



## Course Name

ENGL 4280:001 / Black Magic: Connure, Hoodoo, Voodoo, and Other Black Healing Arts

## Instructor Contact Information

**Course Information:** MW 2:20-3:40PM in 104 Curry Hall

**Professor:** Dr. Jo Davis-McElligatt

**Cell Number:** 337.356.1726

**Office Hours:** MW 12-2 in 115 AUB

**Email:** [joanna.davis-mcelligatt@unt.edu](mailto:joanna.davis-mcelligatt@unt.edu)

**Teaching Assistant:** Gale Williams

**Office Hours:** TTh 12:30-2:30 at Aura Coffee

**Email:** [Garrison.Williams@unt.edu](mailto:Garrison.Williams@unt.edu)

**Teaching Assistant for TAMS:** Mya Fry

**Office Hours:** TTh 12:30-2 at Aura Coffee

**Email:** [JamyaFry@my.unt.edu](mailto:JamyaFry@my.unt.edu)

**Communication Expectations:** Feel free to pop in or leave office hours at any time. If you need to communicate with me urgently, please email or text Dr. Jo.

## Course Description

This course offers an exploration forms of Black magic—conjure, hoodoo, voodoo, and other healing arts. What is magic—is it real, or a spiritual tradition, or a religious faith, or superstition, or fantasy, or desire? How do these forms of magic index with other religions, including Catholicism and African-derived spiritual traditions? What does it mean to be a practicing rootworker—where do your powers come from, and how does it work? How did these practices help sustain Black life during slavery and its aftermath? How has magic helped Black folks survive, dream, and grow into the future? What do we do with Black magic now? We will be reading theory, criticism, fiction, and watching film in order to better understand why Black

magic has so continuously captivated the Black imaginary. This course will help you focus and develop your writing and critical thinking abilities. You will complete film worksheets, critical annotations, a zine, a research quilt, an annotated bibliography; and a final creative project.

## Course Structure

This 16-week course is face-to-face. The course is organized around four modules: Working Through the Roots: Histories and Theories of Black Magic; Sistah Conjurers and Granny Midwives: Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*; Healing and Harming in the Afterlife of Slavery: Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing*; Practicing Magic, Summoning Spells: Tananarive Due's *The Good House*. Each module consists of a selection of literature, film, and secondary sources. The structure of the course is recursive and static—each week you will read the assigned work, complete the assignments, attend class, and participate in class discussion.

## Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe major themes in Black primary source documents (film, literature, media) and culture.
2. Analyze secondary source criticism and critical theory.
3. Critique and interpret primary source documents using a wide range of different secondary sources.
4. Compose your own analysis and criticisms of primary source docs using secondary source criticism.
5. Produce analysis in various forms (research; writing exercises; class discussion; concept mapping; creative projects).

## Materials

You are free to purchase any edition of these texts. Though you may choose to listen to an audiobook or use an e-book, this semester I am asking that you purchase a real book and bring it with you to class. We will host live film screenings on campus; if you choose not to attend

### Books

- Gloria Naylor, *Mama Day*
- Jesmyn Ward, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*
- Tananarive Due, *The Good House*

### Films

- *Sinners* (dir. Ryan Coogler, 2025)
- *Daughters of the Dust* (dir. Julie Dash, 1991)

- *Eve's Bayou* (dir. Kasi Lemmons, 1997)
- *Black Panther* (dir. Ryan Coogler, 2018)
- *The Skeleton Key* (dir. Iain Softley, 2005)

## Course Philosophy

In this course there will be no surprises—what you see is what you get! I firmly believe that it is my job to create conditions for each of you to pass this course, to learn something, and to be encouraged. I know how difficult it can be for you to complete assignments, keep up with all of your courses, make it to work, and also make certain that you have time decompress by yourself and with others. The goal of this course is not to become masters—of monsters, of the horror cinema, of Black speculative fiction, or any other form of knowledge. Rather, the goal of this course is provide you with new ways of thinking about US American literature and culture.

