonus Question based primarily on "optional" readings.

Critical Journal Post Guidelines: You will have a total of SEVEN opportunities during the second half of the course to post FOUR critical journal posts in Blackboard's Discussion Board module. (This means you get to choose which of the four weekly lectures topics/texts [out of seven] compel you the most.) Each critical journal post should respond to a prompt that will be posted in Blackboard's Discussion Board and/or noted in a prerecorded lecture; as such, consult the corresponding Discussion Board prompt before writing your post. Also be sure to carefully review the assigned text in its entirety and write "your heart out" in ways that demonstrate your most rigorous attendance to both the assigned text and my forthcoming critical journal prompts. All critical journal posts should be no more than TWO single-spaced pages, proofread, and include properly formatted citations if relevant. (To expedite my and your peer's online review and commentary, please copy and paste only your best work in Blackboard's Discussion Board rubric versus upload it as a Word or PDF attachment.) The deadline for each weekly critical journal post will be the corresponding Friday at midnight as noted in the Reading & Exam schedule below. (NOTE: Late postings will only be accepted in exceptional cases and will be deducted a minimum of 2 points; an additional point will be deducted for every day the critical journal post is late.) Additional guidelines for critical journal posts will be noted in the first lecture.

Grading Scale:

94-100 = A	87-89 = B+	77-79 = C+	67-69 = D+	\geq 59 = F
90-93 = A-	84-86 = B	74-76 = C	64-66 = D	
	80-83 = B-	70-73 = C-	60-63 = D-	

GRADE BASIS	
Midterm:	30%
FOUR 15-pt. Critical Journal Posts:	60%
Participation:	10%

An Official Note on Examinations: Make-up exams will only be given under extraordinary circumstances and will require documentation from a physician. The content and form of any make-up exam will be at my discretion. In any case, you should inform me via email or phone **prior** to missing an exam. If you feel you must reschedule an exam on account of having (a) two additional exams scheduled at the same time or (b) three exams in a 24-hour period, inform me *at least* two weeks prior to our scheduled midterm.

Statement for Students with Special Needs: Students requesting academic accommodations based on special needs should register with the Office for Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from OSAS when necessary documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible, preferably by or before fifth week. OSAS contact information is as follows: 213-740-0776 (Phone), 213-740-6948 (TDD Only), 213-740-8216 (Fax); Email: osasfrontdesk@usc.edu;

Webpage: https://osas.usc.edu/about/contact-location-hours/

Statement on Academic Integrity: The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct undermines the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form). Accordingly, this seminar will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the USC Student Handbook. All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage; this includes the use of ChatGBT and/or its many alternatives to complete assignments. The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university; if found responsible for an academic violation, students may be assigned university outcomes, such as suspension or expulsion from the university, and grade penalties, such as an "F" grade on the assignment, exam, and/or in the course. For more information about academic integrity see the student handbook or the Office of Academic Integrity's website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct. Also, if ever you're unsure about what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution, please consult me. Relatedly:

University Policy Regarding the Sharing of Course Materials outside of the Learning Environment: USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, page 13). Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, page 13).

USC Support Systems: In this season of swirling pandemics, please know that there are various support systems in place at USC and beyond, including:

USC Technology Rental Program

USC realizes that attending classes online and completing coursework remotely requires access to technology that not all students possess. If you are facing food, housing, and/or financial insecurity that hinder your capacity to successfully participate in your classes, you may be eligible for support via USC's <u>Student Basic Needs department</u> (additional info below). Here, too, are several *USC Technology Support Links*:

- Blackboard Help for Students
- Software available to USC Campus
- USC Computing Center Loaner Laptop Program

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710; campussupport.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student. Specific covid-19-related support systems are noted below:

The <u>Student Basic Needs</u> fund can (again) assist with housing expenses, food insecurity, emergency travel, income loss related to closed workplaces, technology upgrades required for remote instruction, and other unforeseen needs. Students interested in applying for the Student Basic Needs Emergency Grant are encouraged to email the Basic Needs Team at basicneeds@usc.edu. The team will evaluate the request and, if needed, schedule a one-on-one consultation to learn more about the student's situation.

