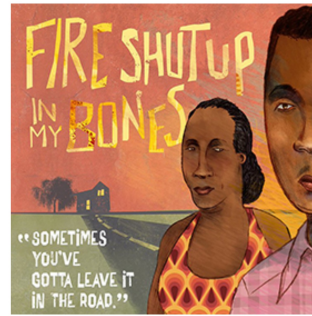
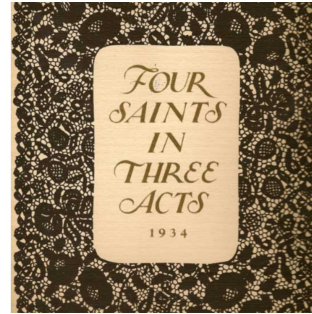




MUCH 495: Opera and Race in the United States Fall 2022

Class Times and Location: T/Th 11:00am-12:15pm (Bishop C214)

Instructor

Dr. Erin Brooks
Email: brooksem@potSDam.edu

Office: Schuette Hall A102

Office hours:

Office hours can be in-person or via online meeting or by phone—any office hour is scheduled by appointment in order to maximize the overlap between your schedule and mine. Please email or message me to set up these office hour meetings; I'm very happy to discuss course material or just offer a supportive ear for anything you'd like to share in a safe space.

Course Description and Objectives:

"MUCH 495: Opera and Race in the United States" is a course for students who wish to explore interfaces between a specific musical genre—opera— and race (including how race intersects with other fundamental aspects of human culture and identity such as gender, sexuality, age, and class). As Naomi André notes in her excellent book *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement*:

expanding the current narrative of history, by including the legacies of slavery, colonialism, Jim Crow, or apartheid, I show that opera has proved to be a flexible and capacious genre: it can give voice to the different experiences that exist outside the mainstream; with the participation of black composers and librettists behind the scenes, black bodies and embodied stories on the stage, and black audience members interpreting the performance, opera compellingly expresses multiple vantage points that have not been previously engaged.

In MUCH 495, throughout the semester we will read and discuss foundational texts exploring relationships between opera and race, engage in close listening and score analysis of selected musical works, and work on case studies of specific histories and narratives.

The class will focus specifically on these relationships between opera and race in the United States—covering the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries—both as a means of limiting the scope of our work and also with the understanding that racial politics differ dramatically from place to place. Focusing on the United States allows us to parse the particular histories of opera and race in a specific context—though we will occasionally refer to operatic histories and trajectories in Europe and other parts of the world as well. While much of our class decision will focus on the “black/white” (sonic) color line that has marked understandings of race in the United States throughout its history, we will also incorporate discussions of Latinx and Asian intersections with opera in the US.

Topics covered in this class include (but are not limited to):

- assessing narrative works focused on characters of color, ranging from 19th century operas such as *Aida* or *Otello* to twentieth-century works such as *Four Saints in Three Acts* and *Porgy and Bess*
- assessing recent operatic compositions focused on race and American history, including Toni Morrison and Richard Danielpour’s *Margaret Garner*; Anthony Davis’s *Amistad*; Anthony Davis’s *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*; Terence Blanchard’s *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*; Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson’s *Blue*; Anthony Davis’s *Central Park Five*
- the institutional histories of segregation and desegregation (?) of major operatic companies in the United States, including the Metropolitan Opera
- racial theories about the voice
- the history and enduring legacies of blackface and yellow face in operatic performance
- the roles of composers/librettists/choreographers of color in opera
- the history and legacy of “colorblind” casting
- the histories of operatic singers of color, such as Marian Anderson, Robert McFerrin, George Shirley, Martina Arroyo, Leontyne Price, Grace Bumbry, etc.
- discourse and perspectives of contemporary operatic performers and institutions on the subject of race and opera, including discussions with guests

During the semester you will develop an individual research project. Research, methods, and analysis will be shared with classmates at various stages; at the end of the semester, you will present your work and engage in peer commenting on each other’s projects.