## Technical Requirements & Skills

### Minimum Technology Requirements

- Computer
- Reliable internet access
- Microsoft Office Suite
- [Canvas Technical Requirements](#)

### Computer Skills & Digital Literacy

- Using Canvas and email
- Using Canva or other graphic design software
- Uploading documents or attachments to email
- Downloading and installing software
- Using presentation and graphics programs

## Getting Help

### Technical Assistance

Part of working in the online environment involves dealing with the inconveniences and frustration that can arise when technology breaks down or does not perform as expected. Here at UNT we have a Student Help Desk that you can contact for help with Canvas or other technology issues.

**UIT Help Desk:** [UIT Student Help Desk site](http://www.unt.edu/helpdesk/index.htm) (<http://www.unt.edu/helpdesk/index.htm>)

**Email:** [helpdesk@unt.edu](mailto:helpdesk@unt.edu)

**Phone:** 940-565-2324

**In Person:** Sage Hall, Room 130

**Walk-In Availability:** 8am-9pm

**Telephone Availability:**

- Sunday: noon-midnight
- Monday-Thursday: 8am-midnight
- Friday: 8am-8pm
- Saturday: 9am-5pm

**Laptop Checkout:** 8am-7pm

For additional support, visit [Canvas Technical Help](https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10554-4212710328)  
(<https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10554-4212710328>)

## Student Support Services

UNT provides mental health resources to students to help ensure there are numerous outlets to turn to that wholeheartedly care for and are there for students in need, regardless of the nature of an issue or its severity. Listed below are several resources on campus that can support your academic success and mental well-being:

- [Student Health and Wellness Center](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center>)
- [Counseling and Testing Services](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services>)
- [UNT Care Team](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care>)
- [UNT Psychiatric Services](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center/services/psychiatry) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center/services/psychiatry>)
- [Individual Counseling](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services/services/individual-counseling) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services/services/individual-counseling>)

Other student support services offered by UNT include

- [Registrar](https://registrar.unt.edu/registration) (<https://registrar.unt.edu/registration>)
- [Financial Aid](https://financialaid.unt.edu/) (<https://financialaid.unt.edu/>)
- [Student Legal Services](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-legal-services) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-legal-services>)
- [Career Center](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/career-center) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/career-center>)
- [Multicultural Center](https://edo.unt.edu/multicultural-center) (<https://edo.unt.edu/multicultural-center>)
- [Counseling and Testing Services](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services>)
- [Pride Alliance](https://edo.unt.edu/pridealliance) (<https://edo.unt.edu/pridealliance>)
- [UNT Food Pantry](https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources/food-pantry) (<https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources/food-pantry>)

## Academic Support Services

- [Academic Resource Center](https://clear.unt.edu/canvas/student-resources) (<https://clear.unt.edu/canvas/student-resources>)

- [Academic Success Center](https://success.unt.edu/asc) (<https://success.unt.edu/asc>)
- [UNT Libraries](https://library.unt.edu/) (<https://library.unt.edu/>)
- [Writing Lab](http://writingcenter.unt.edu/) (<http://writingcenter.unt.edu/>)
- [MathLab](https://math.unt.edu/mathlab) (<https://math.unt.edu/mathlab>)

## Course Requirements

In this course you will complete periodical film worksheets and critical annotations of our assigned readings. You will complete five end-of-module projects, designed to stress creativity, adaptability, and information-processing: a zine, two keyword maps, an annotated bibliography, and an unessay.

| Assignment                           | Points Possible | Percentage of Final Grade |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|
| Film Worksheets                      | 40 points (5)   | 20%                       |
| Critical Annotations                 | 20 points (10)  | 20%                       |
| Project One: Zine                    | 100 points      | 10%                       |
| Project Two: Research Quilt          | 100 points      | 10%                       |
| Project Three: Playlist/Bibliography | 100 points      | 10%                       |
| Final Creative Project               | 150 points      | 15%                       |
| Class Attendance                     | 150 points      | 15%                       |
| Total Points Possible                | 1000 points     | 100%                      |

## Course Policies

### Assignment Policy

All of the information you need for each assignment will be posted to Canvas. Occasionally the university will perform maintenance—if this schedule makes it impossible or difficult for you to get your work submitted on time I will always make accommodations for you. There are other problems that might arise on your end with accessing Canvas or the UNT system. Report any problems you have to me immediately and contact the UNT Student Help Desk:

[helpdesk@unt.edu](mailto:helpdesk@unt.edu) or 940.565.2324 and obtain a ticket number. The UNT Student Help Desk will work with the student to resolve any issues as soon as possible.

