

Key Issues in African American and Black Atlantic Thought

Spring 2006

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Course Description

This course will examine central currents in the intellectual history of the African American experience, situating its significant dialogues and debates about racism, slavery, freedom, citizenship, gender and sexual politics, economic justice, political participation, and criminalization within the context of the wider Black Atlantic zone of contact, exchange, struggle, and knowledge production. The approach taken to African American thought will focus on the leading voices of resistance and social change that have influenced black public consciousness, social and political action, and intellectual practice, including the formulation of social theory. Those voices have belonged to both individuals with academic credentials and those whom the late Black Studies advocate St. Clair Drake categorized as “para-intellectuals”—persons without formal training who, nonetheless, have influenced the direction of scholarship and research in academia. Although this course will focus primarily on African Americans, some attention will also be given to black thinkers elsewhere in the Americas and the wider Atlantic World who have theorized issues germane to the African diaspora.

Objectives

The major objectives of this course are: 1) to expand students’ awareness of African American and Black Atlantic contributions to analyzing and theorizing the Black Experience as it has developed and changed over time in the U.S. as well as within the transnational context; 2) to promote understanding of the significance of this body of knowledge for understanding the wider context of racialization and the other forms of difference and social inequality (e.g., gender, sexuality, and class) that operate in conjunction with processes of race making; and 3) to promote students’ ability to think critically about ideas as well as to communicate effectively about them in writing and speech.

REQUIREMENTS

1. Readings

1a. Books

Farred, Grant

2003 *What’s My Name? Black Vernacular Intellectuals*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Marable, Manning and Leith Mullings, eds.

2000 *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

These two books are the core texts for the course. Marable and Mullings' anthology contains excerpts from major works in African American intellectual history. Many of these excerpts are short and easy to read and digest. The selections are organized around five major themes and chronological periods: slavery and abolitionism, reconstruction and reaction, from plantation to ghetto, the second reconstruction, and the post-civil rights moment. Farred's text complements the anthology by offering a provocative conceptual framework for thinking about the development of African American thought and the role of variously positioned intellectuals. The book is organized around the notion of the *vernacular intellectual*. Influenced by the Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci, the concept of vernacular intellectual gets beyond elitist, exclusionary criteria for who are intellectuals. In Farred's view, vernacular intellectuals (specifically Mohammad Ali, Bob Marley, CLR James, and Stuart Hall) challenge social injustice from inside and outside traditional academic and political spheres. This concept gives us an expanded understanding of what constitutes significant ideas and texts.

1b. Customized Reader

Additional readings, a set of articles and book chapters, both required and highly recommended readings, will be made available in either hard copy or an electronic format through the library reserve.

2. Participation (20 points)

Learning is a shared endeavor. For the class to be successful students must accept responsibility for meeting the professor half way. That means they must attend class regularly and actively participate. A record of attendance and unexcused absences will be kept. Frequent unexcused absences will lower the score accumulated for this important requirement. At minimum, participation involves asking an occasional question and displaying attentiveness. Throughout the semester, there will be opportunities to give informal presentations, assume responsibility for leading discussions on particular readings, and participate in small-group discussions and activities. Some of the weekly reading assignments will be divided among work groups, which will contribute to class discussion based on their respective readings.

3. Writing Assignments (60 points)

3a. Critical Reflections (25 points)

Students are required to write five short essays (equivalent to at least 2500 words). Each of these essays, which are to express students' reflections on the readings, must be at least 500 words or approximately two pages long. They must be double-spaced, typewritten, and submitted in hard copy at the beginning of class on the days they are due. Students are to examine some aspect of the readings they have done over a two week period. Although the professor may suggest possible writing foci, students will enjoy the academic freedom of writing about whatever most interests or concerns them. Essays may focus on a single text; however, generally these assignments should examine issues that run across several texts. Students may express their personal reactions; however, personal opinions and experiences should always be informed by the conceptual and empirical substance of the assigned readings. These assignments will be

evaluated for both their form and content. Students are to respect the principles of both English composition and critical thinking.

3b. Term Paper Proposal (10 points)

Each student must submit a two-three page research proposal (500-750 words) describing the topic s/he would wish to explore in the required term paper project, discussed in further detail below. Students are encouraged to select a term paper topic as early as possible, so that they will give themselves sufficient time to do the research and write the paper in multiple drafts. A proposal is required to assist students in making their decisions. In that proposal, the student will state what the research focus will be, why that particular topic is selected, and the potential significance of the project once it is completed. All paper topics must be tenable as research projects. A fascinating topic that is not covered in an already existing literature is not a viable option. Hence, proposals must include a listing of the potentially useful references students have found in the preliminary phase of their library research. Internet sites can also be used, but they must be approached with caution. The source of this information must be assessed by identifying its authors and determining their standing in the context of academic publications. The expectations for this assignment will be discussed further in class. The proposal is due during the fourth week of the semester, early enough to offer feedback and guidance.