Students who successfully complete MUCH 495 should be able to:

- Articulate foundational theories about opera and race and how those relate to/impact music studies
- Recognize vocabulary, styles, genres, forms, and individual works from our class units on various aspects of music and gender
- Think creatively about how this class work influences your relationships with music
- demonstrate facility with resources for music history research

- frame a research question related to the course topic & identify appropriate sources for exploring the question
- analyze primary sources & critically read the secondary literature related to your research question in order to construct an argument
- communicate your ideas to classmates at various points in the research and writing process
- produce a final paper and consider how your essay might be developed for an undergraduate research journal/presentation or used as a writing sample for graduate school or job applications

Course Prerequisites and Requirements:

Students enrolled in this course should have successfully completed MUCB 323 (History III) or be co-enrolled.

Given the pace of this course, keeping up on all assigned work in advance of every class is essential. SUNY guidelines assume at least 2 hours of study time per hour of class time or credit, so for a 3-credit class that would mean 6 additional hours a week outside of class (studying, listening, reading). I've set up the course to maximize our workload within the class, and there are some other workarounds to compress required time outside of class a bit. If needed, please feel free to schedule an office hour chat for guidance on how to organize your work time most effectively.

Recommended Materials and How to Access Reading/Assignments:

There is no required text for this course. All readings and recordings for this course will be available to you through the Brightspace site for this course. Visit <https://brightspace.potsdam.edu> for your course resources; we'll do this together starting on the Thursday of Week 1.

What kind of stuff might be assigned as homework?

- Throughout the course of the semester, you'll usually have to some work to do before coming to class—maybe some pages to read, music to listen to, a video to watch.

How much?

- I've tried to be as humane as possible: while this is a reading-intensive course (upper division music history seminar!), I have often tried to only assign one longer article per week. Sometimes this will mean that I'll split the class up into two groups (a Tuesday group and a Thursday group), and you'll only do the reading one day a week.

How to get to it?

- Course content and activities are structured using a weekly format on Brightspace
- You'll see a module for a week, then individual modules for each day.
- All of the specific reading / listening / viewing instructions will always be provided on the day's module.
- Each day's module on Brightspace will contain the exact assignment of required page numbers, and (if applicable) PDFs and listening links

When can I access the homework?

- I generally will have the work for the following week posted by the end of business on Friday, so you can do it as it fits into your schedule.
- You should likely have a look at Brightspace every day for listening/reading assignments, discussion questions, quizzes, and any possible updates/changes.
- Anything that's listed for a day, please do it **BEFORE** I see you in class that day.
- Once modules are opened, they will remain visible for the rest of the semester.

Gentle reminder:

- SUNY guidelines assume **at least 2** hours of study time per hour of class time or credit. For this 3-credit class, which meets 3 hours/week, you could potentially spend 6 additional hours a week outside of class (studying, listening, reading).
- Now: that number of hours you spend reading or listening will vary over the course of the week or the semester, but if you are obviously not doing work outside class, you may not be successful in this course.
- Please feel free to come meet with me for guidance on how to organize your studying and reading time most effectively.
- It is your responsibility to make sure that you can access the class materials; please let me know as soon as possible if you are having any problems. I may not be able to troubleshoot issues involving your personal computer. Please understand that if you cannot access course materials through your computer/tablet/etc, we'll need to find an alternative solution. The number to campus Computing & Technology Services (CTS) helpdesk is (315) 267-4444 or helpdesk@potsgdam.edu
- For additional help with your assignments, the Crane Music library has a vast variety of resources. The url <https://library.potsgdam.edu/music> will take you to a page with essential resources such as links to audio/visual databases, articles, the library catalog, etc. We'll talk more about specific resources as the class progresses.