### Instructor Responsibilities and Feedback

- It is our responsibility to help you grow and learn; to provide clear instructions for all assignments; to answer your questions about assignments; to provide you with

guidance in understanding course materials; to review and update course content; and to grade your work.

- Mya and Gale will grade your assignments within 14 days of receiving them. They will provide feedback for all of your work in Canvas. I will review all grades before they are posted to Canvas.

## Attendance Policy

In this course there are no excused absences, unless you have a request from the Dean of Students or have arranged for specific accommodations with ODA. Your attendance grade will reflect a percentage of the total number of days you are in attendance. For example, if you attend the course 90% of the time, you will earn 90% of your attendance grade; if you attend 25% of the time, you will earn 25% of your attendance grade. We will check attendance at the beginning of each class period; if you are late, it is your responsibility to check in before the end of class and make sure that we count you present (we will not change attendance grades after the end of any class period). The instructors reserve the right to offer exemptions to the student attendance policy on a case-by-case basis.

## GenAI Policy

In this course, the use of GenAI tools is not permissible. No matter the approach, any attempt to represent GenAI output as a student's own work will be considered fabrication, cheating, and/or academic dishonesty as determined on a case-by-case basis.

This class is designed to help you become a better writer and thinker, on your own terms, for yourself, by yourself. Generative AI—ChatGPT and others—does not require you to think or write! It is bland, average, derivative, often inaccurate, strange, confusing. In this class, you will have to use your own mind, think your own thoughts, and find your own words. I have a zero tolerance policy for the use of AI for any purpose in this class—it is not acceptable to use AI programs to generate writing, scan for sources, plan or outline, or help produce ideas. If I discover that you have used it *in any capacity* in your work for this class, you will receive an automatic zero on the assignment. You must use your own mind this semester.

## Use of Tech During Class

TAMS students may not use laptops or cellphones during class unless they have the permission of the instructor or documented accommodations from ODA; TAMS students are required to bring physical copies of all texts to each class period. Students are generally discouraged from using laptops or cellphones during class. The use of smart glasses, such as META glasses, are also discouraged. Students may not record the class unless they have received specific accommodations from ODA.

## Late Work

Late work is accepted at the discretion of the instructors. If you have extenuating circumstances that prevent you from getting your work done on time, please contact me immediately—there is no problem we can't resolve together.

## Academic Freedom

UNT has a robust policy regarding academic freedom and academic responsibility. Crucially, this policy encompasses not only the rights of faculty members but also the rights “of the student to freedom in learning.” As a student in this classroom, therefore, you have the right to encounter and debate new ideas, diverse forms of knowledge, and unfamiliar or contrary points of view. According to UNT policy, “it is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive.” At the same time, to encourage the free exchange of ideas, and to ensure that your right to learn is protected, the tone for such discussion must always be civil and respectful; hateful or discriminatory speech will not be tolerated. For more information, please consult the full UNT policy at <https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-035>.

## Audio/Video Recording

Although UNT is a publicly supported institution, our classroom is not a public space. Therefore, in order to protect the intellectual property and privacy rights of both faculty and students, video and audio recordings are prohibited during class. The exception is for students who have been granted explicit approval as an ODA accommodation. For more information, please consult the full UNT policy at <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access/faculty/faculty-guide/accommodations-explained/Audio-Recording-Faculty.html>

## UNT Policies

### Academic Integrity Policy

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University. [Insert specific sanction or academic penalty for specific academic integrity violation.]

