Lift Up or Just Be
The Mixed Comix Collective: Research Practitioners Doing Black Feminist Praxis as Public Scholarship

Aina Braxton | Morgan Thomas | Meshell Sturgis
Race and Media Conference at The University of Washington | May 12, 2018
The Creative Venture

Research

Black Feminist Grounding

The Mixed Comix Collective
Research and Social Justice
Lateral mentorship
Identity Exploration
Space for Creative Expression and
Introductions and the Mixed Comix Collective
Identified over 50+ Comics of Interest
Identified Community Partners

Arcane Comics in Shoreline, WA

The Dreaming Comics & Games in Seattle, WA
Collaborative Reviews of Articles

The very first scene that introduces Laura we see her donning a straight hair pink wig and making herself up to look like Amaterasu, a white ginger haired recently revealed Goddess that Laura is taken with. As she finishes her get up she is still disappointed with her appearance. An informed reader would read this as an identity crisis that Laura is taken with. As she finishes looking like Amaterasu, a white ginger haired recently revealed Goddess that Laura is taken with, she donning a straight hair pink wig and making herself up to

Hazel’s identity is displayed most notably through the combination of the wings and horns she inherited from her parents. Those features are key parts of the novel, as the groups of people who have either wings or horns are at war with each other. Hazel is the first mixed race baby with both wings and horns, and therefore has an attempt to “Whitewash” her appearance. An informed reader would read this as an identity crisis she still disappointed with her appearance. Her skin tone is medium brown and her hair is much darker. She wear the same uniform as the other Bitch Planet inmates, a crew cut shirt and red-orange overalls, with only one clasp done to accommodate her plus-size stature. -- Bitch Planet

Penny Rolle is a very large woman, the pun on her last name intentional. She has a mostly shaved head, with a section of short dreadlocks off to the left side and adorns a tattoo that says “born BIG” surrounded by two elephants. Her skin tone is medium brown and her hair is much darker. She wear the same uniform as the other Bitch Planet inmates, a crew cut shirt and red-orange overalls, with only one clasp done to accommodate her plus-size stature. -- Bitch Planet

Hazel’s identity is displayed most notably through the combination of the wings and horns she inherited from her parents. Those features are key parts of the novel, as the groups of people who have either wings or horns are at war with each other. Hazel is the first mixed race baby with both wings and horns, and therefore has an attempt to “Whitewash” her appearance. An informed reader would read this as an identity crisis she still disappointed with her appearance. Her skin tone is medium brown and her hair is much darker. She wear the same uniform as the other Bitch Planet inmates, a crew cut shirt and red-orange overalls, with only one clasp done to accommodate her plus-size stature. -- Bitch Planet

Wicked & Divine

Saga
Comic Cons: Presentation & Reflections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>10:00</td>
<td>Conference Opening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Thursday Schedule**

ECC 2018
It's great to see comic book characters of color, especially characters who are the main characters or color.

The women were repeatedly described as men, is ambiguously gendered, using “he/his” pronouns or saying the character is ambiguously gendered.

The women were repeatedly described as men,

4% read comics, whereas all of the white respondents do not read African, or African American, whereas 75% of the readers who identify as black, mixed/multiracial, Black & ¼ of the white respondents.

7% are Black and ¼ are mixed/multiracial, 7% are 18-25 years old, N = 15 (16)

Survey

“Comics have a way of removing you from this world and opening up your mind.”

Comics have a way of removing you from this world and opening up your mind.

There’s been a push for people to create what they want to see. This seed has been planted for some time and it is exciting to see what will be out there within the next 5 years!!!

in their books!”

especially characters who are the main characters, 75% of the readers who identify as black, African, or African American, do not read comics.
Library Exhibit Proposal: The Making of a Hero
Crow Catcher
Catching Crows and the
The Creative Venture:

Mental toughness
Eager to serve
Expresses Joy, Sadness, and
Anger
Intelligent
Empathic
Lateral thinker
Shines bright
Good listener
Kind
Attentive to detail
Tall
Skin tone
Dreadlocks
Mixed; Racially ambiguous

Vitiligo spots
Skin tone
Dark brown to light brown
Skin tone

Strong/muscles
Full figured

Mixes; Reliably ambiguous
THANK YOU!
We will survey comic books published by Marvel. The class will weave together both explorations of our individual identities within the classroom group setting and the larger communities we are a part of, along with explorations of the stories that Marvel produces. This means the course places equal emphasis on personal inquiry as it does on analysis of the comics we read.

