



Untitled III, Titus Kaphar

"You can't build a revolution with no education."
~ Fred Hampton

University of Pittsburgh
School of Education
Center for Urban Education, Spring 2024

Black Educational Thought (EDUC 3114)

3 Semester Hours
Center for Urban Education (4303), Auditorium (when in-person)
Mondays, 3pm - 5:40pm

A Living Course Syllabus¹

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¹ This syllabus' "living" model is indebted to the imagination and work of Sabina Vaught and the Pitt SOE's Commons for Critical Pedagogy and Leadership. A living syllabus advances principles of collective teaching and learning through a dynamic, dialogic, and shared praxis of co-construction.

Course Description²

In this seminar, we examine how Black intellectuals, educators, youth, and other Black social actors refuse the construction of Black intellectual “lack”/“deficit” and advance Black educational thought. Black educational thought might be understood as three interrelated fields of theory and praxis: 1) how Black people imagine education, knowledge, and schooling in relation to Blackness (as an ontological position, and as a site of cultural production and performance); 2) how Black people engage in meaning-making about education as a site of and path toward “racial uplift” and/or (Afro-) futurity; and 3) how Black education is imagined and its meanings produced and reproduced in the broader public sphere.

This course aims to critically engage Black education discourse, as a popular-cultural idea, as an area of intellectual thought and scholarly study. Our course readings will include critical social and cultural theory drawing from such areas as Black feminisms, Black cultural studies, Afropessimisms, Afrocentricity, Critical Race Theory, Black literary studies, Black queer studies, Black education history and philosophy, and empirical analyses and policy studies related to Black educational opportunities, experiences and outcomes. Poetry, music, film and other art forms will also serve as texts to help us in our attempt to more clearly articulate a critical Black studies in the field of education, and a critical engagement of education in Black studies.

Assumptions about the Field and Study of Education:

In this course, we deliberately move from theoretical texts in critical Black studies, many outside of the field of education, to rather standard, even hegemonic narratives about Black education, and the schooling of Black children and adults. Paying attention to course aims as well as the mix of people attracted to this class requires dual engagement of work in critical Black studies and in the field of education, and more narrowly, in the study of Black education.

We begin in our work together with the following knowledge – education is a decidedly applied field. That is, we are inherently invested in practice, not simply as an idea, but as implementable operations, either by us directly, or through our students and other partners in the communities within which we work. The theoretical work we will engage in is deeply committed to the idea of freedom with some taking up the challenge of imagining what practices might move us toward realization of these imaginations of freedom. Here, we believe, is an opportunity to explore the tensions between theory and praxis, and between theory and the applied – the impulse in education toward what are called “Monday morning solutions.” Theory should facilitate deeper consciousness and understanding (of the precise nature) of suffering, death, deception, control. It may also help us envision what refusal, resistance, life, and freedom looks like (and requires). Education as an applied field offers the possibility of praxis. However, it is also a field replete with violence and threat of violence against those who might wish to engage in liberatory practice, either as students, educators, or as cousins and aunts. In this tension, we decide what knowledge informs both Black theorizing and Black educational praxis, in and outside of schools (and colleges).

Let us check-in frequently—as a class and in one-on-one meetings (as needed)—about how you are experiencing the course, and how you are progressing with the readings and assignments. We should all agree to make adjustments to the syllabus as needed. We invite all of you to review what is proposed here, and we can make initial revisions based on our collective interests, and our sense

² Thanks, Michael Dumas, for collaborative thinking.

of what we need to do together. **We, the course instructors, also invite you to interact with this syllabus, posing questions and sharing resources.** Also, if at any time, it seems that the reading is excessive, we can talk about learning/engagement approaches (which are various); if there are additional readings we believe necessary to add, let us, as a community, find a way to familiarize ourselves, drawing upon the capacities of a living syllabus.