### ADA Policy

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA)

to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the [ODA website](https://disability.unt.edu/) (<https://disability.unt.edu/>).

## Emergency Notification & Procedures

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Blackboard for contingency plans for covering course materials.

## Retention of Student Records

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Blackboard online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about student's records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the University's policy. See UNT Policy 10.10, Records Management and Retention for additional information.

## Acceptable Student Behavior

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. Visit UNT's [Code of Student Conduct](https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct) (<https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>) to learn more.

## Access to Information - Eagle Connect

Students' access point for business and academic services at UNT is located at: [my.unt.edu](https://my.unt.edu). All official communication from the University will be delivered to a student's Eagle Connect

account. For more information, please visit the website that explains Eagle Connect and how to forward e-mail [Eagle Connect](https://it.unt.edu/eagleconnect) (<https://it.unt.edu/eagleconnect>).

## Student Evaluation Administration Dates

Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. The student evaluation of instruction is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. The survey will be made available during weeks 13, 14 and 15 [insert administration dates] of the long semesters to provide students with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught. Students will receive an email from "UNT SPOT Course Evaluations via IASystem Notification" ([no-reply@iasystem.org](mailto:no-reply@iasystem.org)) with the survey link. Students should look for the email in their UNT email inbox. Simply click on the link and complete the survey. Once students complete the survey they will receive a confirmation email that the survey has been submitted. For additional information, please visit the [SPOT website](http://spot.unt.edu/) (<http://spot.unt.edu/>) or email [spot@unt.edu](mailto:spot@unt.edu).

# Reading Schedule

Our Canvas page is organized by weekly units, but this reading schedule will show you what you must read or watch for each class period. Links to all readings are on the Canvas page.

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8.17                                                                | Introduction to the Class                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Working the Roots:<br/>Histories and Theories of Black Magic</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 8.19                                                                | Kinitra Brooks, "Myrtle's Medicine," <i>Emergence Magazine</i> , 24 January 2019<br>Kinitra Brooks, Kameelah L. Martin, and LaKisha Simmons, "Conjure Feminism: Toward a Genealogy," <i>Hypatia</i> 36.3, 2021, 452-461                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 8.24                                                                | Valerie Lee, "Sistah Conjuror: Text and Context," in <i>Granny Midwives and Black Women Writers: Double-Dutched Readings</i> , 1996, 1-16<br>Valerie Lee, "Western Science and Folk Medicine: White Men's Forceps and Black Women's Forces," in <i>Granny Midwives and Black Women Writers: Double-Dutched Readings</i> , 1996, 23-49<br>Lindsey Stewart, "'An Inside Thing to Live by': Refusal, Conjuror, and Black Feminist Imaginaries among Granny Midwives," <i>Hypatia</i> 36.3, 2021, 462-484                                                                                             |
| 8.26                                                                | Jeffrey E. Anderson, "Vodu and Minkisi: The African Foundation of Black American Magic," in <i>Conjure in American Society</i> , 2005, 25-49<br>Yvonne P. Chireau, "'Africa Was a Land a' Magic Power Since de Beginnin' a History': Old World Sources of Conjuring Traditions," <i>Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition</i> , 2003<br>Yvonne P. Chireau, "'Our Religion and Superstition Was All Mixed Up': Conjure, Christianity, and African American Supernatural Traditions," <i>Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition</i> , 2003 |
| 8.31                                                                | Jeffrey E. Anderson, "The Conjurors' World: The Social Context of Hoodoo in Nineteenth-Century Black Life," in <i>Conjure in American Society</i> , 2005, 75-89<br>Yvonne P. Chireau, "'We All Believed in Hoodoo,'": Conjure and Black American Cultural Traditions," <i>Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition</i> , 2003                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 9.2                                                                 | Yvonne P. Chireau, "'Folks Can Do Yuh Lots of Harm': African American Supernatural Harming Traditions," <i>Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition</i> , 2003<br>Yvonne P. Chireau, "'Medical Doctors Can't Do You No Good': Conjure and African American Traditions of Healing," <i>Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition</i> , 2003                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