Students do not have to be comic readers or comic creators to join the class but a willingness to try both and a sincere devotion to having open conversations about identity are must!

The course uses comics to explore the many intersections of our identities, including race, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, religion, ability, and more. Comics communicate things to the reader that prose, body language, and dialogue alone cannot. The history, literature, and development of comics are examined. This course will help students develop skills in reading and analyzing comics in the process of understanding the context in which they were created.

Course Description: This course uses comics to explore the many intersections of our identities, including race, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, religion, ability, and more. Comics communicate things to the reader that prose, body language, and dialogue alone cannot. The history, literature, and development of comics are examined. This course will help students develop skills in reading and analyzing comics in the process of understanding the context in which they were created.
THE NEW GIRL!!

Created & Illustrated by Ishuika Vasudeva
2018.

In 2016, a girl named lim immigrated to the US. Her initial situations made her...

I don't even know who's coming for me next...

Back in India...

School is tough...

Grandma, I hope you're okay.

Now...

Mom: What? I think I know the answer to that question.

What? I think I know the answer to that question.

Ugh...

Beurk!

As she got used to everything, things got easier for her...

Hopefully, after 20 years from now...

Mom: I guessed it all.

Thanks, guys.
This course would best fit as an upper level undergraduate, major specific. It could be tailored to a graduate level course. For a general guideline, it would work best for these courses under these specific undergraduate majors at UW Bothell:

**American Ethnic Studies**
- BISAES 369: American Culture and Mass Media

**Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies**
- BISGWS 301 Critical Gender and Sexuality Studies
- BISGWS 303: Approaches to Feminist Inquiry

**Culture, Literature, and the Arts**
- BISCLA 360: Literature, Film, and Consumer Culture
- BISCLA 380: Arts in Context
- BISCLA 384: Literary and Popular Genres

**Media and Communication Studies**
- BISMC 333: Media and Communication Studies
- BISMC 473: Visual Communication
- BISMC 471: Advanced Topics in Media and Communication Studies

**MA in Cultural Studies**
- BCULST 581: Approaches to Textual Research
- BCULST 584: Topics in Media Culture
- BCULST 588: Topics in Culture and Diversity
- BCULST 592: Topics in Cultural Studies Research
- BCULST 593: Topics in Cultural Studies

---

**Reading and Theorizing Comics**

**Quarter:** TBD

**Day and Time of Class:** TBD

---

**Instructor:** Meshell Sturgis
**Email:** meshells@uw.edu

**Office Hours:** TBD, and by appointment
**Office:** CMU 340J

---

*From the Brown Daily Herald Comics*  
(http://comics.browndailyherald.com)

---

**Course Description**

This small lecture course is designed to guide scholars in the development of methodological skills necessary for investigating questions of identity. The continuous and periodically ravenous consumption of comics as cultural artifacts reflects to us the world in which they are created. As textual objects, comics simultaneously reserve capabilities for world-making. While the recent rise of comics has been attributed to the popularity of their companion feature films, this surging cultural interest in fragmented and concise storytelling has much to say about our current political, economic, and social condition. To translate representations as
meaning and doing things in our real and current moment is to also critique and thereby access the potential for world-making.

As a textual methods course, students will encounter a wide range of underground comics, generally referred to as “comix” which are “socially relevant underground, and independent forms of comics” (Whaley, 2017). To gain an understanding of comix as always in a reflective and productive conversation with culture, students will be asked to engage with multiple modes of textual analysis, the common method for approaching comics and other literary texts. Using the theories and understandings unearthed in the course, students will practice applying these theories to various textual methods including: content analysis, discourse analysis, semiotic analysis, genre study, auteur study, and star study.

Over the course of the quarter, students will develop a repertoire of comic analysis skills informed by Black feminist theories. The main objective for the course is to foster the ability to read comics through an intersectional lens in asking questions such as: what do these narratives tell us about race, gender, sexuality, and class? And, how are these stories generative and how are they problematic? By pulling from traditional comic studies theorist along with surveying Black feminist perspectives of literature, students will be exposed to a Cultural Studies take on the importance of reading comics for representations of identity in relation to power. We will focus on larger issues of social justice, difference, and equity and will reference current political and popular cultural phenomena to inform the context of our readings.

Each student will engage with the themes of the course through experimental assignments. Students will also be assigned a writing group where each person will be working towards the final paper with a unique focus on either race, class, gender, or sexuality. Participation in the writing group outside of class makes up a significant portion of your participation grade for this class. In-class assignments may occur and can affect your participation score as well. The first portion of the final paper will serve as a midterm evaluation, and will function as the theory section of the paper. There may be up to two short response quizzes throughout the quarter.

