

**Black Phoenix Rising: Death and Resurrection of Black Lives**  
SCIENCE IN SOCIETY 300 | AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES 300  
Tuesday 1:10-4:20pm  
Spring 2022, the 5<sup>th</sup> Semester of Coronatime  
Fisk Hall 414

Instructor: [Professor Tony Hatch](#)  
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Remote Access Link: <https://wesleyan.zoom.us/j/92744620333?from=addon>

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Black Phoenix Rising is an advanced seminar in African American studies, sociology, and science and technology studies that explores Black people's practices of resisting death and the creative ways they transform the symbolic meanings of life, death, and resurrection in Black life and culture. The course explores social theories and creative practices in the Black radical and aesthetic traditions that centers Black people's everyday practices of resistance, through artistic expressions of self, freedom and solidarity and analyses the role of consciousness, spirituality, and affect in Black lives. Black Phoenix Rising builds on the figure of the phoenix as an organizing metaphor for Black peoples' contestations with death and as a site for Black radical analysis. The phoenix is a mythological deity in the form of a large bird that symbolizes the cycle of life, death and resurrection. The phoenix dies and rises again through self-consumption or pyrrhic self-immolation; stories inspired by the Black phoenix remind us that death is not and never was the end for Black people. By telling the stories of Black people, real and imagined, who cut racism against the grain of death, Black Phoenix Rising counters the narrative that Black people's only meaningful existence is death through politically and structurally informed creative storytelling.

## **History of Black Phoenix Rising**

Professor Hatch co-produced [Black Phoenix Rising: Death and Resurrection](#) in 2017-2018 as a sociologically-inspired collaborative creative arts project featuring myself, a group of brilliant Wesleyan undergraduates, and [Ernesto Cuevas, Jr.](#), whose work is featured in our title image of a Black phoenix. This initial collaboration produced 7 pieces including a hand-drawn original comic book, two films, two magazines, sculpture, and a 30-minute soundscape, and a new website, all of which we exhibited at the Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery at the Wesleyan Center for the Arts on February 22 - February 26, 2018. Intellectual, creative, and financial support for Black Phoenix Rising was provided by the Center for the Humanities, the Creative Campus Initiative, the Digital Scholarship Innovation Fund, and the Center for African American Studies at Wesleyan.

Shot out to The Black Phoenix Rising Collective: Kaiyana Cervera, Xavier Cornejo, Ernesto Cuevas, Jr., Kelly D'oleo, Ainsley Eakins, Grace Handy, Tony Hatch, Paige Hutton, Tedra James, Victoria King, Caroline Liu, Jumoke McDuffie-Thurmond, Josh Nodiff, Henry Prine, Aleyda Robles, Belén Rodríguez, Jeneille Russell, Delia Tapia, Jordan White, and Grace Wong. And, a shot out to Briana Mebane for helping to migrate BPR into Wesleyan's new digital ecosystem.

At the time in 2017-2018, the first generation of BPR had discussions about this moment, when a second generation of Wesleyan students, scholars, and artists, would convene to take up the seminar's work in exploring creative and expressive affirmations of Black life in response to pernicious forms of anti-black racism. The 2017-2018 Black Phoenix died, but out of its ashes, the 2021-22 Black Phoenix is born. It is our work to carry forward in dialogue with members of the first collective, several of whom remain in contact with me about the work.

In spring 2022 (March 7 – April 15) I am piloting *Black Phoenix Rising* as a free online mini-course through Wesleyan University. (Living A Good Life is the other pilot course). I'm in the final stages of designing and developing the mini course, which I have developed in tandem with the version of the seminar outlined here.

I do not have grand aspirations that your iteration of BPR produce an art exhibit's worth of material; nor do I expect that we will be able to achieve the level of collaboration of the 2017-2018 group. This is a different seminar than that one for strategic pedagogical reasons, based on completely different structural and material circumstances. I am not a faculty fellow at the Center for the Humanities and I have decided not to partner with an artist as a collaborator. I am a department chair and have an active lecture schedule this semester. And, we are all confronting an ongoing pandemic that makes life more grueling, suffering more widespread, and stress more enduring. My goal this semester is to follow the Black Phoenix theoretically, historically, and creatively with you in our time under the constraints and opportunities present to us, including what I expect will be rich engagements with artist Brandon Ndife and scholar Ashanté Reese.