Course Objectives:

1. *Think* critically about the meaning of Black education, as an idea, as an area of study, and as a cultural-political praxis
2. *Examine* how variously situated Black social actors make meaning of education, schooling, knowledge/knowing, and learning
3. *Explore* (and, as necessary, trouble) the desires and yearnings of variously situated Black social actors within formal and informal educational spaces
4. *Interrogate* antiblackness, and out of necessity then, white supremacy, as violent ideological and material forces in education³
5. *Examine* the possibilities and impossibilities of Black education within the context of an antiblack settler colonial state
6. *Develop* deep(er) knowledge of the cultural politics of Black education, of education as a site of contestation over the meaning and being of Black

Course Methods/Professor Relationality⁴:

1. The rigorous praxis of a collective learning community will:
 - aspire to close readings of the assigned texts, and discussion of the primary arguments advanced in the texts, and how they relate to arguments in other texts (both from our reading and your own reading outside of this class).
 - support individual students in: developing emerging lines of inquiry into the principles, storytelling, and themes of a small set of knowledge traditions.
 - nurture the intellectual practices to generalize these to specific educational and/or schooling settings (spatial) and across time periods (temporal).
 - enhance collaborative and independent critical-analytical writing skills
 - build collaborative, advanced writing skills, in the traditions of insurgent knowledge exchange
 - deepen familiarity with the complex relationship between ideologies and practices within and outside schools (and colleges)

³ We capitalize *Black* when referencing Black people, organizations, cultural products and kinships associated with the self-determination of this racialized social group. Like Dumas (2016), we do not capitalize antiblackness as the term does not refer to the definition of Black people noted in this footnote per se, “but a social construction of racial meaning” (Dumas, 2016, p. 13), or what is imagined *about* Black people rather than what Black people and organizations self-determine.

⁴ Thanks to Dr. Sabina Vaught for collaborative thinking.

2. We will provide advisement and engagement that intend to support our thinking and your academic projects. We encourage students to openly communicate with us and provide thoughts about their experience in the course. You may find us most easily reached by e-mail. However, we are available if appointment is needed. If, for any reason, you feel you are unable to meet responsibilities (see below), please communicate with Professor Dancy in advance so we might discuss supportive ways we might move forward in the interest of your learning.

Responsibilities/Principles⁵

1. It is your responsibility to co-create a rigorous and generative learning environment in which you challenge one another's ideas in a scholarly manner, but never insult or disparage one another.
2. It is your responsibility to engage the ideas, discussions, and materials provided in this class in ways that *enhance and strengthen your own interests*.
3. It is your responsibility to submit only your own original work and abide by the University of Pittsburgh academic integrity guidelines. Please visit:
https://www.provost.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/academic_integrity_guidelines.pdf
and familiarize yourself with codes of academic integrity. Here are helpful videos provided on academic integrity:
 - Academic integrity: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDFHd_31e_o
 - Plagiarism:
<http://en.writecheck.com/blog/2013/10/16/3-ways-to-avoid-plagiarism-summary-paraphrase-and-quote-video>
4. It is our responsibility to engage with difficult readings and ideas as we undertake the study of repressive systems and oppressive institutions. Not all members of the class will respond to the readings in the same manner, and some readings will upset some students more than others. In light of this, there is no clear way to warn students in advance. Moreover, we as a community do not want to unintentionally engage in censorship (<http://signsjournal.org/currents-trigger-warnings/halberstam/>
https://www.salon.com/2014/05/20/no_trigger_warnings_in_my_class_why_you_won%E2%80%99t_find_them_on_my_syllabi/).

What we can do as a community is:

- Recognize and affirm that affective responses to readings and discussions are part of a just intellectual project
- Check in with one another in ways that honor our differences but affirm our membership in a community of conscience
- Excuse ourselves when needed and without explanation in order to take necessary space
- Listen carefully and attentively to one another's experiences and ideas, recognizing those as gifts to the community
- Make culturally specific requests as soon as you realize you need to

⁵ Thanks to Dr. Sabina Vaught and Chris Wright for collaborative thinking.

