

AFAM 200
George Mason University
Fall 2005 TTH 1:30-2:45
Paul Robeson Room (JC 240A)
3 credits

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COURSE SYLLABUS INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

If you don't know how black you are, you don't know how American you are.

—Robert Farris Thompson, art historian

The African slave who sailed to the New World did not sail alone. People brought their culture, no matter how adverse the circumstances. And therefore part of America is African.

—Henry Louis Gates, Jr., scholar and critic

I don't recognize any white culture. I recognize no American culture which is not the partial creation of black people. I recognize no American style in literature, in dance, in music, even in assembly-line processes, which does not bear the mark of the American Negro.

—Ralph Ellison, novelist and essayist

I, too, sing America.

—Langston Hughes, poet

America would not and could not be precisely the America it is, except for the influence, often silent, but nevertheless potent, that the Negro has exercised in its making.

—James Weldon Johnson, writer and activist

I think we have to be uncomfortable with the present racial arrangement. In a sense, I think we have to be willing to be uncomfortable, willing to demand more of ourselves and more of our country, and willing to make the invisible visible.

—John A. Powell, legal scholar

I understand the vocation of the intellectual as trying to turn easy answers into critical questions and ask these critical questions to those with power.

—Cornel West, philosopher

You cannot fix what you cannot face.

—James Baldwin, novelist and essayist

If you deprive a man of who he is, you can make him anything that you want him to be. But if you teach him his heritage and his culture, he will aspire to be greater than those before him.

—Major H.L. Barner, a descendant of enslaved Africans in America

If the house is to be set in order, one cannot begin with the present; he must begin with the past.

—John Hope Franklin, historian

History does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do.

—James Baldwin, novelist and essayist

To talk about race in America is to explore the wilderness inside ourselves and to come to terms with a history that we'd rather conceal.

—Cornel West, philosopher

The race problem...has been omnipresent and all-pervading since long before the Afro-American was raised from the degradation of the slave to the dignity of the citizen. It has never been settled because the right methods have not been employed in the solution. It is the Banquo's ghost of politics, religion, and sociology which will not down at the bidding of those who are tormented with its ubiquitous appearance on very occasion.

—Ida B. Wells-Barnett, journalist and activist

Race has become metaphorical, a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological "race" ever was.

—Toni Morrison, novelist and Nobel laureate

It has often been said that every American is an expert on race. I have concluded the opposite: that no American is an expert on race. Each of us has our own experience, and sometimes it is intense enough to make us think that we know the subject thoroughly. When we recognize that we do not, we will take the first step toward learning.

—David K. Shipler, author of *A Country of Strangers*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an overview of the field of African American Studies. Interdisciplinary in nature, African American Studies embraces history and literature, the arts and material culture, as well as sociological, political, economic, public policy, and philosophical perspectives on the experience of people of African descent in the United States. In addition, the importance of viewing the African American experience in relation to Africa and the Diaspora will be considered. In acknowledgement of the multiplicity of approaches inherent in African American Studies, this course will feature guest experts—from the faculty of George Mason University as well as from local, national, and international organizations—in order to suggest the range of intellectual and professional study that the discipline embraces. Course readings, lectures, and visual and audio sources will present an historical survey of the African American experience, with an emphasis on movements for liberation, self-determination, and the assertion of equal rights. Contemporary reclamations of “hidden” history that have been the focus of contemporary scholarship will also be emphasized. Readings feature the work of important African American public intellectuals, as well as primary source materials from the historical record. Visual and audio sources will take their place alongside the written record and be examined for the unique evidence of the African American experience they provide.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Cornel West, *The Future of the Race*. Vintage, 1997.
- Manning Marable and Leith Mullins, eds. *Let Nobody Turn Us Around; Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal: An African American Anthology*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.
- W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. Penguin Classics, 1996.
- Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley: America's First Black Poet and Her Encounters with the Founding Fathers*. Basic Books, 2003.
- Other short reading assignments as listed (underlined) in the Course Outline. They are available on the course website at <http://beauty.gmu.edu>. The password is “visible.”

