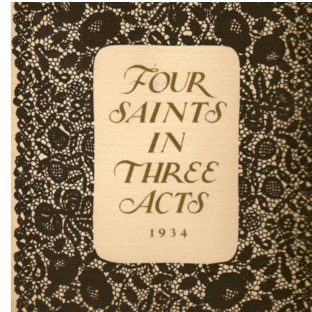




MUCH 495: Opera and Race in the United States Spring 2021

Class Times and Location: MWF 8:00am-8:50am (no assigned room, class meets online)

Instructor

Dr. Erin Brooks
Email: brooksem@potsgdam.edu

Office: Schuette Hall A102

Office hours:

Virtual office hours (Zoom or by phone) are by appointment. 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:

Undergraduate 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. Nonetheless, it's good to remember that this is a graduate course which does require time in order to successfully acquire the requisite skills. 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 Moodle site for this course. Visit <https://moodle.potsdam.edu> for your course resources.

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Readings and work assignments are required, and should be completed prior to each class. For each class, log on to Moodle to access the materials—each day's module on Moodle will contain PDFs, links, etc for each class. Any reading or homework assignment listed for a specific day should be completed prior to coming to class—please come to class prepared and ready to ask and answer questions. You are responsible for regularly checking Moodle for assignments, discussion questions, and any possible updates/changes.

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@potsdam.edu

For additional help with your assignments, the Crane Music library has a vast variety of resources. The url <https://library.potsdam.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.

Class structure:

Course content and activities are structured using a weekly format on Moodle, with individual modules for each day. Modules for each week will open on or before Friday, and once opened, they will remain visible for the remainder of the semester.

While each week may have some small variability—Moodle always has the most specific assignment information for each class—the following is a general explanation of how this semester will function. I have divided our three weekly class meetings into the following structure (note that only one of these meetings is “live”/synchronous, which gives you a fair amount of flexibility).

On **Mondays** (asynchronous), you will have assigned reading (s) and sometimes listening to do. usually a weekly online assignment to do. All specific reading & listening details will always be provided on the Moodle module. I have tried to be judicious about assigning reading (not giving you extraordinarily long/complicated readings), so please dig in knowing that you have limited readings & assignments only one day a week instead of all three. You can do the readings & listening any time you’d like, but they should be finished sometime before Thursday night on any given week.

On **Wednesdays** (asynchronous), you will have some assigned viewing to do. This is typically a lecture video from me, though oftentimes that lecture will include video clips from operas—or might *just* be clips of an opera. You can watch this at your leisure, but will need to be completed sometime before Thursday night.

Small-scale weekly assignments—either specific assignments or Moodle posts—are usually due the night before our synchronous class on or before 11:59 pm. If there are unusual reasons you can’t complete your assignment on time, please let me know.

On **Fridays** (synchronous), we will have a synchronous/live “Zoom” meeting, based on concepts from the readings, listening, viewing assignments, and sometimes a little lecturing from me. I’ll send out the link for Zoom via email and post it on Moodle as well. This meeting will take place during the 8:00-8:50pm class time. For attendance policy, see “Course Evaluation.”

Course Evaluation:

Grading will be based on four overall categories: Moodle weekly short assignments, in-class synchronous work (attendance, participation in in-class activities, discussion, in-class writing, etc), a blog post, 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/posts on the Moodle forum | 15% |
| 2. Class attendance, Participation, Preparation | 15% |
| 3. “A Deeper Dive,” Blog Post (due Week 10) | 10% |
| 4. Final Project | 60% |
- Projected due dates for each part will be posted on Moodle at the beginning of Week 3.
 - I reserve the right to push due dates back due to unforeseen events, etc
 - Initial Research Topic—3%
 - One on One Consultation on Research Topic—2%
 - Research Question and Initial Bibliography—5%
 - Abstract—5%
 - Partial Draft of Podcast Script—10%
 - Peer Suggestions on Podcast Script—5%
 - Final Podcast—20%
 - Peer Presentation during Finals Week—10%

*** Weekly Assignments/Moodle Post/Discussion Forum Procedures and Guidelines:**

- * You'll be asked to either complete an assignment or a discussion forum post on Moodle 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 weekly during the semester. 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 Moodle post—as opposed to a specific assignment—a Moodle "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 synchronous class, 11:59pm (so that I and others can read them before class that morning)

*** * Class attendance/Participation/Preparedness Procedures:** Individual class sessions will combine lecture, listening, and discussion, and overall MUCH 695 will only succeed based on the amount of effort that you invest in it and to the extent to which it becomes an engaged, active learning community.