Framework for shared inquiry:⁶

- ***Stretch*** enables a question to reach further than the immediate object without bypassing its particularity—rather than merely asking a community, “Why do you want this development project?” one asks, “What is development?”
- ***Resonance*** enables a question to support and model nonhierarchical collective action by producing a hum that, by inviting strong attention, elicits responses that do not necessarily adhere to already existing architectures of sense making. Ornette Coleman’s harmolodics exemplify how such a process makes participant and audience a single, but neither static nor closed, category (Rycenga 1992).

Consider: [Beyonce - Irreplaceable - 4 Tour 2011 @ Roseland \(youtube.com\)](#)

- ***Resilience*** enables a question to be flexible rather than brittle, such that changing circumstances and surprising discoveries keep a project connected with its purpose rather than defeated by the unexpected. For example, the alleged relationship between contemporary prison expansion and slavery falls apart when the question describes slavery in terms of uncompensated labor because very few of the 2.2 million prisoners in the United States work for anybody while locked in cages. But the relationship remains provocatively stable when the question describes slavery in terms of social death and asks how and to what end a category of dehumanized humans is made from peculiar combinations of dishonor, alienation, and violent domination (Patterson 1982; Gordon 2006).

passage from: Ruth Wilson Gilmore, pp. 37-38, [“Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning”](#) in Charles R. Hale, Ed., *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship*, University of California Press, 2008, pp. 31-61)

Resources & Accommodations⁷

Center for Urban Education: [Home | Center for Urban Education \(pitt.edu\)](#)

COVID-19 CUE Resources: <https://www.cue.pitt.edu/resources/covid-19-resources>

COVID Testing (Same-day results): [Rapid COVID-19 Testing | The COVID-19 Testing Center of Pittsburgh, PA \(covidtestpittsburgh.com\)](#)

CUE Student Fellows: [CUE Faculty and Graduate Student Fellows | Center for Urban Education \(pitt.edu\)](#)

Pitt non-discrimination policy: <https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/about/notice-non-discrimination>

Parenting and pregnant student rights:
<https://www.gradstudies.pitt.edu/student-life/resources-pregnant-and-parenting-students>

⁶ The section is adapted from a syllabus authored by Sabina Vaught. It is also a guiding framework for the Practices of Freedom syllabus.

⁷ Thanks to Dr. Sabina Vaught for collaborative thinking.

LGBTQIA rights:

<https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/resources/resources-diverse-populations/lgbtqia-resources>

Codes of conduct and violence against women:

<https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/title-ix-policies-and-procedures>

Gender transition and inclusion guidelines:

<https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/guidelines-inclusion-relating-gender-transition>

Mentoring for Neurodiverse Adults (K\$):

<https://www.evolve-coaching.org/>

Disability accommodation. Any student who needs accommodations should inform me at the beginning of the course or as soon as one needs accommodations. To receive accommodations, you must apply for services with the Pitt Office of Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, 3959 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15260, Phone: 412-648-7890, Monday – Friday: 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Email: DRSRECEP@pitt.edu

NOTE: It is possible that university language around equity and inclusion follows antiquated frameworks. For instance, you may find that the parenting and pregnant students policy does not speak to various pathways of parenting and family. Should you be adopting, fostering, or otherwise significantly shifting your dependent care demands, or should you be a student whose gender is not clearly covered by the policy and is pregnant, etc., and would like accommodations, please let me know as soon as possible so we can work together to establish a fair plan. Let us also work together to establish plans anywhere and when institutional policy and guidelines do not accommodate needs.

Absences. Please notify the professor of any anticipated absences by the second week of class (if possible). This will support the organization of class.

