Literature about aliens, space travel, and technology run amok might seem like a wholly contemporary invention, but the concerns of the genre date back to the “scientific revolution” of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries. In this course, we’ll trace our contemporary obsession with science and technology back to its beginnings. We’ll read about mysterious planets alongside narratives of discovery, wonder, and scientific catastrophe. We’ll encounter Daniel Defoe’s startling and uncanny Journal of a Plague Year: an incredible anticipation of our current pandemic state. We’ll think about how early satires on science and reason point ahead to our own concerns about the use and abuse of scientific knowledge. We’ll consider the ethics of animal experimentation, the creation of artificial intelligence, and the relationship between scientific knowledge and England’s growing imperial ventures. Above all, this course will focus on the relationship between science and literature—two fields supposedly at odds with one another. Writers might include, Bacon, Cavendish, Behn, Rochester, Newton, Swift, Pope, Shadwell, Shelley and others.

This course fulfills the pre-1860 requirement.
I can’t breathe. For many, Eric Garner’s final words made prominent the social, political, economic, and environmental phenomena that gave rise to his premature loss of life. How do we, without reducing Garner’s life to his death, attend to the ways that Black breathlessness has become—in fact, has been—a defining factor of Blackness? Not just in moments of spectacular death, but particularly in the everyday lived experience of Black people? How do we understand Black breathlessness as not merely a metaphor, but a material reality? How do we theorize breath as shaping Black life, death, and knowing in the United States? This course provides a historically grounded look at Black breathlessness and Black expressive texts from enslavement to the contemporary moment. (This course fulfills the post-1860 requirement for the English major.)
This course is an introductory study of “African Cinema of Liberation,” most specifically at its foundations. We will screen and discuss classic films from the Continent. We will familiarize ourselves with key cinéastes, or filmmakers, through their interviews and assorted essays as well their cinematic works. We will survey and assess relevant film criticism further still. We will also review key historical texts, events and movements which have inspired African cinema, a unique film tradition that one scholar would dub “The Last Cinema,” when it launched in the 1960s with a typically revolutionary orientation and a radical commitment to Pan-African liberation of the masses on the Continent and in the Diaspora. The major focus of our study will be Ousmane Sembène, Med Hondo, Haile Gerima and Sarah Maldoror as well as Djibril Diop Mambéty before we consider the significance of younger and current generations of filmmaking. Finally, we will consider challenges of production, exhibition and distribution beyond narrative-language and meaning-making along with a number of symbolic themes: Western colonization and neo-colonial imperialism; the people vs. the State; tradition, innovation and memory; sex, body politics and sexuality; religion vs. spirituality; Pan-African and “Third World” resistance or revolution, etc. This course fulfills the post-1860 English requirement.