

Ethnic Studies 289
African American Intellectual History
Tuesday 2 – 4:50 PM
Social Science Building 103

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Office Hours: Monday 2:30-4 pm, Tuesday 11am-12:30pm, or by appointment

Overview

The aim of this course is to develop a general reading knowledge of the traditions, contexts, and trajectories of black intellectual discourse since the end of the nineteenth century. The emphasis will be placed on foundational texts in the field, yet students can expect to engage a wide range of texts representing the diversity of *black thought* in the twentieth century.

In the course we will trace the continuities and disjunctures in the texts produced by black intellectuals in the so-called American century. As the emphasis in the course is on reading primary sources written by key figures in black intellectual history it is very important to situate the work of these men and women in their historical contexts. At the same time, we will not be trapped by reductionist historicism—for, the theoretical implications of the analyses and critiques proffered by our authors have long-standing, though sometimes elided, relevance for many of us who continue to wrestle with questions of racism, identity, difference, citizenship, and the politics of culture, among other trenchant topics in Ethnic Studies and other affiliated fields.

Course Requirements:

Seminar Participation and Class Presentation: Active engagement with the weekly readings and participation in seminar discussion is crucial. Every student will be responsible for at least one class presentation based on weekly readings, designed to provoke and facilitate discussion. (25% of grade).

Critical Reading Commentaries: You will be responsible to provide written commentaries in the form of 300-400 word critical reflections on the weekly readings which will be shared with all members of the seminar. The commentaries should be analytical rather than descriptive, critically engaging the week's readings rather than summarizing them. They are meant both to encourage careful reflection *prior* to our group meeting and to be generative for seminar discussion. The commentaries must be submitted to the course WebCt by 11am each Tuesday (25% of grade).

Seminar Paper: A final historiographical essay is due at the end of the seminar. Each student will identify a theme, problem, or debate generated from the course readings and situate it in the relevant scholarly literature. This paper will offer a critical reading of between seven and ten monographs pertaining to your topic (in some circumstances significant articles/essays can substitute for a monograph). The paper should be about fifteen double-spaced pages. (50% of course grade).

Required and Suggested Texts

B. Anthony Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003)

Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York Review Books Classics, 2005)

Ralph Ellison, *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* (Modern Library Classics, 2003)

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford University Press, 1989)

Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003)

Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959, any edition)

bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (South End Press, 1981)

David Levering Lewis, ed., *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995)

Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2000 [1983])

Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005)

Timothy Tyson, *Radio-Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 2001)

Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (Dover Thrift Editions 1995)

Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance!: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Westminster Press, 1982)

All other required reading will be available as pdfs through WebCt.

Course Schedule (This schedule and the list of texts is subject change—most likely in response to the interests of seminar participants.)

Week One—Course Introduction and Opening Discussion

Gordon, “A Problem of Biography in Africana Thought” in *Existential Africana* (2000)

Bogues, “The Full Has Never Been Told” in *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (2003)

Frazier, “The Failure of the Negro Intellectual” (1962)

West, “The Dilemma of the Black Intellectual” in *Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life* (1991 [1985])

hooks, “Black Women Intellectuals” in *Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Life* (1991)

Week Two: Uplift and Jim Crow October 6th

Anna Julia Cooper, “Womanhood: A Vital Element of Regeneration and Progress of a Race” and “What Are We Worth” in *A Voice From the South* (1892)

Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (1901)

Du Bois, Selected Essays (The Study of the Negro Problems, Of Our Spiritual Strivings, The Talented Tenth, The Conservation of the Races)

Week Three: Of New Negroes October 20th

“The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey” (Selections)

Locke, “Enter the New Negro” (1925)

Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain”; Schuyler, “The Negro-Art Hokum” (1926)

The Crisis, “The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed”

Wright, “The Blueprint for Negro Writing” (1937)

Lewis, “Introduction,” *The Harlem Renaissance Reader*

Week Four—Black Radicalism Between the Wars and Beyond—October 27th

Du Bois, Selected Essays (WebCt)

Wright, “How Bigger Was Born” (1940)

Wright, “The Horror and the Glory” (1944)

C.L.R. James, Selected Essays (WebCt)

Robinson, *Black Marxism* (1983), ch. 9, 10, 11

Bogues, “C.L.R. James and W.E.B. Du Bois: Heresy, Double Consciousness, and Revisionist Histories,” in *Black Heretics, Black Prophets* (2003)

Week Five—Racism, Colonialism, and the Cultural Politics of the Black Psyche at Midcentury—October 14th

Ellison, Negro Quarterly Editorial (1944)

Fanon, Introduction and “The Fact of Blackness,” in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)

Ellison, “Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity” and “The World and the Jug,” *Shadow and Act* (1964)

Baldwin, “Stranger in the Village,” *Notes of a Native Son*

Singh, *Black is a Country* (2005)

Week Six—What is the Meaning of Black Liberation?—November 3rd

Hansberry, *Raisin in the Sun*

King, Selected Essays/Speeches

Malcolm X, Selected Speeches

Tyson, *Radio-Free Dixie*

Week Seven—Race, Responsibility, and the Black Intellectual—November 10th

Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967)

Week Eight—What is the meaning of progress?—November 17th

West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*

Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race*

Steele, “Being Black and Feeling Blue,” from *The Content of Our Character*

Week Nine—Black Feminisms and the Politics of Gender and Sexuality—November 24th

Hooks, *Ain't I A Woman* (1981)

Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Selections)

Gordon, “Sex, Race, and the Matrices of Desire” in *Her Majesty's Other Children:*

Sketches of Racism From a Neocolonial Age (1997)

Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*, Introduction

Week Ten—Postmodernism, Cultural Studies, and the Transnational (Re)Turn in Black Thought—December 1st

Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* (1987)

Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (1993)

Possible Follow-Up Dinner Discussion: Joy James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth: Black Leaders and American Intellectuals* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997)