Each week during our synchronous session, I will track attendance and participation. For participatory elements, you are expected to contribute (simply being present is not enough). You should always come to the Zoom session having taken notes on the assigned materials and ready to respond and ask questions. I will assess your participation grade based on your preparation and thoughtful participation in class. 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.

You can miss **two** synchronous Friday classes for whatever reason with no penalty.

If you miss more than **two** synchronous classes, your participation grade will be docked by a letter grade for each additional absence. You are encouraged to watch the course video to catch up on what you missed.

If you have more extended issues this fall—illness, family concerns, or anything else that significantly impacts your ability to attend the synchronous 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.

Except under extraordinary circumstances, if you miss more than **six** synchronous classes during the term, I reserve the right to fail you in this course.

If you have a religious observance during the semester, any missed coursework during that particular class will not count against you. However, you must inform me before the relevant absence, you must still do the relevant coursework for that class date, and I reserve the right to give you alternate assignments.

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:** Virtual office hours (Zoom, by phone, or whatever other method works best for you) are by appointment. Please email or message me to set up these one-on-one office hour meetings; I'm very happy to discuss curiosities, questions, problems, concerns or just offer a supportive ear for anything you'd like to share in a safe space.
- **Pandemic-related Concerns and Trauma-Sensitive Teaching:** In my initial email, I asked each of you to feel free to come to me about personal issues and/or technology 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:** In order to fully include all students in this course, it is essential to provide reasonable accommodations or program modifications for anyone with a disability. Please let me know **on the first day of class** if you need any accommodations in curriculum, instruction, or evaluation. For most accommodations, you should have a registration on file with Accommodative Services (<http://potsdam.edu/support/oas>), located in Sisson Hall Room 111. If you're already working with Accommodative Services, or have worked with them previously, please inform me immediately. Any

accommodations or modifications require advance notice, so make sure to work out these details with me well in advance.

- **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 trigger warnings in class about class content on 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 Moodle, 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).
 - During the video lectures and sometimes our live zoom meetings, I will use slides and audio examples to illustrate examples and to cover concepts and material. While all teaching videos will be available to you throughout the semester—and everyone assimilates information differently—I do still suggest that you may want to take notes during class.
- **Technology:** Obviously we're all using technology constantly 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. During our live Zoom meetings on Fridays, I ask that you use good Zoom etiquette with your classmates: mute yourself unless talking or asked to talk. In general during these Friday meetings—unless there's a technological or personal problem—I would prefer you have your cameras "on" so that you can engage more directly with me and your classmates during these 75 minutes once a week. Similarly, during the live meetings (unless we're specifically using the internet to look things up) please try to help yourself focus by refraining from multitasking (texting, being on social media, etc).
- **Attendance:**

Only the required synchronous sessions on Friday have an attendance component. You may miss **two** of synchronous sessions with no penalty. You are encouraged to watch the course video to catch up on what you missed. Per New York State Law, any student with a conflict between an academic requirement and any religious observance should be given an alternative for meeting the academic requirement. If you have a conflict with a class meeting or deadline due to a religious observance, please let me know well in advance (at least two weeks). You will not be penalized for missing class material, but you will have to makeup your class material in some alternate way. If you have more extended issues this fall—illness, family concerns, or anything else that significantly impacts your ability to attend the Friday 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 if I don't know the situation.
- **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. If you believe you will have difficulty meeting a particular deadline, you must talk with me at least three days in advance of the due date. In fairness to all students, there are no automatic deadline extensions for students who miss a regular class meeting (regardless of reason for the absence). If you do submit a late assignment—except in cases of hardship—I may deduct 5% for each day the assignment is late.

- **Formatting and Writing Guidelines:** I will provide you a wordcount or specific length requirement for all assignments. As a matter of policy, the typical style required by many journals is double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, and one-inch margins (although I will not be policing acceptable font alternatives if you're devoted to Avenir font). Footnotes and bibliographies should be in Chicago Manual of Style; we'll spend a good portion of this class on citation methods, so more to come on that later. Assignments must be free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors. Minor problems will result in deductions; major writing issues may result in a request to redo the assignment. Continued problems with assignment redos will result in grade deductions. I will be assisting you with revisions and grading, but please note there are also a number of style guides and writing center style sheets available online—please email me if you'd like additional links.

- **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.