3c. Term Paper (25 points)

A term paper focused on some aspect of African American or African diaspora intellectual history is required and, together with the research proposal, will represent more than a third of the semester's work load. Translation: these two assignments are very important and, at best, are an outlet for original work and critically creative thinking. This paper is to be based on library research as well as on a synthesis of relevant readings from the required texts. For example, throughout Marable and Mullings' anthology there are essays and speeches representing the voices of women described as "proto-feminist." A term paper on the historical development of Black feminism might use these items as sources along with recommended readings such as the overview on black feminism (Taylor 1998) listed for Week 12. A paper on some aspect of Pan-Africanism or diasporic consciousness would begin with the reading material the course makes available and from there extend the sources with library research. Students are strongly encouraged to begin their search for term paper topics by browsing and, hopefully, more closely examining the required and recommended texts.

Term papers must be 8-10 pages long and will be evaluated on the basis of five criteria: i- the application and articulation of an interdisciplinary perspective, ii- the clarity of exposition, iii- the quality of evidence used to support their arguments, iv- the adequacy of organization and writing (i.e., word usage, grammar and spelling), and v- the relative quantity and quality of citations. Most of these criteria, particularly ii-iv, should be considered general guidelines for all writing assignments.

Term papers will be due the last week of class.

4. Examinations (20 points)

There will be two take-home exams: a mid-term and final, both of which will require short essay answers to question-sets generated from class discussions on the readings. Each exam is worth a total of 10 points, and, as all other writing assignments, must be typed and double-spaced.

GRADING

Categories of Evaluation

Participation	20 points
Critical reflections (five)	25 points
Proposal	10 points
Term paper	25 points
Mid-term exam	10 points
Final exam	10 points

Grade/Point Scale

A	90-100
B+	86-89
B	80-85
C+	76-70
D+	66-69
D	60-65

MAKE-UP EXAMS

Students will be allowed to take make-up exams provided that: 1) they make arrangements with the professor before the regularly scheduled exam, or 2) they document an illness with a physician's note.

ACCOMMODATIONS TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students needing classroom accommodation should register with the Dean of Students Office, where the necessary documentation will be issued. Students must submit that documentation to the professor when requesting accommodation.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

An implied honor code is observed in all academic work at the University. Every student must operate according to an implied pledge that "any work submitted for credit the student has neither received nor given unauthorized aid." In other words, cheating and plagiarism are breaches of academic honesty subject to disciplinary action, which may include a failing grade for the course.

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND TOPICS

- Week 1 Introduction to African American and Black Atlantic thought and to the vernacular intellectuals who have shaped its various streams
- Farred, 2003, “Introduction: thinking in vernacular” in *What’s My Name?* (pp. 1- 25)
- Marable & Mullings (M&M), 2000, “Introduction: resistance, reform, and renewal in the black experience,” in *Let Nobody Turn Us Around* (pp. xvii-xxv)
- Week 2 Slavery and abolitionism, 1789-1861—a Caribbean historian’s perspective on the origins of transatlantic slavery, an autobiography of a formerly enslaved African, militant anti-slavery statements, and a proto-feminist Abolitionist speech
- Eric Williams, 1944 [1968], “The origin of Negro slavery,” in *Capitalism and Slavery*. Pp. 3-29. New York: Capricorn Books.
- M&M, “Introduction” (pp. 3-7)
- Olaudah Equiano, 1789. “The interesting narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano” M&M (pp. 7-16)
- David Walker’s “Appeal,” 1829-1830, M&M (pp. 23-35)
- Nat Turner, 1831, excerpt from *Turner’s Confessions*, M&M (pp. 35-41)
- Sojourner Truth, 1851, “A’n’t I a woman?” M&M (pp. 67-69)
- Recommended:
Prince Hall, 1797, “Thus doth Ethiopia stretch forth her hand from slavery, to freedom and equality” M&M (pp. 16-18)
- Richard Allen, 1816, excerpt on the founding of the AME Church, M&M (pp. 18-23)
- Maria W. Steward, 1833, farewell address, M&M (pp.42-48)
- Week 3 Slavery and abolitionism continued—historic court cases and an elaboration of an argument for black nationalism and separatism
- Critical reflection #1 due at beginning of week.**
- Cinque and the Amistad revolt, 1841, Supreme Court decision, M&M (52-57)

