

***Open Cultural Studies***

Peer-Reviewed Journal by De Gruyter Open

**CFP: Black Womanhood in Popular Culture**

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In contemporary popular culture, black womanhood frequently takes centre stage. It occupies an increasingly central place and articulates new and renewed dimensions, prompting questions about the status of black women in the cultural imaginary of the US and beyond. Most prominently, Michelle Obama's First Ladyship has sparked scholarly and media discussions around the significance of stereotypes associated with black women, the possibilities and limitations of public figures to create new images and anchor them in the cultural imaginary, and about the subject positions and images that express and shape constructions of black womanhood (cf. Harris-Perry 2011, Schäfer 2015, Spillers 2009). Further examples include the pop singer Beyoncé, who has proclaimed her commitment to feminism and designed an already iconic celebration of black motherhood (concerning Afro-futurist tropes), wildly popular TV shows like *Scandal* or *How to Get Away with Murder* which feature black female protagonists, or literary works and feminist manifestos such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) or *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014) and *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017).

Our special issue aims to examine the multifaceted ideological implications of this proliferation of black womanhood in popular culture. We understand popular culture as a site where "collective social understandings are created" (cf. Stuart Hall 2009) and as a marketplace governed primarily by economic interests, but also trading in symbolic capital, identities, and collective fantasies. Popular culture thus may model new subject positions, unsettle cultural authorities, and question cultural ideals – intentionally or inadvertently so. The contributions to this special issue discuss representations and performances of black womanhood in the transatlantic sphere. They raise issues about the genealogies of these images and their empowering and limiting qualities, about the "affective agency" (Rebecca Wanzo) and subjecthood that black women claim and/or are assigned in these cultural productions, and about the signifying functions of the black female body in visual economies: How does contemporary popular culture negotiate, revise, or recalibrate stereotypical depictions of black women? How can representations of black womanhood be discussed from different theoretical vantage points, such as Afro-Pessimism, Critical Race Studies, Black Feminism? And how can they be positioned within new formations of the Black Atlantic, within (trans)national "affective economies" (Sara Ahmed) and contemporary discourses on race, class, gender, and age in the US and beyond?

Contributions may address a broad range of topics, pertaining to e.g. visual culture (comics, films, TV shows, etc.), material culture and bodily practices, literature, performances, or the arts. We welcome academic essays as well as images to our volume. Issues to be explored include but are not limited to:

- Black women as cultural agents
- Feminist agendas and their representation in cultural discourses

- Epistemologies of black womanhood and systems of knowledge production
- Afropessimisms and ontologies of black subjecthood
- Histories and genealogies of representing black womanhood

Please submit **abstracts** (500 words maximum) and biographical information to [schaefer.stefanie@uni-jena.de](mailto:schaefer.stefanie@uni-jena.de) and [katharina.gerund@fau.de](mailto:katharina.gerund@fau.de) **by January 15, 2018**. **Manuscripts of 5000 to 7000 words will be due by May 1, 2018.**