

ETHN 184 Black Intellectuals in the 20th Century

Winter Quarter 2005: Tue./Thur., 2.00 - 3.20 pm, WLH 2205

Instructor: Brett St Louis

Office Hours: Tue. 11.00-1.00; Thur. 3.30-4.30

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Course Description

This course engages the life and work of a range of black intellectuals in the 20th century and draws a set of insights into the cultural and political interventions of key figures within different thematic contexts. We will critically explore the dilemmas and opportunities that many black intellectuals faced in adopting an activist-intellectual stance towards a range of problematic issues including the process of racial formation and its relation to gendered modes of social identity and oppression; the analytical and practical correspondence between political and poetic concerns; the articulation of racial and class perspectives; the salience of Marxist frameworks for anti-racist and anti-colonial politics; and the often-familiar experience of exile, its concomitant existential pressures and intellectual implications. The course concludes by looking at two key contemporary figures — bell hooks and Stuart Hall — and considers how their work engages and extends the concerns and critiques raised by many black intellectuals throughout the 20th century.

Required Text

Aimé Césaire, Discourse on Colonialism

Other course readings are available on E-reserve.

Course Requirements

You are expected to complete the required reading for each session, prepare for the set tasks, and participate fully in group discussions and projects. The forms of assessment are listed below and papers *must* be submitted by the required deadline: *late papers will not be accepted*.

Assessment

All assignments constitute *individual tasks*. Submitted papers *must not* include work completed by another person (of course, unless cited and referenced as a published source). All papers *must* include citation, quotation, and full bibliographic references. Papers should be double-spaced and checked for spelling and typographical errors prior to submission.

Attendance & Class Participation 10%

Midterm Paper 25%

"Write an assessment of why culture was an important political tool for many black intellectuals in reference to the Harlem Renaissance **and/or** Negritude". (3-4 pages).

Submission Date: Thursday, 3 February 2005. Turn your paper in *either* to the instructor in class on or before this date *or* to the Ethnic Studies Department Office (Social Sciences Building, Room 201) by **4.00 pm** on this date.

Book Review 25%

"Write a critical review of Césaire, Discourse on Colonialism". (3-4 pages)

Submission Date: **Thursday, 17 February 2005.** Turn your paper in *either* to the instructor in class on or before this date *or* to the Ethnic Studies Department Office (Social Sciences Building, Room 201) by **4.00 pm** on this date.

Final Paper 40%

"Write a critical evaluation of how bell hooks **and/or** Stuart Hall address issues previously raised by black intellectuals and the significance of their particular contributions." (5-6 pages)

Your paper should address the specific essay title chosen which *must* be typed on the cover page of your paper.

Submission Date / Time / Place*

Thursday, March 17 2005, 3:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.; Room 230, Social Sciences Building.

*This is based on the provisional examination timetable. The final submission date, time, and place is to be confirmed. You will be notified in class and by email via Studentlink.

Statement on Interaction

It is crucial that we develop a mutually respectful classroom environment in order to explore the sensitive issues that we will encounter on the course. I suggest that you read the statement of UCSD Principles of Community that can be found at:

<http://www-vcba.ucsd.edu/principles.htm>

COURSE SCHEDULE

4 January Initial Session & Course Outline

Introduction: The (Black) Intellectual in Society

What is the intellectual and what is their role in society? What is the relationship between their commitment to knowledge production, cultural pursuits, and political engagement? And how does their life experience impact on their intellectual production? This introductory session raises these questions and offers a series of observations on the responsibilities, dilemmas, and prerogatives facing black intellectuals in the 20th century.

6 January

Dennis, "The Black Intellectual as the 'New Black'"

Stanfield, "Black Radical Sociological Thinking"

Said, Representations of the Intellectual (Chapter 1 & 5)

1: Framing Blackness

The specific “problem” of race and “racial uplift” occupied many black intellectuals in a variety of locations up to and at the turn of the 20th century. This week’s sessions will look at some exemplary statements on this problematic from Anna Julia Cooper and W.E.B. Du Bois. We will consider how they establish an appreciation of the complexity of racial formation and the need to develop a mode of activist-intellectualism in response to racial stratification and uplift.

11 January

Du Bois, “The Conservation of Races”, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” & “On Being Ashamed of Oneself”

Appiah, “The Uncompleted Argument”

13 January

Carby, “At the Threshold of ‘Women’s Era’”

Cooper, “Womanhood: A Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race”

2: Cultural Politics I: The Harlem Renaissance and the “New Negro”

Many black intellectuals have worked at the intersection of the human and social sciences and in artistic as well as academic contexts. As a result, many faced the problem of developing and articulating their ideas within often conflicting political and cultural spheres which posed specific problems and opportunities. Over the next two weeks we will look at some of the distinct dilemmas and advantages that emerge from the attempt to combine a commitment to poetic expression with political commentary and activist engagement. This week we will explore responses to the characterization of US blackness as a “problem” through a consideration of the emergence of the “New Negro” as an autonomous black social character. This concern, and its expression within the sphere of cultural politics, is considered within the broad historical, cultural and intellectual movement that is identified as the “Harlem Renaissance”

18 January

Screening: “I’ll make me a world: Volume 2, Without Fear or Shame”

20 January

Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain”

Wright, “Blueprint for Negro Writing”

Locke, “The New Negro”

Hurston, “Characteristics of Negro Expression”

3: Cultural Politics II: Negritude and Africana Humanism

Expressions of black cultural politics emerged elsewhere in the Atlantic world alongside the Harlem Renaissance in the United States. This week’s sessions will consider the emergence of a Francophone cultural, aesthetic, and political movement labeled “Negritude” that sought to delineate a particular historical Africana sensibility. We will consider some of its key pronouncements and focus on its project to articulate a radical alternative socio-political vision through poetic expression.