Video: Footage from *Amistad*

Dred Scott petition, 1847, “Dred Scott vs Alex. Sandford et al.” (p. 92)
Roger Taney, 1857, “Opinion on Dred Scott V. Sandford,” (pp.92-95)

Frederick Douglass, 1857, “A most scandalous and devilish perversion of the Constitution,” (pp.95-109)

Martin Delany, 1852, “A Black nationalist manifesto” (pp. 69-87)

Week 4 Reconstruction and its aftermath, 1861-1915—perspectives from black Christianity, organized labor, proto-feminism, the women’s club Movement, education, and investigative journalism

Proposal for term paper due

M&M, “Introduction” (pp. 119-124)

Henry McNeal Turner, 1869, speech on black Christian nationalism (pp. 131-134)

National Colored Labor Union & Convention documents, 1869-70 (pp. 134-137)

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, 1875, centennial anniversary address, (pp. 138-143)

Alexander Crummel, 1888, “The race problem in America” (pp.57-167)

Anna Julia Cooper, 1892, “A voice from the south” (pp. 167-172)

March Church Terrell, 1904, “The progress of colored women” (pp. 173-176)

Ida B. Wells-Barnett, 1909, National Negro Conference speech (pp. 209-212)

Week 5 Early expressions of diasporic consciousness, 1885-1890—a Haitian’s critique and alternative to scientific racism and a Danish West Indian’s theory of Pan-Africanism

Critical reflection # 2

Anténor Firmin, 1885, chapters from *The Equality of the Human Races*: “Intellectual evolution of the black race in Haiti” (pp. 295-324) and “The

role of the black race in the history of civilization” (pp. 393-404)

Edward Wilmot Byden, 1890, “The African problem and the method of its solution” (pp. 146-157)

Week 6 Competing models of racial uplift and black citizenship, 1895-1915
Mid-term essay questions distributed.

Booker T Washington, 1895, “Atlanta Exposition Address,” (pp.182-185)
-----1907, “The fruits of industrial labor” (pp.185-195)
-----1915, “My view on segregation laws” (pp.195-198)

William Monroe Trotter, 1902, *Boston Guardian* editorial (pp.198-200)

W.E.B. DuBois, 1897, “The conservation of races” (pp.213-220)
-----1903, excerpts from *The Souls of Black Folk* (221-226)

The Niagara Movement, 1905, “Declaration of Principles” (pp.227-230)

Hubert Henry Harrison, 1912, speech from *The Negro & the Nation*
(pp. 230-233)

Week 7 From plantation to ghetto—the Great Migration, the Garvey movement,
and the Harlem Renaissance in constructing the “New Negro”

Mid-term essay exam due on second class day.

M&M, “Introduction” (pp. 237-242)

Marcus Garvey, 1920, “Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the
World Preamble” (pp. 259-264)
-----1920, “An appeal to the conscience of the black race to see
itself” (pp. 264-268)

----- 1920, “An expose of the caste system among Negroes”
(pp. 268-273)

Amy Jacques Garvey, 1925, “Women as leaders” (pp. 274-275)

Langston Hughes, 1926, “The Negro artist and the racial mountain”
(pp. 276-280)

-----1944, “My America” (pp. 287)

Week 8 The Great Depression—declining economic opportunities, labor organizing, racial and class consciousness, racial repression, and studying the struggles of black families and households

Abram L. Harris, 1930, “The Negro worker” (pp. 296-301)

E. Franklin Frazier, 1931 [1968], “Certain aspects of conflict in the Negro family,” reprinted in *On Race Relations*. Pp. 210-224. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Scottsboro Boys, 1932, Appeal from Death Cells (pp. 302-303)

Angelo Herndon, 1933, “You cannot kill the working class” (303-313)

Hosea Hudson, 1979 (reflecting on 1930s), excerpt from *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson* (pp. 313-319)

Mary McLeod Bethune, 1935 Speech to NAACP (pp. 320-323)

Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., 1938, “Fight for jobs” and “Platform for job campaign” (pp. 323-325)

Black women workers, 1938-40, “Women of the cotton fields” and “I am a domestic” (325-331)

Week 9 Building momentum for mass mobilization, 1939-1954—calls to mobilize for social change from youth, labor, performing artists, and women’s activists; theorizing race with sociological tools