Black Phoenix Rising activates all four competencies of Mapping, Expressing, Mining, and Engaging.

*Mapping:* Navigating Complex Environments. This course maps bodies of knowledge and social practices across academic disciplines, creative fields, and diverse social contexts.

*Expressing:* Writing and communication. This course features multiple modes of human expression and communication in fiction and non-fiction texts, performances, and cultural artifacts to convey course content.

*Mining:* Empirical analysis and interpretation. This course offers a reinterpretation of the social history of African Americans' resistance to racism and forms of death through a thematic excavation of social theory, cultural texts and artefacts within a curated archive.

*Engaging:* Negotiating Cultural Contexts. This course engages an urgent collective need to confront what racism has done and continues to do to societies and invites students to negotiate cultural contexts in ways that work to abolish racism.

## COURSE READINGS

All course readings are available as PDFs in Moodle or as e-books through the Wesleyan Online Library. I will also create a Course Pack. You may want to purchase two books for close reference, although I provide free electronic access to all required readings:

Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (editors). *Futures of Black Radicalism*. Verso, 2017.

Christina Sharpe. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke University Press, 2016.

## COURSE WORK AND GRADING

Your grade in this class is calculated out of **500 points** distributed across four elements:

Class Engagement	100 points	20 percent
Menagerie	150 points	30 percent
Class Project	175 points	35 percent
Class Portfolio	75 points	15 percent

### **CLASS ENGAGEMENT 100 points**

Class engagement tracks your active participation in class lectures, discussion groups, and in one-on-one meetings with Professor Hatch. Please engage in your individual and our collective learning as fully as you are able all semester long. The single most important thing I want you to spend your time doing is reading. Read the material assigned and follow up on any leads that occur to you while reading. Take notes. Come to class and to our meetings ready to discuss the ideas in generative and open ways. Create space for other people to learn and practice engaged listening when they speak. Minimize any distractions that might interfere with your or others' learning (e.g., use your computer mindfully in class). Our coming together to learn is an extraordinary privilege paid for by the sacrifices of others. Some have paid higher prices, but I want to foster an environment where we can all learn from and teach each other. The pandemic will undoubtedly affect how we all engage this class. I'd like for us to survive the pandemic, not overachieve in it.

### **MENAGERIE 150 points Due weekly as part of the Class Portfolio**

The menagerie consists of a curated set of seven (7) artifacts and annotations that best speak to our seminar's themes. Out of the ten (10) class meetings for which readings are required, you can choose which seven (7) sessions for which you will select an artifact and write an annotation (I have indicated the set of ten sessions with a (\*) in the course calendar below). You will earn up to 20 points per week plus 10 points for assembling your menagerie all together for your Class Portfolio; see my description in your Class Project below for more detail on how I evaluate annotations.

**Before class each Tuesday by 12 noon**, upload your weekly selection and annotation to Moodle for credit and potential sharing with the class. Our collective selections will form an extended evidentiary basis for class discussion. The artifacts can be "texts" of any kind including scholarly

sources, cultural media, and creative work. You can build your menagerie around any of the following eight categories (or propose new category if one comes to mind), but try to diversify your interests across categories.

1. Films & Documentaries
2. Songs/Albums
3. Novels & Short Stories
4. Performance Art (Theater, Dance, etc.)
5. Visual Art
6. News stories
7. Short form writing (blogs, op-eds, essays)
8. Scholarly sources (books, chapters, articles)

Each annotation should be 100 words long and offer your brief and cursory justification for selecting the artifact in relationship to one (or more) of our course readings. Please cite any sources appropriately in each annotation.

**CLASS PROJECT 175 POINTS DUE MAY 13 as part of the Class Portfolio**

Your course project will actualize one of your Project Blueprints. Pick one the following three options for your Class Project. You will submit your project as part of the Class Portfolio.