VISUAL MATERIALS

Videos and DVDs assigned for viewing outside of class are available on reserve in the Media Services area of the Johnson Center Library. Their call numbers are listed on the Course Outline.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Class attendance is essential. We will have many visits by guest speakers, and often there will be presentations of audio and visual materials. All of this material will be covered on exams. Also, please note that class participation is weighted significantly in your grade.
- Completion of assigned readings and videos, and participation in class discussion indicating familiarity with these materials
- Should students have to miss class for any reason, they are expected to take initiative in obtaining notes, assignments, and/or handouts **from class partners**.
- Class communications will be sent via GMU email. You must activate, maintain, and regularly check your GMU email. You are responsible for notices sent via email.
- **Cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices must be turned off in class.**
- Three take-home exams.
- Attendance at a Fall for the Book event as listed on the Course Schedule.
- Brief written reports on three visual sources (chosen from list provided by instructor).
- Attendance at three outside events related to course material (approved by instructor).

GUIDELINES FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

NOTE: There are varying comfort levels with speaking extemporaneously in a group. For this reason, I ask that if you have little problem with speaking that you make an effort to self-monitor (e.g., occasionally yielding the floor to those who may be slower with a response). If you are reluctant to speak in class, please **challenge** yourself to offer oral commentary. *Your insights and questions are vital to our collective success.* Each class member is responsible for the success or failure of the discussion.

The following guidelines will be followed in class discussion:

- You must bring your book to class, as well as something to write with and on.
- You must come on time and come *prepared*.
- You must discuss carefully and be prepared to *listen* as well as to talk.
- Discussion will be grounded in readings and videos, and will remain focused.
- Respect for the opinions of other class members forms the basis of class discussion.
- If, for some reason, you have come to class unprepared, identify yourself as such and limit yourself to listening to the discussion.

Use the following guidelines for class preparation:

- Mark your books when reading to note passages of interest or curiosity or confusion.
- Make a list of questions about the reading, noting relevant page numbers.
- Come to class prepared to discuss the reading and videos in detail, focusing on specific passages from the texts.

EVALUATION AND GRADING

Student evaluation will be based on:

- 30% **Prepared** participation in class discussion
- 20% Take-home exam #1
- 20% Take-home exam #2
- 20% Take-home exam #3
- 5% Written reports on three supplementary visual sources
- 5% Attendance at three outside events related to course material

Grading Standards:

- A grade of **A** is given for **superlative** work that demonstrates a profound commitment to the course material, and further, that goes on to employ this material as a springboard for independent thought and work
- A grade of **B** is given for **very good** work that completely fulfills all the requirements of the course in a conscientious and dedicated manner, and that demonstrates mastery of the course content
- A grade of **C** is given for work that fulfills all the requirements of the course in a **satisfactory** manner, but that falls short of demonstrating rigor and mastery
- A grade of **D** is given for work that is **unsatisfactory**
- A grade of **F** is given for work that **fails** to fulfill the requirements of the course as listed above

Expectations of the Instructor:

1. You should plan to attend class. You will find it impossible to pass exams if you habitually miss classes. Much of the material of this course will be offered by guest instructors and you will be responsible for understanding the content of these (and all) lectures. If there is an emergency that forces you to miss class, please let me know and plan to meet with me. Also, contact your class partner immediately to find out what went on that day.
2. Due to the scheduling of guests, there will certainly be changes in the Course Schedule. These changes will be announced in class or via GMU email, and/or listed on the course website. You are responsible for keeping abreast of changes.
3. Plan to spend three hours of preparation for each hour of time spent in class. If you feel that this assumption is unfair, it would be in your own interest not to take this course. AFAM 200 is 3 credits; $3 \text{ credits} \times 3 \text{ hours/credit} = 9 \text{ hours per week}$ in class preparation.
4. My door is open. I invite you to see me at any point in the term to discuss your progress in the course or any anxieties you may be feeling about the work. If you are getting behind in the course, feel as though you are not understanding something, or are having an unspecified problem, please come and talk with me without delay. I am here to facilitate your learning.
5. My door is also open to discuss your enthusiasms and interests. I am glad to help you deepen your research and to guide you in following your interests.
6. I expect that this course will be a journey of discovery that we take together. We are here to learn from each other and will do so with respect and mutual regard.