Critical reflection #3

Southern Negro Youth Conference, 1930, “Call to Third All-Southern Negro Youth Conference” (pp. 331-332)

A. Philip Randolph, 1941, “Call to the march” and “Why should we march?” (pp. 333-339)

Oliver C. Cox, 1948 [2000], “The race problem in the United States.” In *Race: A Study in Social Dynamics*. Pp. 246-287. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Claudia Jones, 1949, “An end to the neglect of the problems of Negro women” (pp. 340-351)

Paul Robeson, 1952, “The Negro artist looks ahead” (351-356)

Thurgood Marshall, 1954, “Segregation and desegregation” (356-364)

Recommended

Frantz Fanon, 1952, excerpt from *Black Skin, White Masks* (a Martiniquean psychiatrist and political analyst’s theory of the psychological trauma of colonial/racial oppression)

Week 10

The second reconstruction, 1954-1975—the mass movement for civil rights, black power, and social reform; nonviolence vs. self-defense based strategies

M&M, “Introduction” (pp. 367-376)

Rosa Parks and Jo Ann Robinson, 1955-56, documents on the Montgomery Bus Boycott (pp. 376-385)

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1957, “Program of the SCLC” (pp. 391-394)

SNCC, 1960, “Statement of Purpose” (pp. 395-396)

Ella Baker, 1960, “We need group-centered leadership” (398-400)

SNCC, 1964, “Position Paper on Women in the Movement” (pp. 422-425)

Martin Luther King, Jr., 1957-1963, excerpts from “Nonviolence and racial justice” and “I have a dream” (pp. 400-406)

Williams, Robert F., 1962 [1998], “Prologue” (pp. 3-5), “Self-Defense Prevents Bloodshed” (6-12), “The Struggle for Militancy in the NAACP” (28-37) and “The Monroe Case: Conspiracy against the Negro” (54-71). In *Negroes with Guns*.

Recommended

Timothy B. Tyson, 1998, “Introduction: Robert F. Williams, “Black power,” and the roots of the African American freedom struggle” in R. Williams’s *Negroes with Guns*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Week 11

The second reconstruction continued—more radical and militant approaches to movement building and social transformation, black power and revolutionary nationalism

Critical reflection #4

Malcolm X, 1964, “The ballot or the bullet” and “Statement of the Organization of Afro-American Unity” (pp. 427-441)

Farred, “Muhammed Ali the world contender” in *What’s My Name?*

Stokely Carmichael, 1966, “What we want” (pp. 442-448)

SNCC, 1966, “Position Paper on Black Power” (pp. 448-453)

Black Panther Party for Self-Defense and Huey Newton, 1966, “Black Panther Part Platform and Program” (pp.468-471) and “Rules of the BPP” (pp. 471-472)

Kathleen Neal Cleaver, 2001, “Women, power, and revolution,” In *Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*. Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, eds. pp. 123-127. New York: Routledge.

Angela Davis, 1970, “I am a revolutionary black woman” (pp. 482-486)

The National Black Political Convention, 1972, “The Gary Declaration” (pp. 492-496)

Recommended

Elijah Muhammad, 1984, “Program and Position” (pp. 425-427)

Amiri Baraka, 1972, “The Pan-African Party and the Black Nation” (496-501)

Robert C. Smith, 1981, “Black power and the transformation from protest to policies.” *Political Science Quarterly* 96(3):431-443.

Jessica Christina Harris, 2000, “Revolutionary black nationalism: the Black Panther Party.” *Journal of Negro History* 85(3):162-174

Frantz Fanon, 1961 [2005], excerpt from *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.

Week 12

The contemporary post-civil rights moment, 1975- present—the consolidation of political projects ranging from black feminism to black neoconservatism, efforts to address the problems of black manhood, new approaches to race

M&M, “Introduction” (pp. 511-518)

Combahee River Collective Statement, 1977 (pp. 524-529)

Audre Lorde, 1984, “Age, race, class, and sex: women redefining difference” (pp. 538-544)

bell hooks , 1984, “Shaping feminist theory” (pp. 544-550)

The Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas controversy, 1991 (pp. 588-593)

Cornel West, 1991, “Nihilism in black America” (pp. 594-601)

Martin Kilson, 1993, “Anatomy of black conservatism” *Transition* 59:4-19

Louis Farrakan, 1995, “The Million Man March” (pp. 615-618)

Recommended

Wayne J. VILLEMEZ and John J. BEGGS, 1984, “Black capitalism and black inequality: some sociological considerations.” *Social Forces* 63(1):117-144.

