

Spring 2021

3 Credit Course Open for Enrollment!!



Black Profiles in Humor and Entertainment

INDEX NUMBER 07240

COURSE NUMBER 01:014:317

Meets Remotely and Synchronously on Thursdays from 12:00pm to 3:00pm.

This course explores the historical role that humor and comedy have played in African American political resistance, cultural history, and creative expression, from the era of Slavery to the contemporary moment. We will examine works from a wide array of genres - including folktales, essays, short stories, Spoken Word poetry, stand-up routines, sketch shows, sitcoms, and films - to understand how comedy can serve as a vehicle for social and political commentary and change. We will study the comedic profiles and works of key Black artists who have distinguished themselves in the fields of humor and entertainment, including: Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Dick Gregory, Moms Mabley, Ishmael Reed, Chester Himes, Isabel Sanford, Sherman Hemsley, Eddie Murphy, Will Smith, Whoopi Goldberg, Queen Latifah, Wanda Sykes, Keegan-Michael Key, Jordan Peele, Martin Lawrence, Chris Rock, Bernie Mac, Kevin Hart, Mo'Nique, Issa Rae, Robin Thede, Quinta Brunson, Boots Riley, Tracee Ellis Ross, and Anthony Anderson, to name a few.

Focusing closely on the creative and political expression of these comedians, films, and sitcoms, as well as the impact their commentaries have had on American society, we will ask a variety of questions, such as: How has African American humor transformed the entertainment and film industries, as well as culture at large? What challenges can audiences present for the African American comic? How do comedians balance personal creativity and agency with the spotlight their fame places on them as representatives of a community? We will also explore more genre specific questions pertinent to comedy, such as, what is a laugh-track? What is improvisation? What is "funny" about a scene, or a moment within a comedy act? Is there an intended audience for a particular comedy or comedian? Are there any specific body movements, facial expressions, vocal intonations, language, or topics that a comedian embraces as a signature style? How does comedy help to serve as a vehicle of communication for important social, political, and emotional issues that people face on a daily basis? We will explore not only these questions, but any questions you as students bring to these comedic works. No prior knowledge of the subject matter is required, and there are no prerequisites. **ALL STUDENTS ARE WELCOME!!**

For more information, please contact the instructor, Dr. Anitha Ramachandran at anitha@africana.rutgers.edu .