USC's COVID-19 Resource Center provides information, updates, and support for the USC community. Please consult the website (https://coronavirus.usc.edu/) to learn about Spring 2022 COVID-19 Health and Safety protocols. To notify the university of a case, please call their 24/7 COVID-19 hotline at 213-740-6291 or email covid19@usc.edu.

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 (WELL) – 24/7 on call; studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call; suicidepreventionlifeline.org Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours -24/7 on call; studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 / Title IX – (213) 821-8298; equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

USC Support Systems (continued):

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

https://usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report/index.php/pid670872?

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity |Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101; diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 - 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency precludes travel to campus.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC); ombuds.usc.edu

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concerns.

READING & EXAM SCHEDULE

PART 1-A: RACE, REPRESENTATION, AND POLITICS IN AFRICAN AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE

Week 1:

COURSE INTRO; EARLY REPRESENTATIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE U.S.

W 6/28

- Krasner: The Real Thing [in RDR]
- Sewell: Mammies and Matriarchs [Optional; in RDR]
- Film: *Ethnic Notions* (1987; 57 mins.) NOTE: USC login here: Kanopy

Week 2: M 7/3 **No Class** INDEPENDENCE DAY HOLIDAY (NO CLASS)

T7/4 No Class

INDEPENDENCE DAY HOLIDAY (NO CLASS)

PART 1-B: INTERROGATING AUTHENTICITY IN BLACK POPULAR CULTURE

W 7/5 TH 7/6 is last day to register or add classes; last day to drop without "W" or change P/NP or Audit Enrollment Option or receive

refund

REPRESENTING AFRICAN AMERICANS IN PRIME TIME TV

- Braxton: *Color Adjustment*: A Bittersweet Look at Black TV Roles [in RDR]
- Gray: African American Discourses and the Sign of Blackness [in RDR]
- Hunt: Making Sense of Blackness on Television [in RDR]
- Film(s): Color Adjustment (1991; 87 mins.) NOTE: USC login here: Alexander Street

PART 1-B: INTERROGATING AUTHENTICITY IN BLACK POPULAR CULTURE (CONTINUED)

Week 3: INTERROGATING RACIAL AUTHENTICITY IN THE "EVERYDAY" M7/10Chin: Authenticity [in RDR]

- Jackson: Real Fictions [Optional; in RDR]
- Jackson: A Little Black Magic [in RDR]
- Japtok & Jenkins: What Does It Mean to Be "Really" Black? [in RDR]
- Film: Black Is ... Black Ain't (1994, 88 min.) USC login here: Alexander Street

T 7/11 REPRESENTING "BLACK AUTHENTICITY" IN THEATER & FILM

- Cartier: Black Women On-Screen as Future Texts [in RDR]
- Collins: Activists Who Yearn for Art that Transforms [in RDR]
- Forsgren: The Black Arts Movement (1956-1976) [in RDR]
- Lorde: Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger [Optional; in RDR]
- Smith: Affect and Respectability Politics [in RDR]
- Tyson et al.: It's Not A "Black Thing" [Optional; in RDR]
- Film: Black Girl (1972; 97 mins.); can also watch on YouTube

W 7/12 EXCAVATING "A REAL" IN AFRICAN AMERICAN SOUL MUSIC

- Ahad: Imagining Communities in Dave Chappelle's *Block Party* [Optional; in RDR]
- Murch: The Many Meanings of Watts: Black Power, Wattstax, and the Carceral State [in RDR]
- Hall: What is "Black" in "Black Popular Culture"? [in RDR]
- Film: Wattstax (1973; 1hr 43 mins.); excerpts from Dave Chappelle's Block Party (2005; 1 hr 40 mins.) and Questlove Jawn's *Summer of Soul* (2021; 1 hr 57 mins.)

