

Ethnic Studies 184, Winter 2010
Black Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century
Warren Lecture Hall 2208, Tu/Th 12:30-1:50pm

Prof. Gabriel N. Mendes

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Office Hours: Wed. 10:30-Noon & Thurs. 2:30-4:00pm and by appointment.

“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

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%
Weekly Critical Reflection Papers	20%
Midterm Take-Home Exam	25%
Final Take-Home Examination	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 20 times in the quarter, more than three 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. **Please complete the readings prior to Tuesday the week they are assigned, and bring the text(s) we are covering that week to class.** Visits to my office hours will also count toward class participation.

*During the course each student will write a one-page (double-spaced, 12pt. Times New Roman font) critical response to each week's readings, except for those weeks when another assignment is due. These reflection/response papers are due at the end of each week and must be sent to gmendesethnusp@gmail.com, by noon on Fridays. Each response will receive a credit or no credit, depending on evidence of engagement with the week's readings. 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 (4-5 pgs 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 **Thursday, Jan. 28th**, and be due in my office **by noon, Friday, Feb. 5th**.

*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 March 11th, and it will be due in my office on Tuesday, March 16th, 11:30am—2:30pm.**

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

These books can be purchased at the UCSD Campus Bookstore and are on reserve at Geisel Library.

Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices* (Thunder's Mouth Press; Reissue edition 2000 [1941]; ISBN 1560252472)

Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (Vintage Press, 2004 [1959]; ISBN 0679755330)

Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, eds., *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: An African American Anthology, Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal*. Second Edition (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009: ISBN 978-0-7425-6057-4)

Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* (Vintage Press, 2008: ISBN 0307455874)

Required Course Reader – available for purchase from University Readers online at <http://www.universityreaders.com/students> or call 800 200 3908. [These readings will be marked in the course schedule with the letters CR]

Several copies of the reader will also be on reserve at Geisel Library.

Several of the assigned readings will be available on the course WebCT.

For those of you wish to have a further grounding in African American history the following text is a useful reference: *To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans*, edited by Robin D.G. Kelley and Earl Lewis (Oxford; New York : Oxford University Press, 2000).

Course Schedule

Week 1—January 5th—7th

The Task: Modernity and Its Discontents

Cornel West, “The New Cultural Politics of Difference,” in *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), 119-139. WebCT

W.E.B. Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). WebCT

Recommended:

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

Week 2—January 12th—14th

“The Negro’s Modernity” and the Meaning of Migration & Urbanization

Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press; [1941] Reissue edition 2000), read Parts Three and Four especially closely.

Optional:

Gabriel N. Mendes, “This Burden of Consciousness: Richard Wright and the Psychology of Race Relations, 1927-1947” in *A Deeper Science: Richard Wright, Dr. Fredric Wertham, and the Fight for Mental Healthcare in Harlem, NY 1940-1960* (Forthcoming). WebCT

Week 3—January 19th—21st

Black Intellectuals and the World Crisis: World War II and the Cold War

Ralph Ellison, Editorials, *The Negro Quarterly*, (Summer 1942 and Winter 1943) [CR]

Ralph Ellison, “An American Dilemma: A review” (1944) in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* (Modern Library Classics, 2003), 328-340. [CR]

Nikhil Pal Singh, “Internationalizing Freedom,” in *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Harvard University Press, 2005), 101-133. [CR]

Recommended:

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.

Week 4—January 26th—28th

Civil Rights and Black Nationalisms

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

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.

Audio Recording: Malcolm X, “Ballot or the Bullet” (1964) and “Message to the Grassroots” (1963)

Recommended:

Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter From a Birmingham Jail” (1963) WebCT

James Baldwin Interview by Kenneth B. Clark. WebCT

James Baldwin Documentary, *The Price of the Ticket* (1987)

Week 5—February 2nd—4th

Black Power and the Black Arts Movement

Malcolm X (El Hajj Malik El Shabazz), “Statement of the Organization of Afro-American Unity” (1965), in *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: An African American Anthology*. Second Edition (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 404-417.

Angela Y. Davis, “I Am a Revolutionary Black Woman” (1970), in *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: An African American Anthology*. Second Edition (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 459-463.

Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), “There Is No Revolution Without the People” (1972), in *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: An African American Anthology*. Second Edition (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 473-479.

Optional:

Black Power, Statement by the National Committee of Negro Churchmen (1966), in Wilmore and Cone, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History* (1979), 23-29. WebCT

MIDTERM DUE NOON, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 5TH

Week 6—February 9th—11th

The Politics of Gender & Race in Black Women's Thought

Frances Beale, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," in Morgan, Robin, Ed. *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation* (New York: Random House, 1970), 340-353. [CR]

Combahee River Collective Statement (1977), in *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: An African American Anthology*. Second Edition (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 501-507.

Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: the Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (1984), 299-324, 383-84. [CR]

Optional:

Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," in *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: An African American Anthology*. Second Edition (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 515-522.

Week 7—February 16th—18th

What is the Meaning of Progress?

Cornel West, "Nihilism in Black America," in *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: An African American Anthology*. Second Edition (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. [CR]

Lorene Cary, "Chapter Eleven," *Black Ice* (Vintage Books, 1991), 194-206. [CR]

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.

Week 8—February 23rd—25th

Afrocentricity and the Politics of Black Cultural Production

Molefi Kete Asante, "Afrocentricity," in *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: An African American Anthology*. Second Edition (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 546-552.

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.

Hip Hop Selections: Public Enemy, KRS-ONE, Queen Latifah, X-Clan, Brand Nubian

Week 9—March 2nd—4th

Black Cultural Studies and Its Critics

Paul Gilroy, "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity," in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Harvard University Press, 1993), 1-40. [CR]

Stuart Hall, "What is the 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" in Gina Dent, ed. *Black Popular Culture* (The New Press, 1998), 21-33. [CR]

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. [CR]

Week 10—March 9th—11th

Black Intellectuals in the Age of Obama

Barack Obama. Selections from *The Audacity of Hope* (2006)

PAPER DUE MARCH 16TH 11:30AM-2:30PM

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 Yolanda Escamilla, Ethnic Studies Department Undergraduate Advisor, at 858-534-3277 or yescamilla@ucsd.edu.