1. **Analytic Essay:** Write a 2,500-3,000-word analytic essay that uses theoretical ideas from the black radical tradition to analyze a topic of your choice. Your task is to write your essay as if you are writing to a public audience that wants and needs to be informed about your topic. You are not writing a public lecture, but you need to write with a public audience in mind. Deliver an engaging didactic essay that teaches your framework to your audience and then uses that framework to analyze your chosen topic. Tell us exactly what we should think about your topic, given your framework. Educate us—convince us that these ideas and your analysis are important. This essay must include four sections: An Introduction, Theoretical Framework, Analysis, Conclusion. More details later.
2. **Annotated Bibliography + Framing Essay:** Produce an annotated bibliography of 12 annotations of journal articles/books/texts that help you advance a larger intellectual or political project (e.g., honors thesis, non-profit formation, activism, etc.). Write a 500-word framing essay that justifies your choices and offers a provisional evaluation of the fields and information referenced in the annotation. What you highlight in your annotations is up to you and depends on your overall interests. I will evaluate these annotations in terms of their coherence as a set (or set of themes), the clarity of your explications and prose, and the quality of your interpretations. Each annotation will be worth 10 points (10 x 12 = 120 + 55 for the essay). An annotated bibliography can provide you with a lovely opportunity to do some deep reading in an area of scholarship you'd like to know better. For example, if you wanted to *read* key texts in a particular field or area of interest, this can be accomplished via this option. The audience for an annotated bibliography is you and the point of it is to read, interpret, and annotate.

NOTE: Three out of twelve (3/12) of your annotations must be focused on assigned readings from Black Phoenix Rising.

NOTE: Three out of twelve (3/12) can be drawn from your Menagerie with revised/sharpened annotations.

3. **Digital and Creative Scholarship:** Create and produce a piece of digital and/or creative scholarship inspired by Black Phoenix Rising. Use any digital technologies or any creative means available. Carefully limit the scope and scale of the project to be consistent with the other final projects. This will also include a substantive artists' statement if the scholarship is not communicated in a verbal or written form.

NOTE: We can talk about the promise, peril, and possibilities for *collaborative class projects* once the semester gets going. The first generation of BPR (2017) was focused on collaboration, but I have decided to allow for individual projects in the second generation (2022) partly due to the unique challenges of the pandemic for deep and sustained collaboration.

**CLASS PORTFOLIO            75 POINTS            DUE MAY 13 Midnight**

You will assemble a clear and well-organized class portfolio that packages all of your coursework into one comprehensive document.

1. Write a 2-page personal essay that describes your intellectual and creative labor in the context of your overall learning experience in this course and how it frames to your broader interests in science and technology studies, African American Studies, or other areas of praxis. Be specific when referencing our class experiences and materials (cite, if necessary). You might think of this as part of a draft for a graduate school application or, alternatively, as a creative and personal articulation of your interests. Make an effort to draw on the most important ideas, theories, and perspectives as you articulate your understandings, interests, and plans (65 points).
2. Your Menagerie (5 points)
3. Your Class Project (5 points)
4. Any appendices, notes, resources that you'd like to archive for the future archive.

**COURSE CALENDAR**

**February 1: Introductions, the Syllabus, and Experimentations**

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**Part I: FIRE**

The element of fire signifies the phoenix in a hot and inflamed state, fanning its flaming wings.

This section of the course explores the following questions: What is the nature of the threat to Black lives and how have forms of black radical praxis emerged to define and respond to those threats? We will situate the formation of #BLM in the context of the long durée of colonialism and interdisciplinary efforts to confront the complex infrastructures and practices of racism that flow from enslavement.

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## February 8: Threat Analysis, #BlackLivesMatter, and Black Radical Praxis\*

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. 2016. "Black Lives Matter is a Movement, not a Moment," pp. 153-190 in *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*. Haymarket Books, 2016.

George Lipsitz. "What Is This Black in the Black Radical Tradition?" pp. 108-119 in Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (editors). *Futures of Black Radicalism*. Verso, 2017.

Fred Moten and Stefano Harvey. "Fantasy in the Hold," pp. 34-39 in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. Wivenhoe, 2013.

<https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.wesleyan.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1194818&site=ehost-live&scope=site&cbv=EK&ppid=Page--36>

## February 15: Necropolitics, Racial Capitalism, and Social Death\*

Achille Mbembe. 2003. "Necropolitics." *Public Culture* 15: 11-40.

Cedric Robinson. "The Nature of the Black Radical Tradition," pp. 167-171 in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. University of North Carolina Press, 2000 (original 1983).

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/wesleyan/reader.action?docID=475202&ppg=207>

Robin D.G. Kelley. "Why Black Marxism, Why Now? Boston Review. January 25, 2021.

