

Ethnic Studies 184, Fall 2011
Black Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century
Sequoyah 147, Monday 5-7:50pm

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“Are American Negroes simply the creation of white men, or have they at least helped to create themselves out of what they found around them? Men have made a way of life in caves and upon cliffs, why cannot Negroes have made a life upon the horns of the white man’s dilemma?”

—Ralph Ellison (*An American* 1944)

Course Description and Overview

The aim of this course is to develop a general reading knowledge of the traditions, contexts, and trajectories of Black intellectual discourse during the 20th Century, particularly from the time of the Great Migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North. The emphasis will be placed on foundational texts in the field, yet students can expect to engage a wide range of works representing the diversity of Black thought in the 20th Century. The work of contemporary historians and other scholars (secondary sources) will provide background and context to supplement our reading of the foundational texts (primary sources) in the field.

In the course we will trace the continuities and disjunctures in the texts produced by Black intellectuals in the so-called American century. Taking our cue from the questions Ralph Ellison posed back in 1944, we will explore how Black writers and political figures have fashioned unique sets of ideas and arguments aimed at addressing the condition of being Black in an anti-Black society—ideas and arguments that often focused on *the question of identity* and *the meaning of freedom*.

This course has four specific objectives:

1. To further develop students’ critical study of American culture and history through an interdisciplinary examination of such important topics as race and racism, class and economic inequality, gender and sexism, and how what we in the academy say about these topics matters.
2. To introduce students to the key terms of debate in the study of African American thought and culture(s) and to chart the significant impact of Black intellectual discourses on U.S. institutions, communities, and individuals.

3. To expose students to a wide range of writers and speakers in the Black intellectual tradition in order to aid you in developing well-grounded approaches to the study of the history of ideas and the social role of intellectuals in modern American society
4. To guide students in strengthening their skills at “reading” American culture and history, with the aim of being able to write well-formed essays based on their “readings.”

Logistics and Policies [PLEASE REFER TO THIS SYLLABUS & CONSIDER WHETHER YOUR QUESTION CAN BE ANSWERED HERE]

You can reach me by email, in my office hours, or by appointment at any time during the quarter. I respond to students’ emails by 10am every weekday; I do not answer students’ emails on weekends.

I do not accept late assignments. In case of a medical/personal emergency, you must produce a doctor’s note or other documentation in order for an exception to be made.

This syllabus is subject to change; any changes will be announced well in advance in class or by email.

I would prefer that you do not use computers during class sessions, even to take notes. If this is a problem for you, please let me know and we can discuss accommodations.

Turn off phones and refrain from text messaging during class. If I notice you texting, I will ask you to leave the classroom and that will count as an absence.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

Attendance and Active Class Participation	20%
Group Research Project	20%
Midterm Take-Home Exam	25%
Final Take-Home Exam	35%

*Attendance and participation constitute a significant portion of your grade. Arrive to each class session on time and stay for its duration. Tardiness and absences will be noted and result in the lowering of your grade. Since we only meet 10 times in the quarter, more than two absences will result in a failing grade.

*Active participation means thoughtful engagement in the readings/lectures, meaningful contributions to class discussions, and respectful collegiality toward your classmates and instructor. Visits to my office hours will also count toward class participation.

* Some possible questions to consider each week are:

1. What was the general argument or point the author or editor made?
2. What major premises, themes, and concepts of culture or race, did the author employ?
3. What evidence did the author use? (i.e. scientific, ethnographic, personal

experience)

4. How were ideas about “America” or the ideology of democracy engaged?
5. Who was the audience, why was that audience chosen, and how was it received?
6. What intellectuals (or schools of thought) was this author engaged in a dialogue with or drew from?

*The Midterm exam will consist of a short essay (3-4 pages, double-spaced) in response to a question I pose that addresses key themes in Black intellectual discourse drawn from the readings of the first half of the course. Students will be able to choose between two questions/prompts, which will be handed out in class on **October 17th**, and be due at the Ethnic Studies Dept. office by **3pm, October 21st**.

*The Final exam will consist of a longer essay (6-7pgs double-spaced), which will synthesize material from the whole course. Students will have a choice of answering one of three questions/prompts. I will hand out the Final at the last class, on **November 28th**, and it will be due in my office by **Thursday, December 8th at 7pm**.

For both the Midterm and the Final, I will provide considerably more details in a separate handout and discussion. Also I will not accept any late exam submissions.

Grading Standards:

- A Superior performance; meets assignment requirements, and demonstrates exceptional execution of those requirements; reflects outstanding insight and depth; grammatically and stylistically excellent; would be considered a model example of assignment completion.
- B Good, solid performance; meets assignment requirements, and demonstrates competent execution of those requirements; reflects insight and depth; grammatically and stylistically strong; may have one or more problem areas.
- C Average performance; meets assignment requirements, minimally; grammatically and stylistically adequate; may have two or more problem areas; paper has more than two errors per page.
- D Below average performance; does not meet minimal assignment requirements; has several fundamental problem areas; has several errors throughout the paper.
- F Inferior performance; does not meet assignment requirements; not deserving of credit.