University Policies

As a courtesy to others in the class, and in accordance with George Mason University policy, please turn off all beepers, cellular telephones, and other wireless communication devices at the start of class.

Official Communications

Mason uses electronic mail to provide official information to students. Examples include communications from course instructors, notices from the library, notices about academic standing, financial aid information, class materials, assignments, questions, and instructor feedback. Students are responsible for the content of university communication sent to their Mason e-mail account, and are required to activate that account and check it regularly.

Honor Code

Students in this class are bound by the Honor Code, as stated in the George Mason University Catalog. The honor code requires that the work you do as an individual be the product of your own individual synthesis or integration of ideas. (This does not prohibit collaborative work when it is approved by your instructor.) As a faculty member, I have an obligation to refer the names of students who may have violated the Honor Code to the Student Honor Council, which treats such cases very seriously.

Using someone else's words or ideas without giving them credit is *plagiarism*, a very serious Honor Code offense. It is very important to understand how to prevent committing plagiarism when using material from a source. If you wish to quote verbatim, you must use the exact words and punctuation just as the passage appears in the original and must use quotation marks and page numbers in your citation. If you want to paraphrase or summarize ideas from a source, you must put the ideas into your own words, and you must cite the source, using the APA or MLA format. (For assistance with documentation, I recommend Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference, Fifth Edition*.) The exception to this rule is information termed *general knowledge*—information that is widely known and stated in a number of sources. Determining what is general knowledge can be complicated, so the wise course is, "When in doubt, cite."

Be especially careful when using the Internet for research. Not all Internet sources are equally reliable; some are just plain wrong. Also, since you can download text, it becomes very easy to inadvertently plagiarize. If you use an Internet source, you must cite the exact URL in your paper and include with it the last date that you successfully accessed the site.

No grade is important enough to justify cheating, for which there are serious consequences that will follow you for the rest of your life. If you feel unusual pressure about your grade in this or any other course, please talk to me or to a member of the Counseling Center staff.

Students with Disabilities and Learning Differences

If you have a diagnosed disability or learning difference and you need academic accommodations, please inform me at the beginning of the semester and contact the Disabilities Resource Center (SUB I room 234, 703-993-2474). You must provide me with a faculty contact sheet from that office outlining the accommodations needed for your disability or learning difference. All academic accommodations must be arranged in advance through the DRC.

Writing Center

Students who are in need of intensive help with grammar, structure or mechanics in their writing should make use of the services of the Writing Center, located in Robinson A116 (703-993-1200). The services of the Writing Center are available by appointment, online and, occasionally, on a walk-in basis.

COURSE OUTLINE

*****Course Outline is subject to change. Changes will be announced in class.*****

Note: Visual materials on reserve are listed with their library call numbers (underlined), and are available in the Media Reserves area of the Johnson Center Library. Course readings that are underlined are available on the course website (<http://beauty.gmu.edu>); the password is “visible.”

Tuesday, August 30

Introduction to Course

Screening: *First Person Singular: John Hope Franklin*

Thursday, September 1

READING:

- Manning Marable, “Race in American Life: A Conversation with John Hope Franklin.”
- Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “African-American Studies in the 21st Century”
- Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “‘What’s in a Name?’ Some Meanings of Blackness.”
- Michael Eric Dyson, “Why I Am an Intellectual”

AUDIO:

- Listen to the hour-long documentary, *Say It Plain: A Century of Great African-American Speeches*. Link available at:
<http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/sayitplain/>

Tuesday, September 6

READING:

- Michael Eric Dyson, “Giving Whiteness a Black Eye”

DVD:

- *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, parts 1-3 (GN269 .R34 2003b)