Week 4: BIDS TO THE "REAL" IN AFRICAN AMERICAN STANDUP COMEDY

- Haggins: Dave Chappelle: Provocateur in the Promised Land [Optional; in RDR] M7/17
 - Haggins: Epilogue [Optional; in RDR]
 - Jacobs: Introduction, To Be Real: Truth and Racial Authenticity in African American Standup Comedyl [in RDR]
 - Jacobs: "It's about to get real": Kevin Hart as a Modern-Day Trickster" [in RDR]
 - Senna: Passing and the Problematic of Multiracial Pride [Optional; in RDR]
 - Film: Why We Laugh: Black Comedians on Black Comedy (2009; 95 mins.), J. Cole's (2018) "Kevin's Heart"

T 7/18 **GUEST LECTURE**

- Readings: To be announced
- Film/Clips: To be announced

MIDTERM ON THURSDAY IN BLACKBOARD (INSTRUCTIONS TO COME) W 7/19 Midterm

PART 2 - HOW TO SURVIVE AND THRIVE: THEORETICAL PROMPTS & METHODOLOGICAL INVITATIONS

Week 5: M 7/24



POLITICAL PROTEST AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZING IN THE CONTEMPORARY MOMENT: What's love got to do with race and liberation? What can "radical dharma" teach us in the present moment about "letting go," holding space for each other despite our many differences, and minding our personal and emotional boundaries in precarious times?

- williams, Owens, with Syedullah: <u>Radical Dharma</u>: <u>Talking Race, Love, and</u> Liberation
- Film: <u>Lama Rod Owens: Radical Dharma in the Time of Crisis</u> at London Shambhala Meditation Centre on April 9, 2018 [2:06:30]

Critical Journal Post Assignment: Post a critical journal post in Blackboard's "Discussion Board" under the corresponding weekly theme. Be sure to: type up your *best* response to the prompt noted there and/or lecture in no more than two single-spaced typed pages, and then cut and paste into the Discussion Board (versus attach as a Word or PDF document). **Deadline: TUE 7/25 any time before midnight**

T 7/25



LOVE LETTERING: What does African American poet Nayyirah Waheed speak to us about love, belonging, pain, and living ... both now and forever?

• Waheed: Salt

Critical Journal Post Assignment: Post a critical journal post in response to the aforementioned text in Blackboard's "Discussion Board" under the corresponding weekly theme. Be sure to: type up your *best* response to the prompt noted there and/or lecture in no more than two single-spaced typed pages, and then cut and paste into the Discussion Board (versus attach as a Word or PDF document). **Deadline:** WED 7/26 any time before midnight

W 7/26



MINDING MY BOUNDARIES (AND LEAVING YOURS ALONE): How can we best mind our personal boundaries in an increasingly interconnected and (always) intersubjective world? Why might protecting our boundaries be especially important in the present moment, if not beyond?

Katherine: <u>Boundaries: Where You End and I Begin</u> **OR** <u>Boundaries in An Interconnected World: Setting Limits to Preserve Your Focus, Privacy, Relationships, and Sanity</u>

Critical Journal Post Assignment: Post a critical journal post about <u>ONE</u> of the aforementioned texts in Blackboard's "Discussion Board" under the corresponding weekly theme. Be sure to: type up your *best* response to the prompt noted there and/or lecture in no more than two single-spaced typed pages, and then cut and paste into the Discussion Board (versus attach as a Word or PDF document). Extended Deadline: MON 7/31 any time before midnight

PART 2 - HOW TO SURVIVE AND THRIVE: THEORETICAL PROMPTS & METHODOLOGICAL INVITATIONS (CON'D)

Week 6: M 7/31



CONJURING NEW FUTURES (BY ALL MEANS POSSIBLE): What theories and methods do Afro-futuristic texts offer us as we live in and imagine a new future? How might we imagine or make a new world in our hearts and minds and/or in collaboration with other beings?

- Jemisin: <u>How Long 'Til Black Future Month?</u>
- Optional Podcast: "Storytelling while Black and Female: Conjuring Beautiful Experiments in Past & Future Worlds"

Critical Journal Post Assignment: Post a critical journal post in Blackboard's "Discussion Board" under the corresponding weekly theme. Be sure to: type up your *best* response to the prompt noted there and/or lecture in no more than two single-spaced typed pages, and then cut and paste into the Discussion Board (versus attach as a Word or PDF document). **Deadline: TUE 8/1 any time before midnight**

T 8/1 Last day to drop with "W"



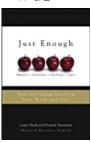
REMEMBERING TONI MORRISON AS SHE (LOVINGLY) REMEMBERS US: What does Toni Morrison teach us that we can hold onto now and forever? How does she lovingly see us and how can we, in turn, see her? What all sources her abiding wisdom?

