Course Description: This course pursues two ends. In the first half of the course, we will examine how authenticity – or notions of “the/a real” act as a galvanizing force in African American popular culture, shaping the way African Americans are represented and perceived in the world. This preoccupation with “a/the real” no doubt beckons another; namely, what does it mean to “be real? Further, isn’t realness and notions of “authentic Blackness” subjective at best? Such questions (and sure-fire answers) will be addressed in this course with considerable optimism and trust – trust that the tools of social analysis will help us unpack the socially-constructed and historically-contingent nature of race, representation, and authenticity during uncertain times, and hope that if we are present, prepared, and open, we’ll collectively discover how and why notions of “the real” have animated Black popular culture in the past, present, and (likely) the unforeseen future. In the second half of the course, we will move beyond academic scholarship “proper” to mine other narrative genres and formats (e.g., films, webcasts, science fiction); our goal is to distill theories and practical methods – “ways of being and thinking” – in the world wherein we might not only “survive, but also thrive” in real and meaningful ways.