Course Evaluation:

Grading will be based on five overall categories: weekly short assignments, in-class work (attendance, participation in in-class activities, discussion, in-class writing, etc), a writing assignment on the Pellicciotti competition, a short blog post on performers, and a research project (which has a number of internal steps). For more details on specific categories, see below:

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| 1. Weekly assignments/forum posts on Brightspace | 25% |
| 2. Class attendance, Participation, Preparation | 20% |
| 3. Pellicciotti Write-up | 15% |
| 4. Short Blog Post on Performers | 10% |
| 5. Final Project | 30% |
- Projected due dates for each part will be posted on Brightspace
 - I reserve the right to push due dates back due to unforeseen events, etc
 - One on One Consultation on Research Topic—2%
 - Initial Research Topic—3%
 - Research Question & Initial Bibliography—5%
 - Brief Presentation, last week of classes—5%
 - Final Podcast—15%

* Explanations of procedures:

1. **Weekly Assignments/Forum Post/Discussion Forum Procedures and Guidelines:**

- * You'll be asked to either complete an assignment or a discussion forum post on Brightspace for each week of the class. Start early, stay on top of it, and it should help us start our discussions from a more complex and interesting place!
- * You are required to complete the assignment/post to the discussion forum each week of the semester (15 weeks). You may skip two weeks with no penalty (so you should have completed 13 assignments or forum posts by the time the semester is over). If you miss additional weeks beyond the two freebies, you will lose a letter grade from your weekly grade for each additional missing assignment/post.
- * If I ask for a post—as opposed to a specific assignment—a "post" should consist of at least one paragraph (3 full sentences, but you may write more), plus 2 questions. I will often give you some specific guidelines or things to think about to help you focus your thoughts a little. I will track the forum posts throughout the semester (and feel free to post followup comments in order to make the conversation better!)
- * Your post or assignment must be completed the evening before our class, 11:59pm (so that I and others can read them before class that morning)

2. **Class attendance/Participation/Preparedness Procedures:** This class will only be successful if it becomes an engaged, active learning community. Course lectures, discussion, and activities will expand on material presented in homework, offering additional perspectives and musical examples. Due to these factors, attendance and participation is essential and will be encouraged through multiple means of evaluation.

I've tried to build in some flexibility into this class—EVERYONE NEEDS IT—while also acknowledging the reality that you can't be successful in this class without being present. If participation in spoken class conversations is difficult for you—based on personality types, learning styles, access, etc—please come see me and we can find additional ways to make you feel more comfortable as you participate.

A) Each day during our class sessions, I will track attendance and participation. I may assign you a discussion question or topic to work on. For participatory discussions, you are expected to contribute (simply being present is not enough).

B) Note that there are a couple of days built into this semester when we won't meet in person, ranging from Fall Break to a conference I'll need to attend in early November.

C) You can miss **FOUR** classes for whatever reason with **no** penalty. **Use these as you see fit—you can use them for illness, mental health days, prep for some giant deadline, whatever works.**

D) For any class you've missed, I strongly suggest you contact me to discuss missed course content, as you'll still need to know it.

E) If you miss more than **FOUR** classes, I start to have concerns about the extent to which you can participate in our semester-long communal work and discussions. **I reserve the right to subtract 10% from your participation grade for each additional absence after the four "use-as-you-see fit" absences.**

F) If you have more extended issues this fall—illness, family concerns, or anything else that significantly impacts your ability to attend the class sessions—please schedule a time to talk to me *as soon as possible.* I want to help anyone in need find workarounds, but I can't help if I don't know the situation.

G) **Except under specific circumstances, if you miss more than EIGHT classes during the term**

(that's more than 25% of our class meetings), I reserve the right to consider that you haven't been able to do enough of the work to successfully complete the course ("pass"). This isn't automatic, but is a possibility.

H) If you have a religious observance during the semester, any missed coursework during that particular class will not count against you. However, you should inform me before the absence and you'll still want to stay on top of the relevant coursework for that class date.