Ronald L. Jackson II, 1997, “Black ‘manhood’ as xenophobe: an ontological exploration of the Hegelian dialectic.” *Journal of Black Studies* 27(6):731-750

Ula Taylor, 1998, “The historical evolution of black feminist theory and Praxis.” *Journal of Black Studies* 29(2):234-253.

Week 13

Negotiating cultural identity and the meaning of the hyphen in “African-American”—Afrocentricity, its advocates and critics

Critical reflections #5

Molefi Asante, 1991, “The Afrocentric idea in education” *M&M* (pp.577-588)

Lee Baker, 2000, “Afrocentricity and the American dream,” in *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower: Intellectuals Confront the African American Experience*. Manning Marable, ed. Pp, 224-235. New York: Columbia University Press.

Barbara Ransby, 2000, “Afrocentrism, cultural nationalism, and the problem with essentialist definitions of race, gender, and sexuality,” in *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower*. Pp. 216-223. New York: Columbia University Press.

Leith Mullings, 2000, “Reclaiming culture: the dialectics of identity,” in *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower*. M. Marable, ed. Pp. 210-215.

Week 14

Race, gender, culture, and politics in the age of deindustrialization, neoliberalism, and the prison industrial complex.

Jarvis Tyner, 1994, "Crime—causes and cures" (pp. 606-615)

Mumia Abu-Jamal, 1998, "Capital punishment" (pp. 618-619)

African-American prisoners in Sing Sing, 1998, "Statement" and "The prison-industrial complex: an investment in failure" (pp. 619-623)

Robin D.G. Kelley, 1997, "Looking to get paid: how some black youth put culture to work." In *Yo' Mama's DisFUNKtional: Fighting the Culture Ward in Urban America*. pp. 43-77. Boston: Beacon Press.

Black Radical Congress, 1998, "Principles of unity," "The Struggle Continues," and "The Freedom Agenda," (pp. 625-633)

Recommended

Assata Shakur, 1978, "Women in prison" (pp. 529-535)

Michael Eric Dyson, 1993, "Rap culture, the church, and American society," in *Reflecting Black: African-American Cultural Criticism*. Pp. 276-285. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Beverly Xaviera Watkins and Mindy Thompson Fullilove, 2000, "Crack cocaine and Harlem's health. In *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower*. Pp. 121-137. New York: Columbia University Press.

Angela Y. Davis, 2003, excerpts from *Are Prisons Obsolete?* New York: Seven Stories Press.

Week 15

Confronting colonial and postcolonial oppressions and negotiating ethnic, racial, national/transnational, and gendered identities in other diasporic contexts; mapping the Black Atlantic as a countercultural zone

Term papers due and final essay exam questions distributed.

Farred, "CLR James, marginal intellectual" (pp. 95-148), "Stuart Hall, the scholarship boy" (pp. 149-214), and "Bob Marley, postcolonial sufferer" (pp. 215-274) in *What's My Name?*

Stuart Hall, 1990 [2003], "Cultural identity and diaspora," reprinted in *Theorizing Diaspora*. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, eds. pp. 233-246. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing.

Paul Gilroy, 1993, "The Black Atlantic as a counterculture of modernity," in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Pp. 1-40. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Rhoda Reddock, 2001, "Conceptualizing 'difference' in Caribbean feminist theory," in *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader*. Brian Meeks and Folke Lindahl, eds. Pp. 196-209. Kingston: University of West Indies Press.

Gloria Rolando, 2000, "Africa, the Caribbean and Afro-America in Cuban Film. In *Afro-Cuban Voices: On Race and Identity in Contemporary Cuba*. Pedro Pérez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs, eds. Pp.129-139. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

João H. Costa Vargas, 2004, "Hyperconsciousness of race and its negation: the dialectic of white supremacy in Brazil." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 11(4): 443-470.

Recommended

Brian Meeks, 2000, "The political moment in Jamaica: the dimensions of hegemonic dissolution," in *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower*. Manning Marable, ed. Pp. 52-74. New York: Columbia University Press.

Nancy Morejón, 1982 [1993] "Race and nation," reprinted in *Afrocuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writing on Race, Politics and Culture*. Pedro Pérez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs, eds. Pp. 227-237. London: Latin American Bureau.

Pedro Serviat, 1993[1986], "Solutions to the black problem," Reprinted in *Afrocuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writing on Race, Politics and Culture*. Pedro Pérez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs, eds. Pp. 77-90. London: Latin American Bureau.