ARTSCI 1138.xx: First Year Seminar (Pass/Fail)

“Why Wakanda Matters: Utopias/Dystopias and the Legacies of Slavery and Empire”

Fall 2018

**Dr. Pranav Jani**, Department of English (US Ethnic Studies, Postcolonial Studies)

Affiliated Faculty: African American and African Studies; Comparative Studies

567 Denney Hall

[Jani.4@osu.edu](mailto:Jani.4@osu.edu)

**Course description**

The blockbuster superhero movie *Black Panther* is intimately tied to the struggles for Black liberation in the US and anti-colonial struggles in Africa. In fact, *Black Panther* joins a long list of films, comics, and literature that have imagined alternative worlds to the one we have: marred by slavery, colonial violence, imperialism, and racism. This class, drawing out the many contexts of *Black Panther* and linking it to a wider world—invites students to explore different politically-charged utopias and dystopias in scholarly ways.

**Course requirements**

Students will be expected to:

* Participate regularly and actively in class, showing that they have thought about the assignments for the week
* Discuss course materials and topics on a weekly post for the first 10 weeks (100-150 words) on our online discussion page on Carmen
* Sign up for a 8-10 minute oral presentation on course material
* Write a one-page summary of a scholarly article or book that helps students deepen their knowledge about a course topic.

**Course objectives**

* To explore ways of analyzing popular culture and literature beyond surface observations about theme and plot,
* To discuss and debate topics like race, representation, history, and society in a way that foregrounds evidence-based argument,
* To learn how to think globally and transnationally,
* To speak and write in ways that develop critical thinking,
* To introduce student to the wide world of cultural criticism, US Ethnic Studies and Postcolonial Studies

**Grading**

* Participation 30%
* 10 Carmen posts 20%
* Oral presentation 20%
* Review of Scholarship 20%

**Course Policies**

* **Academic Misconduct**: It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>.
* **Students with Disabilities**: Students with disabilities (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions) that have been certified by the Office of Student Life Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office of Student Life Disability Services is located in 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue; telephone 614- 292- 3307, slds@osu.edu; slds.osu.edu.

**Course Outline**

Week 1 **Topic: Introduction**

* + - Introduction to the course

Week 2 **Topic: *Black Panther* and #BlackLivesMatter**

* + - Discuss *Black Panther* (2018, dir. Ryan Coogler)
    - Patricia Cullors, “BlackLivesMatter Cofounder: Black Panther Reflects a Cultural Shift in Hollywood and America” <https://www.glamour.com/story/black-lives-matter-cofounder-black-panther-reflects-a-cultural-shift>

Week 3 **Topic: From Comic to Movie**

* Discuss *Black Panther* (comic)
* Rebecca Wanzo, “And All Our Past Decades Have Seen Revolutions: The Long Decolonziation of Black Panther”; <http://www.theblackscholar.org/past-decades-seen-revolutions-long-decolonization-black-panther-rebecca-wanzo/>

Week 4 **Topic: Comics and Social Justice**

Visit OSU’s Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum

Week 5 **Topic: Black Feminism and *Black Panther***

* + - Robyn C. Spencer, “Black Feminist Meditations on the Women of Wakanda” <https://medium.com/@robyncspencer/black-feminist-meditations-on-the-women-of-wakanda-5cc79751d9cd>

Week 6 **Topic: AfroFuturism**

* DemocracyNow! Roundtable, “AfroFuturism, Literation, and Representation in *Black Panther*”; <https://www.democracynow.org/2018/2/28/is_black_panther_the_film_we>

Week 7 **Topic: Whitewashing Colonialism**

* Discuss *Pocahantas* (1995, dir. Gabriel/Goldberg)
* IN CLASS: Dalrymple, Louis, “School Begins” (1899, cartoon)
* IN CLASS: Pears Soap advertisements (Pre 1900)

Week 8 **Topic: *Black Panther* and Africa**

* Naunihal Singh, “What Wakanda Can Teach Us About Africa’s History---and Its Future”; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/02/28/what-black-panthers-wakanda-can-teach-us-about-africas-history-and-its-future/?utm_term=.e636ad696990>
* Patrick Gathara, “*Black Panther* Offers a Regressive, Neocolonial Vision of Africa”; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/02/26/black-panther-offers-a-regressive-neocolonial-vision-of-africa/?utm_term=.3b4fab1d8e04>

Week 9 **Topic: *Avatar* and Colonialism**

* Discuss *Avatar* (2009, dir. James Cameron)
* Choose an article on *Avatar* and race from this collection of links by <https://shokrylina.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/re-visiting-the-racism-in-james-camerons-avatar/>

Week 10 **Topic: Recasting, Renewing**

* Discuss *A Wrinkle In Time* (2018, dir. Ava DuVernay)

Week 11 **Topic: Pakistani + Muslim + Girl = Superhero**

* Discuss *Ms Marvel, Volume 1: No Normal* (excerpts)
* Laura Hudson, “First Look at the New Ms. Marvel”; <https://www.wired.com/2014/01/ms-marvel-muslim-superheroine/>

Week 12 **Topic: Race in Space**

* Discuss *The Expanse* – Episode 1 (2015)
* Tasha Robinson, “How Syfy’s *The Expanse* Cast Its Multiracial Future”;<https://www.theverge.com/2016/2/25/11103434/syfy-the-expanse-series-diverse-cast>

Week 13 **Topic: Racial Violence as Horror**

* Discuss *Get Out* (2017, dir. Jordan Peele)
* Angelica Bastién, “Why Don’t Dystopias Know How to Talk About Race?”; <http://www.vulture.com/2017/08/why-dont-dystopias-know-how-to-talk-about-race.html>

Week 14 **Topic: Campuses as Utopian/Dystopian Spaces**

* Discuss *Dear White People* – Episodes 1 and 5 (2017)

**Biographical Statement**

I’ve worked at Ohio State as a professor of English since 2004. I teach both undergraduate and graduate students, and specialize in US Ethnic Studies and Postcolonial Studies. In other words, my classes highlight the literatures and cultures of people of color—racial/ethnic minorities in the US and/or regions colonized by the West in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. In terms of research, I have published a book on Indian writing in English and several scholarly articles; I’m currently working on another book on the changing narratives of the 1857 Revolt (or “Mutiny”) in British India.   
  
I am Director of the South Asian Studies Initiative at Ohio State, and affiliated with the departments of African American and African Studies and Comparative Studies. In 2016, I was honored to win the English Department’s Marlene Longenecker Award for Teaching and Leadership. In 2015, I received an award from the Columbus Free Press for Community Activism.

My aim, always, is to teach dynamic, student-centered classes that help students become humane, globally-aware individuals, confident to speak (and write) their mind.