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|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 9.7                                                                                                   | <b>Labor Day / No Class</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 9.9                                                                                                   | Zora Neale Hurston, "Hoodoo in America," <i>The Journal of American Folklore</i> 44.174, 1931, 317-417                                                                                                                              |
| 9.14                                                                                                  | Zora Neale Hurston, "Hoodoo in America," <i>The Journal of American Folklore</i> 44.174, 1931, 317-417                                                                                                                              |
| 9.16                                                                                                  | <i>Sinners</i> (dir. Ryan Coogler, 2025)                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Sistah Conjurers and Granny Midwives:<br/>Gloria Naylor's <i>Mama Day</i></b>                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 9.21                                                                                                  | <i>Daughters of the Dust</i> , (dir. Julie Dash, 1991)                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 9.23                                                                                                  | Gloria Naylor, <i>Mama Day</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 9.28                                                                                                  | Gloria Naylor, <i>Mama Day</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 9.30                                                                                                  | Gloria Naylor, <i>Mama Day</i><br>Lindsey Tucker, "Recovering the Conjure Woman: Texts and Contexts in Gloria Naylor's <i>Mama Day</i> ," <i>African American Review</i> 28.2, 1994, 173-188                                        |
| 10.5                                                                                                  | Gloria Naylor, <i>Mama Day</i><br>Yomna Saber, "The Conjure Woman's Poetics of Poisoning in Gloria Naylor's <i>Mama Day</i> ," <i>Folklore</i> 129, 2018, 375-396                                                                   |
| <b>Healing and Harming in the Afterlife of Slavery:<br/>Jesmyn Ward's <i>Sing, Unburied, Sing</i></b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 10.7                                                                                                  | <i>Eve's Bayou</i> (dir. Kasi Lemmons, 1997)                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| 10.12                                                                                                 | <i>Black Panther</i> (dir. Ryan Coogler, 2018)                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 10.14                                                                                                 | Jesmyn Ward, <i>Sing, Unburied, Sing</i>                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 10.19                                                                                                 | Jesmyn Ward, <i>Sing, Unburied, Sing</i>                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 10.21                                                                                                 | Jesmyn Ward, <i>Sing, Unburied, Sing</i><br>Joanna Davis-McElligatt, " 'And Now She Sings It': Conjure as Abolitionist Alternative in Jesmyn Ward's <i>Sing, Unburied, Sing</i> ," <i>Mississippi Quarterly</i> 74.1, 2021, 103-123 |
| 10.26                                                                                                 | Jesmyn Ward, <i>Sing, Unburied, Sing</i><br>Na Rim Kim, "Melancholic, Hopeful Magical Realism in Jesmyn Ward's <i>Sing, Unburied, Sing</i> ," <i>Texas Studies in Literature</i> 67.2, 2005,                                        |
| <b>Practicing Magic, Summoning Spells:<br/>Tananarive Due's <i>The Good House</i></b>                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 10.28                                                                                                 | Tananarive Due, <i>The Good House</i>                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 11.2                                                                                                  | Tananarive Due, <i>The Good House</i>                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 11.4                                                                                                  | Tananarive Due, <i>The Good House</i>                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 11.9                                                                                                  | Tananarive Due, <i>The Good House</i>                                                                                                                                                                                               |

|       |                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|       | Yolanda Hood and Tananarive Due, "Interivew with Tananarive Due," <i>Femspec</i> 6.1, 2005                                                                                   |
| 11.16 | Tananarive Due, <i>The Good House</i><br>Tananarive Due, "Healing Our Histories Through the Lens of Horror," <i>Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts</i> 33.3, 2022, 132-151 |
| 11.18 | <i>The Skeleton Key</i> (dir. Iain Softley, 2005)                                                                                                                            |
| 11.23 | <b>Thanksgiving / No Class</b>                                                                                                                                               |
| 11.25 | <b>Thanksgiving / No Class</b>                                                                                                                                               |
| 11.30 | Final Project Work                                                                                                                                                           |
| 12.2  | Final Project Presentation                                                                                                                                                   |