Required Books [Other Assigned Readings will be available electronically at ted.ucsd.edu]:

- James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (Vintage; Reissue edition, 1992 [1963])
- William Strunk and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*. 4th Edition. Allyn and Bacon Publishers, 1999.

Course Schedule and Assignments

Week One

September 26th—Introductions

- Cornel West, "The Four Traditions of Response," in *Prophesy Deliverance: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Westminster Press, 1982), 69-91. [WebCT]

Recommended: Cornel West, "A Genealogy of Modern Racism," in *Prophesy Deliverance*, 47-65.

Week Two

October 3rd—The Nadir

- William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), 1-12.
- Anna Julia Cooper, "The Status of Woman in America," in *A Voice from the South* (1892), 127-45.
- Lewis R. Gordon, "Du Bois's Humanistic Philosophy of Human Sciences," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 568, (Mar., 2000), pp. 265-280. [JSTOR]

Both Du Bois and Cooper items can be located electronically through ROGER.

Week Three

October 10th -- Diasporic New Negroes

- Alain Locke, "Enter the New Negro," *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, 1-16. [WebCT]
- Zora Neale Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Expression," 1019-32. [WebCT]
- Nathan Irvin Huggins, "Introduction" and "The New Negro," in *Harlem Renaissance* (Oxford University Press, 1971), 3-12 & 52-83.

Recommended: Ann Douglas, "Taking Harlem," in *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (The Noonday Press, 1995), 303-45.

Week Four

October 17th—Interwar Black Radicalism

- Richard Wright, "I Tried to be a Communist," *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 174, No. 2 August 1944. <http://www.nathanielturner.com/itriedtobeacommunist.htm>
- Richard Wright, "The Blueprint for Negro Writing," *New Challenge* 1937 [WebCT]

Recommended: Robin D.G. Kelley, "Afric's Sons with Banner Red: African American Communists and the Politics of Culture, 1919-1934," 103-22.

Week Five

October 24th --World War II—Double V (?)

- Ralph Ellison, Editorials, *The Negro Quarterly*, (Summer 1942 and Winter 1943)
- Nikhil Pal Singh, "Internationalizing Freedom," *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2005), 101-33.

Film: *Home of the Brave*

Week Six

October 31st—Cold War Civil Rights/Anti-colonialism

- James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (Vintage; Reissue edition, 1992 [1963])
- Claudia Jones, "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!" (1949) in *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: An African American Anthology*. Second Edition (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 316-326.

Recommended: Ella Baker, "Bigger Than a Hamburger" (1960), in *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: An African American Anthology*. Second Edition (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 375-76.

Week Seven

November 7th—*Black Power/Black Arts*

- Harold Cruse, "Postscript on Black Power—The Dialogue Between Shadow and Substance," in *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967), 544-65.
- Hoyt W. Fuller, "Introduction: Towards a Black Aesthetic," in *The Black Aesthetic*, pp.3-12.
- Amiri Baraka, "The Revolutionary Tradition in Afro-American Literature," in *Selected Plays and Prose of Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones* (New York: Morrow, 1979), pp. 242-51.

Poems by Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez

Screening: Baraka, *The Dutchman*

Week Eight

November 14th--*Black Thought in the Age of Reaction*

- Cornel West, "Nihilism in Black America," in *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: An African American Anthology*. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 558-565.
- Shelby Steele, "Being Black and Feeling Blue," from *The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America* (St. Martin's Press, 1990), 37-55.
- Lorene Cary, "Chapter Eleven," *Black Ice* (Vintage Books, 1991), 194-206.

Recommended:

William Julius Wilson, "Preface" and "From Racial Oppression to Economic Class Subordination," in *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions* (The University of Chicago Press, 1978), xi-23; "Adolph Reed, Jr., "What Are the Drums Saying, Booker?": The Curious Role of the Black Public Intellectual," in *Class Notes: Posing As Politics and Other Thoughts on the American Scene* (The New Press, 2000), 77-90.

Week Nine

November 21st—Are MCs Intellectuals?—the Politics and (Failed?) Promise of Hip Hop

- Tricia Rose, “Prophets of Rage: Black Music and the Politics of Black Cultural Expression” in *Black Noise* (Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 99-145, plus endnotes.
- Supplementary Interviews and Statements to be Assigned

Week Ten

November 28th—New Directions in Black Thought in the Age of Obama

- Student Presentations (Instructor will provide a list of possible topics.)