3. **Pelliocciotti:** It's my intention that everyone in this class attend at least one portion of the Pelliocciotti workshops on campus.

These sessions will take place at the following times:

Friday, September 23: 4pm

Saturday September 24: 1-6pm

Sunday, September 25: 1-7:30pm

My expectation is that you would attend a 2-hour block, not necessarily the entire session.

Let's have a look at calendars now to make sure that one of these events will work with your schedule—I've asked you to indicate this in your entry ticket. Additionally, you can let me know if you're taking part in the workshops (and which part).

If you cannot attend due to scheduling reasons, you'll need to come to me this week and let me know so that we can plan for an alternate assignment.

4. **Short Blog Post on Performers:** this will be assigned mid semester—around Week 6-7—stay tuned!

5. **Final Project**—we'll start working on this about Week 8/9 and continue throughout the entire semester.

Course Policies

Grading

All grades will be determined on the following scale:

4.0: 95-100	2.7: 82-84	1.3: 68-71
3.7: 92-94	2.3: 78-81	1.0: 65-67
3.3: 88-91	2.0: 75-77	0.0: 0-64
3.0: 85-87	1.7: 72-74	

Please note that passing grade for an undergraduate course is a 2.0 or above.

Grade Appeals

If you have questions about a grade, please speak with me (in person) first. Please note that the Graduate Catalog includes the specific criteria upon which you are allowed to appeal a course grade. If we cannot come to an informal resolution, you would then complete a formal Grade Appeal Form and

we would consider if additional resolution is necessary. Details about the specific steps and timelines for this process are located in the Graduate Catalog: <https://catalog.potsdam.edu/index.php?catoid=2>

- **Emails:** I check email several times a day; if you don't hear back from me within 24 hours, feel free to try again. Please make sure to check your campus email regularly—I frequently send essential updates or class comments via email..
- **Appointments/Office Hours:** Office hours can be in person or via online meeting or by phone—any office hour is scheduled by appointment in order to maximize the overlap between your schedule and mine! Please email or message me to set up these office hour meetings; I'm very happy to discuss course material or just offer a supportive ear for anything you'd like to share in a safe space.
- **Pandemic-related Concerns:** Well, we continue to be in the midst of this....at the moment there aren't a lot of specific protocols on campus that should impact this class, but given the changing nature of the pandemic, it is entirely possible that circumstances may change during the semester (for better or worse). Pay close attention to your Potsdam email account: there may be changes to academic policies. As a faculty member, I will continue to follow official campus guidelines, which may mean that our classroom policies could change over the course of the semester. I'll keep you posted about any changes in policy as we go.
- Please let me know if you have concerns—depending on the nature of the question, some of those inquiries may be redirected to the Dean or Assistant Dean, but I'm happy to work with you if you have any questions or concerns related to pandemic policies. I know we're all grateful to gather to make music, talk music, and have the opportunity to be part of an in-person community. And I know we all want to do this as safely as possible.
- **Trauma-Sensitive Teaching:** In my entry ticket for the course, I asked each of you to feel free to come to me with any personal issues and/or other limitations that might impact your ability to participate in the semester; please always feel free to keep me updated should your circumstances change during the semester.
- I am committed to using trauma-sensitive teaching and learning principles to support your resilience and success in this course. Trauma-sensitive principles help create a safe, transparent, connected, and collaborative classroom environment where you feel empowered and respected. Be sure to do periodic self-checks on how course material—and the ways in which material is delivered and discussed—are affecting you, and please talk with me if you are having difficulties with any aspect of the course. Getting support from friends, colleagues, family, and mental health professionals is also important, especially if you have risk factors or you find yourself becoming distressed. For additional links to campus and community services, see <https://www.potsdam.edu/studentlife/wellness/counseling-center>
- **Accessibility:** I'd like to borrow a few words from the wonderful scholar Mimi Khúc (scholar/artist/activist in Residence in Disability Studies at Georgetown University): "Everyone's access needs matter, and we will try collectively to meet them as they arise. Access needs are needs that when met enable participation in the course to the fullest--therefore they are wide-ranging and can be met in wide-ranging, creative ways. I am committed to making participation as accessible as possible. Please let me know if anything comes up that makes participation feel hard....We are taught not to have needs, that needs mean we are "weak"; resist this impulse. Access is relational. This means that creating access and accessibility is something we do together, in relationship and community. It requires a shared commitment to each other's wellbeing and participation in the community space, and requires