Writing resources and support. Call upon CLOE. Seek:

- C** **Clarity** with respect to expression, grammar, meaning, sentence structure, and paragraph structure.
- L** **Logic** in the presentation of arguments, positions, treatment of issues, and conclusions
- O** **Organization** that builds a coherent structure (consider an outline)
- E** **Evidence** to support statements and opinions of the writer/speaker. Ask yourself, ‘on what basis am I making claims?’

The most recent edition of APA will articulate more specific guidelines. Please note that dissertations in the education field and publications in education journals usually require APA formatting.

Additionally, the Pitt Writing Center offers services for graduate students. You may schedule appointments at writingcenter.pitt.edu. Location: 3178 O’Hara Student Center, 4024 O’Hara Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15260, Phone: 412-624-6556.

Assignment due dates. All work is due on the due date. Please contact the instructor if the assignment will be late to discuss context and possibilities.

Inclement weather policy. If Pitt is closed due to inclement weather or other conditions, students are to assume that all classes on and off campus are cancelled and all offices in all units will be closed.

Formatting. American Psychological Association. (2019). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). Washington, DC.

Text to Speech Readers

- Speechify app (free and paid versions) <https://speechify.com/>
- Natural readers (free and paid versions) <https://www.naturalreaders.com/>

Resources for Life Circumstances

For any of the below, if you believe your circumstances may affect your performance in the course, please advise Professor Dancy (if comfortable):

Campus Police: [Cops Off Campus Coalition – an abolition network to get cops off campus and cops off the planet](#)

Hunger. Pitt Pantry offers the following: “All members of the Pitt community are welcome to visit the pantry. Through a self-certification form, shoppers are eligible to use the pantry if they earn less than 150% of the federal poverty line, a state regulation, which equals \$18,090 for a household of one and \$24,360 dollars for a household of two.” For questions regarding eligibility, please email pantry@pitt.edu. Additional resources are the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank (pittsburghfoodbank.org).

Safe and stable shelter. Please see resources at the following links:

Housing and housing justice: honorscollege.pitt.edu

Housing resources: pitt.libguides.com

Women’s Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh. The 24-hour hotline is 412-687-8005. The website is wcpittsburgh.org

SisTers PGH Community Center is a safe space for trans people of color. Phone: 412-259-3091, Website: www.sisterspgh.com

Racialized and gender-based discrimination. Contact the Pitt Title IX Office. Community members may visit the office during scheduled office hours without an appointment. Students, staff and faculty can also call 412-648-4034 or email to schedule an appointment. For more information, go to <https://www.titleix.pitt.edu/policies-procedures>.

Sexual violence. The Pitt Student Affairs site offers several resources and contact numbers. Visit studentaffairs.pitt.edu.

Course Readings:

A collection of readings has been selected for our consideration. All (except required books) readings will be uploaded to an online platform (probably Box) for your convenient access.

Required Texts:

Grant, C. A., Brown, K. D., & Brown, A. L. (2016). *Black intellectual thought in education: The missing traditions of Anna Julia Cooper, Carter G. Woodson, and Alain LeRoy Locke*. New York: Routledge.

A thesaurus of your choice.

COURSE CONTRIBUTIONS

Dialogue (70%)

Much of the work in this class is shared and interdependent. Hence, our learning is contingent upon your reading and writing deeply. Preparation and participation are the highest values. Grades are reflections, as much as possible, of two things: 1) your contribution to the collective learning process and 2) your intellectual growth over the semester determined in our in-class dialogue and our engagement with your thinking/writing over time.

*Reflective journaling, dialogue with thought partners, and weekly class dialogue (50%).*⁸ As you prepare for class discussion, think about the questions and ideas that emerge. Bring your thoughts on a complex idea. Feel free to share something in process and ill-informed, half-baked, or messy and complex. Engage, consider, contemplate, storytell, question, but do not hold forth. **We are not a community of “experts”**. As you read, you should keep a reflective journal with substantive entries and reflections about your learning and you should dialogue weekly or bi-weekly with your thought partner about the ideas in the course. Ask your partner(s) their ideas. It may be helpful to meet prior to class to dialogue about ideas. We will discuss your reflections over the time of the course in class and how dialogue contributed to your thinking. This exercise will also support the below writing contributions. Share from these activities with the class as you feel comfortable.

