Overview:
The aim of this course is to develop a general reading knowledge of the traditions, contexts, and trajectories of research in Black intellectual discourse. Structured both thematically and chronologically, this course takes a broad conceptualization of Black intellectual history as it explores both major currents in Black thought and some paths less tread. We will read several well known and lesser known texts that represent suggestive and provocative modes of engaging Black intellectual and cultural works and workers. In some ways this course comprises a sociology or archaeology of knowledge and other ways it traces continuities and discontinuities between communities of thought and representation and the institutional means of producing knowledge by and about Black people.

Caveat:
It is essential for all students in the seminar to familiarize themselves with the various historical/genealogical contexts wherein Black/African Diasporic intellectual discourse has been crafted. To that end, each student should assemble a set of reference texts, when necessary and relevant, be they textbooks, encyclopedia, or scholarly review articles such as those drawn from Reviews in American History, American Quarterly, Callaloo, African American Review, and/or Transition. A particularly useful and capacious textbook is Robin D.G. Kelley and Earl Lewis’s To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans (Oxford, 2000).

Please also take a moment to read the following brief pieces on approaches to scholarly criticism:

(1) John Updike’s Rules for Constructive Criticism
http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/05/john-updikes-6-rules-for-constructive-criticism/256643/


Reading Schedule:

Week 1—Introducing Black Intellectual Discourse

Week 2—“What is Africa to Me?”

Week 3—Death and Social Death: The Case of New World Chattel Slavery
• Orlando Patterson, Preface and Introduction to *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), vii-14.


**Week 4—Gender, Sexuality, Class and the Politics of Black Racial Destiny, 1877-1930**


**Week 5—The Black Atlantic and the Uses of Diaspora**


**Week 6—Race, Nation, and Democracy in the “American Century”**


Skim the following:


Week 7—Queer of Color Critique and the Future of Black Studies
- Roderick Ferguson, Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004)

Week 8—Whose Black Radical Tradition?

- Supplemental:

Week 9—Afro-Pessimism and the Limits of Relationality

Week 10—“L’expérience vecue du Noir”
- Anna Julia Cooper, “What Are We Worth?” in *A Voice From the South* (Xenia, Ohio: The Aldine Printing House, 1892).


**Evaluation Criteria**

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<td>Presence and Participation</td>
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<td>Annotated Bibliography</td>
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**Presence and Participation:** Each student is required to attend every session of the course. In the case of absence, you must write a 750-100 word analytic review of the text(s) under consideration, modeled on the type of critical book review found in a scholarly journal.

You should come to each session as though you were responsible for leading the discussion of the text(s) for that day. For each session, you should come with detailed notes and questions on the text(s) we will be discussing and be prepared to comment verbally on them, as well as be ready to discuss the written and spoken comments of your classmates. Since presence and participation comprises one-third of your grade for the course it is imperative that you contribute to each session by sharing your informed interpretation of the material and/or by posing questions that might guide our investigation of the topics and text(s) for that week.

**Critical Reading Commentaries:** Each week you will provide a written critical reflection of 200-300 words in response to the weekly readings, to be shared with all members of the seminar. Your written commentaries are meant both to encourage careful
reflection prior to each class and to be generative for seminar discussion. The commentaries must be submitted to the course TED page by 12pm each Monday and each student is responsible for having read and considered the commentaries of the other seminar participants.

The commentaries must be analytical rather than descriptive, critically engaging the primary argument(s) of week's readings rather than a summary. Each commentary will receive a mark of either Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory: a Satisfactory critical reading commentary presents an analysis of some key aspect of the text illuminating its relevance to Black intellectual discourse.

The word analysis in Greek meant to loosen up; so I take that to mean analysis loosens up the topic/phenomena under discussion into parts that are significant to the working of the whole thing. It’s then our task to explain why the parts we loosened up are significant to the whole. Ask yourself whether you’ve moved beyond defining the topic and related concepts and terminology, beyond describing what others have said about the topic, to providing your own interpretation of the topic/issue/evidence under consideration. Your interpretation must be substantiated through reference to our readings.

A useful prompt is: Start declarative; go narrative.

Each paragraph in your commentary should follow this general structure:

Claim → Evidence → Significance

An example from my own work:

“Social and behavioral scientists’ focus on the pathological makeup of black people— their behavior, their culture, their social structure—was not new in the early postwar years. In the four decades prior to the Second World War, however, there had been a profound shift in the way the human sciences considered what was then named the Negro Problem. During the 19th century and even into the early 20th century, the Negro Problem was thought of in biological terms as the Negro’s inability to adapt to the white man’s superior civilization. But by the start of the 20th century, anthropologists and sociologists such as Franz Boas and W.E.B. Du Bois began to frame supposedly racially-determined, hence biologically-determined, differences among human populations as the result of the contingencies of history and culture, rather than ordained by God or fixed by the hand of nature. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this new way of thinking about human variation. By the end of World War II, social scientific thought and research on African Americans focused not on the bio-racial but on the psychological and cultural obstacles to full immersion, assimilation, and integration into American society.”

Seminar Paper: Choose ONE of the following and write a fifteen-page critical analysis of any aspect of the text using at least five sources from the assigned reading of this course:

Jean Toomer, Cane (1923)
Ann Petry, *The Street* (1946)
Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)
James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953)
George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953)
Le Roi Jones, *The Dutchman* (1964)
Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972)

**Annotated Bibliography:** Please identify five to seven books or articles on the text you choose for the critical essay. You will write a paragraph for each source you choose, explicating its significance to contemporary scholarly discussions of your text.