25 January & 27 January

Senghor, "Negritude: A Humanism for the Twentieth Century"

Arnold, Negritude and Modernism (Chapter 1 & 6)

Nettleford, "The Aesthetics of Negritude"

Vailliant, Black, French, and African (Chapter 10)

Adotevi, "The Strategy of Culture"

4: Racial Politics I: The Critique of Colonialism

In addition to the cultural strategies exemplified within the Harlem Renaissance and Negritude movements many black intellectuals also concerned themselves with more "traditional" modes of political thought and activism. This week's sessions focus on the critique of colonialism advanced by two notable Caribbean activist-intellectuals, C.L.R. James and Aimé Césaire. We will consider how both James and Césaire delineate the hegemonic formation of colonial dominance and assert the imperative of developing practical political opposition alongside a penetrative critique of the flaws and contradictions in colonial egalitarian mores.

1 February & 3 February

Césaire, Discourse on Colonialism

James, Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution (Chapter 1)

5: Racial Politics II: The Race / Class Problematic

Many black intellectuals recognized a need to develop a critique of capitalism in order to understand and fight racial oppression. However, while this articulation of race and class was, for many, a conceptual and analytical necessity it was difficult to maintain within orthodox Leftist organizations. Developing C.L.R. James's activist-engagements, this week's sessions discuss the effort to re-conceptualize the relationship between the black struggle and proletarian class struggles. We will explore how the characterization of the U.S. black struggle as autonomous questioned the guiding role of the vanguard party and offered a critique of paternalistic modes of Marxist revolutionary praxis as well as the marginalization of gender politics within the race / class problematic.

8 February & 10 February

Breitman (ed.) "The Discussions in Coyoacán" (1939)

James, "Documents from the Discussions with Leon Trotsky" & "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the United States"

Kelley, Freedom Dreams (Chapter 2)

Jones, "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of Negro Woman!"

6: Racial Politics III: Freedom and Duty / Intellectual and Party

In contrast to James's resolutely independent Marxism this week's sessions consider the experiences of black intellectuals such as Césaire and Richard Wright as members of national branches of the Communist Party. We will draw largely on two seminal texts of black intellectual refusal of the Communist Party: Césaire's famous 'letter of resignation' — *Letter to Maurice Thorez* —and Wright's autobiographical account of the racial opportunism of the party and the extent to which its class-centric orientation compromised an understanding of the correspondence between race and class and the racialization of particular class struggles.

15 February

Screening: "Richard Wright, Black Boy"

17 February

Wright, "I Tried to be a Communist"

Césaire, *Letter to Maurice Thorez*

St Louis, "The Perilous 'Pleasures of Exile'"

7: Contemporary Critique I: bell hooks on Race / Class / Gender and Cultural Politics

The final sessions concentrate on two contemporary black intellectuals and will assess the extent to which they extend the issues explored throughout the course as well as articulating concerns specific to the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries. We will begin by looking at the work of bell hooks and concentrate on her assertion of the necessity to articulate understandings of racialization and racism with a critique of capitalism and patriarchy. We will also examine her assertion of the need to examine popular cultural production as a site for the social reproduction of gendered, racial, and class stratification.

22 February

Screening: "Cultural Criticism and Transformation"

24 February

hooks, Feminist Theory Chapter 1, 2 & 3 & "Introduction" & "The Oppositional Gaze" in Black Looks

8: Contemporary Critique II: Stuart Hall on "Blackness" and "New Ethnicities"

In this final session we will consider the work of Stuart Hall and in particular his insistence on recognizing the complex formation of blackness. We will examine his critique of orthodox notions of a unitary black racial identity and cultural formation that interrogates the assumption of blackness as inherently progressive given the dominating social structures of anti-black racism it emerges within. As such we will consider his critical assessment of some ideal-typical understandings of black culture as reified and his emphasis on the need to end essentialized notions of the oppressed black racial subject that depend on its construction as "innocent".

1 March

Screening: "Race: The Floating Signifier"

3 March

Hall, "New Ethnicities" & "What is this 'black' in black popular culture"

Conclusion: Course Summary & Final Paper Workshop

These final sessions will provide a summary of the main themes and arguments engaged throughout the course. There will also be an opportunity for students to raise questions and observations as well as queries regarding the final paper.

8 & 10 March

Majoring or Minor in Ethnic Studies at UCSD

Many students take an ethnic studies course because the topic is of great interest or because of a need to fulfill a social science, non-contiguous, or other college requirement. Often students have taken three or four classes out of "interest" yet have no information about the major or minor and don't realize how close they are to a major, a minor, or even a double major. An ethnic studies major is excellent preparation for a career in law, public policy, government and politics, journalism, education, public health, social work, international relations, and many other careers. If you would like information about the ethnic studies major or minor at UCSD, please contact Theresa Aitchison, Ethnic Studies Department Undergraduate Advisor, at 858-534-6040 or taitchis@ucsd.edu