Thursday, September 8

Guest: Professor Marilyn Mobley McKenzie, Founder of the Program in African American Studies and Associate Provost for Educational Programs

READINGS:

- Toni Morrison, “The Site of Memory”
- Marilyn Sanders Mobley, “A Different Remembering: Memory, History and Meaning in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*”

Tuesday, September 13

REVIEW of readings and visual material to date

READING:

- *The Future of the Race*, Preface (pp. vii-xvii) and Appendix (pp. 115-177)
- Orlando Patterson, "Why We Still Need Affirmative Action"

Thursday, September 15

Guest: Dr. Carmen Rose Marshall, author of Black Professional Women in Recent American Fiction (McFarland, 2003)

READING:

- *The Future of the Race*, pp. 1-112
- Thomas M. Shapiro, "Introduction," *The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality*

FALL FOR THE BOOK. ATTEND AT LEAST ONE EVENT:

- Thursday, September 15, 8pm, Dewberry Hall South: Walter Mosley discusses his new novel *Cinnamon Kiss*, an Easy Rawlins mystery.
- Tuesday, September 20, noon, Grand Tier, Center for the Arts: Marking this year's 40th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Nick Kotz explores the relationship between two pivotal figures in the Civil Rights era in his book, *Judgment Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr., and The Laws That Changed America*.
- Tuesday, September 20, noon, outside Johnson Center: Ned Sublette, cofounder of the Qbadisc record label and author of *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo*, surveys the history of Cuban music from the 16th century through the present-day and examines its influence on the evolution of other New World musical forms, including ragtime, jazz, and rhythm and blues. This event also features music and dance, including a performance by The Salsa Club. Co-sponsored by Fall for the Book and by George Mason's Office of Diversity Programs and Services.
- Tuesday, September 20, 4:30pm, Johnson Center Meeting Room D: Harvard history professor Jill Lepore discusses her investigations into a supposed slave plot to destroy New York in the 18th century—and plumbs whites' fears of black revolt in colonial America—in her groundbreaking social history, *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan*.
- Wednesday, September 21, 3pm, Harris Theater: Tricia Rose discusses the anthology, *Longing to Tell: Black Women Talk about Sexuality and Intimacy*, gathering first-person narratives focused on topics ranging from marriage and divorce to interracial dating, sexual abuse, drug addiction and AIDS.

Tuesday, September 20

Guest: Dr. Toni-Michelle Travis, Director of African American Studies and Professor of Government and Politics

READING:

- Marable and Mullings, 3-18, 23-35

VIDEOS:

- *Africans in America*, parts 1-3 (E441 .A27 1998)

Thursday, September 22

READING:

- Garry Wills, “Introduction: The Three-Fifths Clause” in “*Negro President*”: *Jefferson and the Slave Power*
- Marable and Mullings, 35-42, 48-57

VIDEO:

Africans in America, part 4 (E441 .A27 1998)

Thursday, September 27

READING:

- Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley: America’s First Black Poet and Her Encounters with the Founding Fathers*. Basic Civitas Books, 2003.
- Marable and Mullings, 67-68, 114-116

Thursday, September 29

READING:

- Eric Foner, “Blacks and the U.S. Constitution”
- Eric Foner, “Ken Burns and the Romance of Reunion”
- Marable and Mullings, 91-109, 119-134, 157-167

EXAM #1 Distributed

Tuesday, October 4

Guest: Professor Scott Trafton, English

READING:

- TBA
- W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (<http://www.bartleby.com/114/>)

Thursday, October 6

Guest: Professor Benedict Carton

READING:

- TBA

EXAM #2 DUE

Tuesday, October 11

Columbus Holiday—NO CLASS

Thursday, October 13

Guest: Officer from TransAfrica Forum

READING:

- Marable and Mullings, 173-200, 209-212, 227-230
- TBA

VIDEO:

- *Marcus Garvey: Look for Me in the Whirlwind* (E185.97 .G3 M3644 2001)

Tuesday, October 18

READING:

- Marable and Mullings, 302-303

VIDEO:

- *Rise and Fall of Jim Crow*, parts 1-4 (E185.61 .R58 2002)

Thursday, October 20

Guest: Professor Michael McDonald, Public and International Affairs, speaking on the Voting Rights Act

READING:

- *Marable and Mullings*, 259-295

VIDEO:

- *I'll Make Me a World*, parts 1-4 (E185 .I44 1999 or E185 .I44 1999b)

Tuesday, October 25

READING:

- Deborah Willis, “Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography” and “Gordon Parks and the Image of the Capital City.” *Family History Memory*. Hylas Publishing, 2005.
- David Levering Lewis, “A Small Nation of People: W.E.B. Du Bois and Black Americans at the Turn of the Twentieth Century.” *A Small Nation of People: W.E.B. Du Bois and African American Portraits of Progress*. The Library of Congress, 2003.

VIDEO:

- *Scottsboro: An American Tragedy* (KF224 .S34 S36 2001 and 2001b)

Thursday, October 27

Guest: Julie Galonska, Site Manager, Frederick Douglass National Historic Site

ASSIGNMENT:

- Marable and Mullings, 87-91, 125-131

VIDEO:

- *Frederick Douglass: When the Lion Wrote History* (E449 .D75 F76)
- *This Far by Faith* (DVD: BR563 .N4 T55 2003)

Tuesday, November 1

READING:

Marable and Mullings, 320-325, 327-331, 333-339, 351-364

VIDEO:

- *Eyes on the Prize*, parts 1-3 (E185.615 .E9 or E185.61 .E94 1995)

Thursday, November 3

Guest: Paul Brathwaite, Executive Director, Congressional Black Caucus

READING:

- TBA

VIDEO:

- *Paul Robeson: Here I Stand* (E185.97 .G3 M3644 2001)

EXAM #2 Distributed

Tuesday, November 8

Guest: Professor Keith Clark, English

READING:

- TBA

VIDEO:

- *The Black Press: Soldiers without Swords* (PN4882.5 .B532 1998)

Thursday, November 10

Guest: Professor Lawrence Butler, Art History

READING:

- TBA

EXAM #2 DUE

Tuesday, November 15

Guests: Dr. Jeanne Middleton-Hairston, National Director, and Warren Buford, Volunteer Coordinator, Children Defense Fund Freedom Schools

READING:

- Marable and Mullings, 376-409, 419-425

VIDEO:

- *Eyes on the Prize*, parts 4-6 ([E185.615 .E9](#) or [E185.61 .E94 1995](#))

Thursday, November 17

Guest: Professor Keith Clark, English, speaking on playwright August Wilson

READING:

- August Wilson, *Fences*
- Marable and Mullings, 427-468

VIDEO:

- *Eyes on the Prize II*, parts 1-4 ([E185.615 .E91](#) or [E185.61 .E91 1999](#))

Tuesday, November 22

READING:

- Manning and Marable, 468-491, 519-535

VIDEO:

- *Eyes on the Prize II*, parts 5-8 ([E185.615 .E91](#) or [E185.61 .E91 1999](#))

Thursday, November 24

Thanksgiving—NO CLASS

Tuesday, November 29

Guest: Professor Yvette Richards Jordan, Women's Studies

READING:

- TBA

VIDEO:

- *Ida B. Wells: A Passion for Justice* ([E185.97 .W55 133 2004](#))

Thursday, December 1

Guest: Professor Jim Lepore, Dance

READING:

- Ned Sublette, Ned Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo*, pp. 73-74.

VIDEO:

- *I'll Make Me a World*, parts 5-6 ([E185 .I44 1999](#) or [E185 .I44 1999b](#))

Tuesday, December 6

READING:

Manning and Marable, 550-633

VIDEO:

- *Two Towns of Jasper* (*HV6534 .J36 T86 2003*)

Thursday, December 8

Wrap-Up and Overview

EXAM #3 Distributed

Thursday, December 15, 4:15pm

EXAM #3 DUE