Course Objectives
Upon completing this course students will be able to:
1. Express a familiarity with contemporary underground comics and recount the emergence of these comics in popular culture.
2. Recall cultural studies, comic studies, and Black Feminist theories relevant to reading comics for race, gender, sexuality, and class.
3. Analyze comics using multiple textual analysis methods including: discourse, semiotics, content, genre, auteur, and star studies.
4. Develop intersectional critiques of comics
5. Practice collaborative communication through writing group assignments
6. Enact the various combinations of theories and methods that together, inform an intersectional praxis of reading comics for race, gender, sexuality, and class.

Required Texts
4. Assembled Course Packet of Underground Comix available at the Student Book Store includes:
   a. Niobe by Amandla Stenberg
   b. Your Black Friend by Ben Passmore
   c. Bayou by Jeremy Love and Patrick Morgan
   d. Black Panther by Ta-Nehisi Coates and Brian Stelfreeze
   e. Girls (Need to locate author)
   f. Wicked and Divine by Kieron Gillen and Jamie McKelvie
   g. Flutter by Jennie Woods and Jeff McComsey
   h. Bitch Planet by Kelly Sue Deconick and Valentine DeLandro
   i. Saga by Brian K. Vaughn and Fiona Staples

**Course Readings**

Readings should be completed prior to the class date that they are listed. Students should expect Monday readings to be a bit heavier and theoretically more complicated than Wednesday readings. Students who critically read the texts should be able to identify a summary of the text and main arguments/points. Additionally, you should be able to locate definitions of major concepts, note the theoretical lens, explain the method(s) used to convey concepts and arguments, note the author’s writing style, and possess an analysis of the text’s strengths and weaknesses. Prepared students will arrive to class with at least one question per text assigned. Students should be actively annotating their texts. Beyond highlighting or underlining passages, students should note their responses to the text, including questions and ideas in the margins of the text.

**Assignments**

**Experimental Analysis (Focus on Race, Gender, Class, Sexuality) (20 points; 10 x 2):**

For each experimental analysis, please choose a prompt from below to engage with the theme of that section of the quarter. For these assignments, you may use a text that we’ve encountered in the course, or bring in a comic of your own. You must complete one of these options below reflecting the themes we cover, equating to 2 different Experimental Analysis assignments.

a. Current Event: Using a comic of your choice, please select an article that discusses a current event or expresses some sort of reflection of society, politics, economy, and culture in relation to your chosen comic. The article should come with a citation and must have been published within a 5-year radius of the chosen comic’s publication date.
Please write a 400-500 word response about what this article tells us about the current world and how the comic you have chosen reflects this specifically. Then, offer a critique that suggests how this comic might make an intervention in the ways that we think about (race, gender, sexuality, or class) in society. Be sure to also include evidence from at least one theoretical article we have read.

b. Comparative Method Analysis: Using a comic of your choice, choose an outside research method and present a comparative case study of researching the same comic. Please provide a brief statement of how you’ve encountered this alternative method and why you’ve chosen to experiment with it here.

Please write a 400-500 word response comparing and contrasting the process of using a textual analysis method we cover in class versus a different method through the analysis of a particular comic. Please emphasize the strengths of both methods as well as their weaknesses, and consider the possibilities of using the methods together.

c. Historical Analysis: Using a comic of your choice, construct an archive that would allow you to investigate your focus. Assemble 10-20 items physically or virtually with each item having a 2-sentence caption explaining what it is, as well as a citation.

Please write a 400-500 word response explaining your curation choices for the archive and be sure to mention what the archive allows you to do as well as what some of its limits are. Include a plan to proceed for the archive indicating what sources should be monitored and how to select items. What does your archive of history surrounding your comic tell you about your focus?

d. Creative Arts: Using a comic of your choice, create some form of an art-based response. Examples of this could be a painting, drawing, poem, flash fiction, script, sculpture, digital art, etc. Create something that allows you to explore the ways that your focus for this assignment manifests within the comic.

Please write a 400-500 artist statement to go with your artwork, describing what it looks/sounds like, how it was made, and your intentions with the work. What does it communicate about your response to this comic? Include a section on the theory that has informed your artistic practice with this submission. Artwork should have appropriate citation.