- Morrison: "Cinderella's Stepsisters" (Commencement Address to Barnard Class of 1979) in Morrison: Mouth Full of Blood
- Morrison: "Be Your Own Story" (Commencement Address to Wellesley College (May 28, 2004) in Morrison: Mouth Full of Blood
- Film: *Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am* (2019, 2 hrs)

Critical Journal Post Assignment: Post a critical journal post in response to ONE of Morrison's commencement addresses and the documentary in Blackboard's "Discussion Board" under the corresponding weekly theme. Be sure to: type up your *best* response to the prompt noted there and/or lecture in no more than two single-spaced typed pages, and then cut and paste into the Discussion Board (versus attach as a Word or PDF document).

Deadline: WED 8/2 any time before midnight

Week 6: W 8/2



"JUST ENOUGH": Hold up; what's "just enough"? What matters most to you and why? What would happen if you (re)considered what qualifies as "success" in terms of "just enough"?; what, if at all, would necessarily change in your mind, heart, and actions?

• Nash & Stevenson: <u>Just Enough</u>: <u>Tools for Creating Success in Your Work and Life</u> **Critical Journal Post Assignment:** Post a critical journal post about in Blackboard's "Discussion Board" under the corresponding weekly theme. Be sure to: type up your *best* response to the prompt noted there and/or lecture in no more than two single-spaced typed pages, and then cut and paste into the Discussion Board (versus attach as a Word or PDF document). **Extended Deadline: MON 8/7 any time before midnight**

PART 2 - How To Survive and Thrive: Theoretical Prompts & Methodological Invitations (con'd)

Week 7: M 8/7



INTERROGATING "CANCEL" CULTURE IN TIMES OF CRISIS AND OPPORTUNITY: What does a Black, queer, and feminist stance on "cancel" or "call out" culture look like in your heart-body-soul? What would it require to love, live, and lead from this vantage point? How are brown's book and Ayishat Akanbi's SOH Talk in critical and compassionate conversation?

- brown: We Will Not Cancel Us: And Other Dreams of Transformative Justice
- Film/clip: <u>The Problem with Wokeness All About Women 2019</u> (Ayishat Akanbi) [58:32]

Critical Journal Post Assignment: Post a critical journal post about ONE or BOTH texts in Blackboard's "Discussion Board" under the corresponding weekly theme. Be sure to: type up your *best* response to the prompt noted there and/or lecture in no more than two single-spaced typed pages, and then cut and paste into the Discussion Board (versus attach as a Word or PDF document). **Deadline: TUE 8/8 any time before midnight**

T 8/8 **No Class**

STUDY AND WELLNESS DAY

Final Remarks:

All Critical Journal Posts (CJPs) MUST be posted in Blackboard by midnight on TUE, 8/8/23, our final day of class. (In order to calibrate my investments and in honor of course deadlines, I will not be reading or assessing any posts after this date)

COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY

(NOTE: Articles are alphabetized by last name in Course Reader in Blackboard. Required textbooks are included below, in **bold**.)

Ahad, Badia Sahar. 2015. Imagining Communities in Dave Chappelle's Block Party. *Journal of Popular Culture* 48(6):1108-1129.

brown, adrienne maree. 2020. We Will Not Cancel Us: And Other Dreams of Transformative Justice. Chico, CA: AK Press. (new)

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Cartier, Nina. 2014. Black Women On-screen as Future Texts: A New Look at Black Pop Culture Representations. *Cinema Journal* 53(4): 150-157.

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Forsgren, La Donna L. 2014. The Black Arts Movement (1965-1976): An Interview with J.e. Franklin. *Callaloo* 37(5): 1140-1157.

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- Hall, Stuart. 1993. What Is This "Black" in Black Popular Culture? *Social Justice*, 20(1/2[51-52]): 104-114.
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- Jackson, John L. 2005. A Little Black Magic. South Atlantic Quarterly 104(3): 393-402.
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- Krasner, David. 2011. The Real Thing. *In* W.F. Brundage (Ed.) Beyond Blackface: African Americans and the Creation of American Popular Culture, 1890-1930 (99-146). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Lorde, Audre. 2007 [1984]. Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger. *In* Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press. (new)
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