<https://bostonreview.net/articles/robin-d-g-kelley-tk-2/>.

Orlando Patterson. "Authority, Alienation, and Social Death," pp. 35-76 in *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. E-book. Harvard University Press, 1982.

<https://hdl-handle-net.ezproxy.wesleyan.edu/2027/heb.03237>.

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## Part II: WIND

The element of wind signifies the phoenix in an active state of migration, marronage, and fugitivity.

This section of the course explores the following question: In response to necropolitics, racial capitalism, and social death, how have Black people used movements across space, time, and matter to evade capture, contact, and dehumanization? We will visit with artist Brandon Ndife whose work explores these and other themes and we will explore cultural histories of the phoenix in Black Egyptian cosmology.

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## February 22: Brandon Ndife and Excavations of Matter and Meaning\*

Review visitor materials. <https://brandonndife.com/>

View "[Down to the Spoons and Forks](#)" at the Zilkha Gallery

@ 6PM: “Artist Talk: A Conversation with Brandon Ndiye and Anthony Ryan Hatch at the Zilkha! <https://www.wesleyan.edu/cfa/events/2022/02-2022/02222022-conversation.html>

H.L.T. Quan. ““It’s Hard to Stop Rebels That Time Travel”: Democratic Living and The Radical Imagining of Old Worlds,” pp. 173-193 in Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (editors). *Futures of Black Radicalism*. Verso, 2017.

Anthony Ryan Hatch. “Quantum Archeology in 12018: A Visionary Excavation,” pp. 21-27 in *Street Matter-Decay& Forever/Golden Age: Khalil Robert Irving*. Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery, Center for the Arts, Wesleyan University, 2019.

Mel Chen. “Lead’s Racial Matters,” pp. 159-188 in *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. Duke University Press. 2012.

### **March 1: Phoenix Stories in Black Egyptian Cosmology and Culture\***

Mary Francis McDonald. "Phoenix redivivus." *Phoenix* 14, no. 4 (1960): 187-206. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1085860>

Thomas P. Harrison. “Bird of Paradise: Phoenix Redivivus” *Isis* 52, no. 2 (1960): 173-180. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/226849>

Reginald S. Poole. The Chronology of Ancient Egypt. 1851. *Horae Aegyptiacae: Or, The Chronology of Ancient Egypt Discovered from Astronomical and Hieroglyphic Records from Its Monuments... and Illustrations of the History of the First Nineteen Dynasties, Showing the Order of Succession from the Monuments*. John Murray, 1851. [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b560454](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b560454)

### **March 8: No class due to COVID scheduling complications**

### **March 15: Spring Break**

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## **Part III: EARTH**

The element of earth signifies the phoenix in its smoldering ashen state, having exhausted its flames, now returning to the soil.

This section of the course explores questions of Black people’s relationship to the soil, to food, and their formative work in the environmental justice movement in the United States. We will read about the racial capitalocene, revisit George Washington Carver, and spend time with anthropologist and author Ashanté Reese in an effort to theorize an intersectional and nuanced approach to environmental justice and ecological repair.

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### **March 22: Replanting Resistance, Black Radical Ecologies, and Signs of Regeneration\***

Mark Hersey. "Where The Soil is Wasted," pp. 194-218 in *My Work is That of Conservation: An Environmental Biography of George Washington Carver*. University of Georgia Press, 2011.

Stephanie A. Malin and Stacia S. Ryder. 2018. "Developing deeply intersectional environmental justice scholarship." *Environmental Sociology* 4 (1): 1-7.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2018.1446711>

Francoise Verges. "Racial Capitalocene," pp. 72-82 in Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (editors). *Futures of Black Radicalism*. New York: Verso, 2017.

**March 24-26: [The Future of Health](#)**, Co-Organized by Anthony Hatch and Megan Glick; featuring keynote speaker Keith Wailoo with talks by Rene Alemeling, Hil Malatino, **Ashanté Reese**, Nayan Shah, and Zaira Simone-Thompson.