Writing Groups (25 points): Based on the focus that students select for their final paper, you all will form small writing groups where each student is working towards a final paper that focuses either on race, class, gender, or sexuality. Students are expected to coordinate with each other, a time in which they can meet every other week, outside of scheduled class time, for 1 hour. Students will self-assess their participation score.
For the 1 hour that the group meets, you all will follow the agenda for that meeting. Typically, students will have a writing exercise, and then will write silently on their own for 40 minutes, and then there will be a follow up exercise. Each student will have a role, to be selected at the first meeting: Parliamentarian (reports attendance and is mediator), Secretary (submits documents), Keeper (leads agenda, reserves room), and Reporter (reports out in class).

**Theory Midterm (The Lit Review) (15 points):** Students will be asked to write a 5-page paper explaining their understanding of the theories that we have covered in this course. You must include at least 5 of the theoretical texts that we’ve read thus far.

**Final Paper (25 points):** Using a comic either from our selected readings list, or from outside of class, construct a critical textual analysis with particular focus on either race, class, gender, or sexuality. Your paper should identify the work that the representations of (race, class, gender, or sexuality) are doing, and simultaneously speak to the work that your critique seeks to do. Papers should be 8-10 pages long, including a literature review, and exclusive of footnotes and bibliography. It will be evaluated on the originality of the argument, the depth and appropriateness of its evidence, the logic and clarity of its argument, and its engagement with methods, theories, and themes of the course.

**Participation (15 points):** Poor attendance is likely to greatly impact your participation grade. Please be proactive in communicating with me any expected absences well in advance. The more you communicate, the better able I am to accommodate your circumstances. Students are expected to contribute to the classroom learning environment by sharing their thoughts, ideas, and questions in class. Quizzes will count toward your participation grade.

**Policies**

**Grades:** Students can earn up to 100 points for this class – point values are located next to the various assignments above.

**Classroom Agreements:** Please visit this link for the agreed upon policies for classroom participation, collaboration, and engagement. Link.

**Late Work Policy:** Work submitted after the deadline will be considered late. While I am happy to accommodate students with unexpected circumstances in general, extensions will not be granted. However, late work can still be submitted for partial credit. Students will lose 10% per day that the assignment is late, UP TO a 30% total deduction. In other words, an assignment that is submitted 3 days late will receive the same deduction as an assignment submitted 7 days late.

**Communication:** It is imperative that you communicate with me for I cannot help you if I do not know what is going on. Students are responsible for all canvas and email communications for the course, including those amongst each other for the writing group. Please allow 2 business days for response from me.

**Technology in Class:** For the course, students are expected to take notes by hand unless they have gotten my approval prior to class beginning. I will strictly enforce this rule. You can read
about some of that research here. There is no time in class when websurfing, tweeting, texting, snapping, Grouponing, emailing, googling, facebooking, youtubing, wikileaking, perezhiltoning, etc., is permitted as these activities distract from student learning, and instructor focus. If you are seen texting, tweeting etc, in class you will be asked to refrain, and if your actions are disruptive enough, you will be asked to leave class. Your cell phone should be on silent mode in class.

**Academic Integrity:** There is zero tolerance for cheating on assignments, plagiarizing (misrepresenting work by another author as your own, paraphrasing or quoting sources without acknowledging the original author, or using information from the internet without proper citation). Academic dishonesty in any part of this course is grounds for failure and the University will proceed with disciplinary action.

**Resources:**

Disability: It is the University of Washington’s policy to provide support services to students with disabilities that encourage them to become self-sufficient in managing their accommodations, including their ability to participate in course activities and meet course requirements. Students with such needs are encouraged to contact Disability Resources for Students at 448 Schmitz Hall, through their website at www.washington.edu/students/gencat/front/Disabled_Student.html, or by calling them at 206-543-8924 (voice) or 206-543-8925 (voice/TTY). If you have specific accommodations that need to be met please let me know.

UW Writing Center: Students are encouraged to seek writing assistance from the [UW Writing Centers](#).

UW Libraries: Students are encouraged to seek research assistance from the [UW Libraries](#) and librarians.