communication and negotiation and flexibility. We learn each other's needs and try to meet them as best we can, so that we can all participate as much as possible in this classroom space. Everyone has access needs, and these needs change over time. I will try to anticipate as much as possible but I cannot know everyone's needs at all times. When you become aware of your access needs, please communicate them to me."

- If you have any concerns about our in-class work, please let me know and I will work with you to find acceptable accommodations. I know that some of you may have a registration on file with Accommodative Services (<http://potsdam.edu/support/oas>)—you're very welcome to share these with me. I look forward to talking to all of you about your access needs as we work together this semester.
- **Classroom conduct:** Active participation in this class involves taking notes, contributing questions and commentary, and challenging each other to think more deeply. Indeed, critical engagement—which should include reasoned debate, critique, and questions—is one of the best ways to learn. It is essential, however, that we be considerate in the ways we conduct these discussions; have an open mind, don't make assumptions about your classmates, have respect for different viewpoints, and hone your ability to listen thoughtfully and compassionately to each other and the instructor. Anyone who struggles with this policy will be asked to meet with the instructor; in particular, please let me know if you have any concerns about discussion during the course.

Note in particular: I may occasionally give content warnings in class about particular class dates. Please feel free to let me know (in private) if you have any concerns about any class content in this regard and we can find a solution for you.

- **Note taking:** A few friendly note-taking suggestions:
 - If I use slides in the class, I will post the slides on Brightspace, no need to copy down all the info directly from the slides as you go. In particular, it will help you the most to focus on ways of jotting down important verbal content from lecture (i.e. material beyond just copying down any information directly from a slide).
- **Technology:** we're likely to be using technology regularly in this class! Please feel free to come to me personal issues and/or technology limitations that might impact your ability to participate in the semester. You'll likely find it helpful to bring laptops, tablets, or phones to class—I'll let you know in advance if there's a particular class where it is especially useful to have such devices. Regardless of what we're doing during our in-class meetings (unless we're specifically using the internet to look things up) please try to help yourself focus on your classmates by refraining from multitasking (texting, being on social media, etc).
- **Late work:** If there's a specific situation which necessitates flexibility with an assignment deadline, please talk with me—I am always willing to work with you and see what solutions we can find for any situations which necessitate flexibility.
- **Academic Integrity:** This class will strictly follow SUNY Potsdam's policies on academic integrity. Please consult the Academic Honor Code website (<http://www.potsdam.edu/studentlife/studentconduct/honorcode>) or the Graduate Catalogue for more information regarding your responsibilities as a student. In general, academic misconduct includes acts in which a student seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation. Examples include (but are not limited to):

1. Cutting and pasting text from the web without quotation marks or proper citation.

2. Paraphrasing from the web or written texts without crediting the source.
3. Using notes in an exam when such use is not allowed.
4. Using another person's ideas, words, or research and presenting it as one's own.

I encourage you to discuss class content with each other inside and outside of class. For writing assignments, however, no collaboration with other students is permitted. Disguising words written by others as your own undermines the academic community here at SUNY Potsdam. If you have any questions about this, don't hesitate to ask me. For specific questions on intellectual property and proper citation techniques, advice is available both at SCCS and the Writing Center.

Cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, falsification and other academic honor code violations are taken very seriously. Any suspicious situations will be dealt with through proper judicial channels and may result in serious consequences. For more information about academic misconduct procedures, see the processes and procedures at the Academic Honor Code website.