### **March 29: Ashanté Reese and Critical Black Anthropologies of Food\***

Review visitor materials: <https://www.amreese.com/>

Ashanté Reese. "Introduction: Black Food, Black Space, Black Agency," pp. 1-18 in *Black Food Geographies: Race, Self-Reliance, and Food Access in Washington, D.C.* University of North Carolina Press.  
[https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469651521\\_reese.5](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469651521_reese.5)

Ashante Reesé. "What Is Our Culture? I Don't Even Know Nostalgia and Memory in Evaluations of Food Access," pp. 1-18 in *Black Food Geographies: Race, Self-Reliance, and Food Access in Washington, D.C.* University of North Carolina Press.  
[https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469651521\\_reese.8](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469651521_reese.8)

See also: Hanna Garth and Ashanté Reese, eds. *Black Food Matters: Racial Justice in the Wake of Food Justice*. University of Minnesota Press, 2021.  
<https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctv182jtk0>

### **April 5: Phoenix Stories in Early African American Life and Culture\***

Britt Russert. "Experiments in Freedom: Fugitive Science in Transatlantic Performance," pp. 113-148 in *Fugitive Science: Empiricism and Freedom in Early African American Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2017.

W.E.B. Du Bois. "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," in *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903.  
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm#chap01>

David Walker. *Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America, Written in Boston, State of Massachusetts, September 28, 1829.*  
<http://www.davidwalkermemorial.org/appeal>

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## **Part Four: WATER**



The element of water signifies the phoenix in a cool state of incubation, memory, and restful enclosure within an egg. In this section of the class, we investigate the political and aesthetic significance of water, shipping, and memory in the afterlife of enslavement. We will use both Christina Sharpe and Toni Morrison as interpretive guides through the cold waters of the past in our journey to other shores.

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**April 12: In the Wake\***

Christina Sharpe. “The Wake” and “The Ship”, pp. 1-67 in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

**April 19: Rememory and Black Matter\***

Christina Sharpe. “The Hold” and “The Weather”, pp. 68-134 in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

Toni Morrison, “Black Matter(s),” pp. 140-160 in *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations*. Knopf, 2019.

**April 26: Individual and Collaborative Research**

**May 3: End Times? Seeking Care and Community in the Midst of Chaos\***

Martin Luther King, Jr. “The World House,” pp. 177-202 in *Where Do We Go From Here?: Chaos or Community?*. Beacon Press, 2010 (1967).

Alice Walker. Selection from *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For: Inner Light in a Time of Darkness*. The New Press, 2021 (2006).

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**IMPORTANT COURSE POLICIES**

DISCLAIMER

This syllabus provides a general plan for the remainder of the course: BIG deviations may be necessary. Any and all updates will be posted as Announcements in Moodle.

GRADING SCALE

This class is graded A-F with no student option.

<u>Percent</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>Grade</u>
97-100	485-500	A+
93-96	465-484	A
90-92	450-464	A-
87-89	435-449	B+
83-86	415-434	B
80-82	400-414	B-

77-79	385-399	C+
73-76	365-384	C
70-72	350-364	C-
67-69	335-349	D+
63-66	315-334	D
60-62	300-314	D-
57-59	285-299	E+
53-56	265-284	E
50-52	250-264	E-
<50%	<249	F

### LATE WORK

Under the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic, I will remain flexible about any outstanding work and deadlines. Do your best to turn in your assignments on time so that you can avoid incompletes. If you enter a situation that impairs your ability to stay on track, please reach out to me for support and counsel.

### USING MOODLE

I make use of the “Announcements” feature to communicate with the entire class about class cancellations, illness, etc. It is your responsibility to monitor Moodle on a regular basis for any important announcements. My understanding is that Moodle will email you automatically when there is an announcement. You will also use Moodle to submit all of your work.

### WESLEYAN’S HONOR CODE

I treat all forms of academic honesty with the utmost seriousness and *strongly* encourage you to comply with Wesleyan’s Honor Code which you can review within the student handbook (<http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/20152016studenthandbook.pdf>) Violations of the Honor Code may result in an F in the course and possible academic and disciplinary action. All violations will be reported without exception.

### DISABILITY RESOURCES

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible. If you believe that you might need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Laura Patey in Disability Resources, located in 021 North College or call 860-685-5581 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

### COURSE EVALUATION

Your honest and constructive assessment of this course plays an indispensable role in shaping the future of higher education at Wesleyan, even in Coronatime. Upon completing this course, please take time to fill out the online course evaluation.