Class facilitation (20%). Thought partner pairs will lead our class in an analytical discussion of the day’s assigned reading. While this discussion must involve the whole class (and therefore all must closely read), it is the task of the discussion leaders to guide us in a specific, analytical and conversational interpretation. Pairs must complete the assigned reading and work together to digest the material and subsequently form a processed understanding and a plan of engaging the class in discussion. Pairs might work to identify key passages and concepts, assert how they feel they contribute to the author’s/authors’ overall arguments, significance within Black educational thought, and raise questions the readings invariably pose. **The highest values are dialogue, ideas, and posing questions.** Pairs are asked to select at least one week and can do more; you may work with multiple thinkers in the class, but each student must do at least one week. No one will do this activity alone.

Semester-long Projects (select an option) (30%)

Option 1: Scholar literature review. Select a Black intellectual tradition thinker whose scholarship informs educational praxis. The assignment has three parts – 1) a 2 – 3 page context about the scholar, which includes information about (broadly) who they are, where they are, where they have been, and their scholarly/ research contributions; 2) Engage 10 - 15 scholarly products (journal articles, books, essays, speeches); and 3) using course (and other) texts, analyze their major

⁸ Thanks to Dr. Sabina Vaught for collaborative thinking.

research areas, major arguments, major findings, and contributions to the field from the standpoint of one or more course objectives (not to exceed 5 pages). In what ways has their body of knowledge:

- critiqued the meaning of Black education, as an idea, as an area of study, and as a cultural-political praxis?
- examined how variously situated Black social actors make meaning of education, schooling, knowledge/knowing, and learning?
- explored the desires and yearnings of variously situated Black social actors within formal and informal educational spaces?
- interrogated antiblackness, and out of necessity then, white supremacy, as violent ideological and material forces in education?
- examined the possibilities and impossibilities of Black education within the context of an antiblack settler colonial state?
- develop deep(er) knowledge of the cultural politics of Black education, of education as a site of contestation over the meaning and being of the Black?

4) select a copy of one of their works – a book chapter, article, or conference paper listed in your literature review. Please upload to our Google Docs folder. Please discuss all aspects of the project and discuss how the one piece you selected reflects your arguments about a scholar’s research and writing.

Option 2: Propose a creative project you feel meets course objectives that develops over the semester. For example, you could design a project to examine an activist’s or organization’s philosophies (e.g., Kali Akuno, Fred Hampton, Angela Davis, Mariame Kaba, Dayvon Love, Operation Jackson, 1Hood) or conduct a deep study of a book-length text. You could also study/analyze at least one CUE panel/talk to deepen coursework knowledge. If interested in these ideas, Elon, Stacey, Cheta, and Chris are available for discussion about framework and principles. See CUE panels here: [Center for Urban Education - YouTube](#).

Description of the project – Week 5 (2/12)

Description of the project – Week 7 (2/26)

Working drafts due – Week 8 (3/4)

Presentation/class dialogue about your work – Week 15 (4/22)

Final draft due – Last week of class

A Note about Semester-Long Writing Projects

To the extent possible, consider semester-long writing projects opportunities to engage with a Black scholarly tradition (e.g., Black feminism, Black radical tradition, Afropessimism, CRT) around your question/theme/focus and to think deeply in comparison of this tradition with other knowledge traditions in the course. The possible reward here is learning how various Black knowledge traditions are in conversation with others--that is, how are they similarly and distinctly contoured (in their assumptions, arguments, frameworks, (im)possibilities, and other features). For instance, this project can potentially deepen study of the similarities and/or differences among forms of Black radical thought.