Student Pantry: Please note students facing food insecurity while at UW have access to [Any Hungry Husky at the ECC](#).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3/26</td>
<td></td>
<td>Welcome!</td>
<td>Go over syllabus and create classroom agreements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/28</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reading Comics</td>
<td><em>Unflattening</em> by Nick Sousanis</td>
<td>Submit Reading Annotations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bring a comic that speaks to either race, gender, sexuality, or class. If you are unable to locate the comic, read a comic that speaks to either race, gender, sexuality, or class. If you are unable to locate the comic, read the article about it. Please write a 250-word response explaining why you choose the comic. Bring a comic that speaks to either race, gender, sexuality, or class. If you are unable to locate the comic, read the article about it. Please write a 250-word response explaining why you choose the comic.</td>
<td>Write Group Meeting #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Why Do We Do Media and Cultural Studies?</td>
<td><em>Why Do We Do Media and Cultural Studies?</em>, 2nd Edition by Jane Stokes; Part 1: <em>Black Feminism and Intersectionality</em> by Barbara Christian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Visiting the Archive</td>
<td><em>Visiting the Archive</em> by Barbara Christian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/16</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Black Speculations</td>
<td><em>Black Speculations</em> by John Jennings, <em>Octavia Butler's novel</em> <em>Kindred</em> by Ben Passmore, and <em>Niobe: She Is Life</em> by Amandla Stenberg</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/28</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural Identity and Diaspora</td>
<td><em>Cultural Identity and Diaspora</em> by Stuart Hall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/26</td>
<td></td>
<td>Welcome!</td>
<td>Go over syllabus and create classroom agreements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Assignment</td>
<td>Due Date</td>
<td>Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/18</td>
<td>Writing #4</td>
<td>Quiz 2, Race of Race Continued</td>
<td>4/18</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/23</td>
<td>Writing #2</td>
<td>Sappho by Brian K. Vaught and Pirona, Saga of Sappho, Volume I</td>
<td>4/23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/25</td>
<td>Writing #3</td>
<td>What's Class Got To Do? What's Race Got To Do?</td>
<td>4/25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/30</td>
<td>Writing #4</td>
<td>Quiz 1, Exploring Webcomics and Comix, Not Just Race, Not Just Gender by Valerie Smith</td>
<td>4/30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/2</td>
<td>Writing #4</td>
<td>Quiz 2, Race of Race Continued</td>
<td>5/2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/7</td>
<td>Writing #3</td>
<td>Literature Review Midterm due</td>
<td>5/7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/9</td>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Class and Incarceration, Bitch Planet by Kelly Sue DeConnick and Valentine De Landro, Volume 1</td>
<td>5/9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/14</td>
<td>Writing #4</td>
<td>Quiz 1, Race of Race Continued</td>
<td>5/14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/16</td>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Class and Immigration</td>
<td>5/16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/16</td>
<td>Writing #4</td>
<td>Quiz 2, Race of Race Continued</td>
<td>5/16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/19</td>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Class and Immigration</td>
<td>5/19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/22</td>
<td>Writing #4</td>
<td>Quiz 1, Race of Race Continued</td>
<td>5/22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/25</td>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Class and Immigration</td>
<td>5/25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/29</td>
<td>Writing #4</td>
<td>Quiz 1, Race of Race Continued</td>
<td>5/29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/30</td>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Class and Immigration</td>
<td>5/30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/30</td>
<td>Writing #4</td>
<td>Quiz 1, Race of Race Continued</td>
<td>5/30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>Readings</td>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>Class, Gender, Race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/21</td>
<td>Methods Worksheet Assignment Due 2 Due</td>
<td><a href="https://example.com">Wicked &amp; Divine</a> by Kieron Gillen and Jamie McKelvie, Volume 1</td>
<td>Analyzing Media and Cultural Content</td>
<td>Sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/23</td>
<td>Methods Worksheet Writing Group Workshop</td>
<td>How to Do Media and Cultural Studies, 2nd Edition by Jane Stokes, Part 2</td>
<td>Methods of Analysis, Chapter 7: Calculating Social Justice and Race, Gender</td>
<td>Sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/28</td>
<td>Methods Worksheet Writing Group Workshop</td>
<td>What's the Difference with Social Justice and Race, Gender</td>
<td>Researching Differences Across Difference, Chapter 6: Race, Gender</td>
<td>Sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/30</td>
<td>Methods Worksheet Writing Group Workshop</td>
<td>When We Fight We Win by Greg Jobin - Black Panther by Ta-Nehisi Coates</td>
<td>Methods of Analysis, Chapter 7: Calculating Social Justice and Race, Gender</td>
<td>Race, Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/30</td>
<td>Methods Worksheet Writing Group Workshop</td>
<td>When We Fight We Win by Greg Jobin - Black Panther by Ta-Nehisi Coates</td>
<td>Methods of Analysis, Chapter 7: Calculating Social Justice and Race, Gender</td>
<td>Race, Gender</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>