

The African American Experience

Ethnic Studies 2550 Section 070

Spring 2015

Yasin Fairley , TA

Yasin Fairley <yasinf08@gmail.com>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

After the Egyptian and the Indian, the Greek and the Roman, the Teuton and the Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this measuring of one's soul through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

W.E.B.DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (1902)

Obviously, the experiences of Negroes—slavery, the grueling and continuing fight for full citizenship since Emancipation, the stigma of color, the enforced alienation which constantly knifes into our natural identification with our country—have not been that of white Americans. And though as passionate believers in democracy Negroes identify themselves with the broader American ideals, their sense of reality springs, in part, from an American experience which most white men not only have not had, but one with which they are reluctant to identify themselves even when presented in forms of the imagination. Thus when the white American, holding up most twentieth century fiction says, “This is American reality,” the Negro tends to answer (not at all concerned that Americans tend generally to fight against any but the most flattering imaginative depictions of their lives.), “Perhaps, but you have left out this, and this, and this. And most of all, what you'd have the world accept as me isn't even human. Ralph Ellison, “Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity.” *Shadow and Act* (1953; 1966)

Generally, I have used the description that follows (with major revision for each time I have offered the course) for Ethnic Studies 2559. It provides me with a premise and general thesis for how I envisioned Ethnic Studies 2550.

Within Western history and culture race has always mattered. The **Black experience**: African, African American, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latin American, Anglo African, and Francophone African, is essentially one of being-for- or being-as-other. Generally, Africans on the continent and in the **Diaspora** are perceived as inferior beings whose reification and reified lives imply a lack of agency or subjectivity. Notions of "race" and "racialism" are central to this

marginalization. "Race" is the central criteria used to determine irreducible difference between cultures, linguistic groups, and even belief systems.

This course focuses on the way in which "race" became a trope (metaphor) of "irreducible difference" during the eighteenth century, the Age of Reason. Specifically, we will assess the way in which enlightened ideas about race were sewn into core notions about an **American** self. I wrote:

We will also attempt to determine how these ideas continue to impact prevalent notions about race as we move towards the second decade of the twenty-first century. Also, we will focus on the judiciary system and the current "Black lives matter" movement to gain insights into the experience and contemporary discussion about race in America. Most important, however, we will look at the **African American** experience—specifically the continued significance of the Black Church, family unit, and contributions to American culture—to gain insights into how African Americans converted their assigned marginalization into a space of radical resistance, creation and celebration.

Thus, ultimately, our central objective is to celebrate African American culture--its complexity and its rightful place in and meaningful contributions to American culture. This will be done through a brief discussion of African American contributions to music, art, dance, film and literature.

More than a year ago, I began to seriously revise this course to use available contemporary material and information such as the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, to stay current with the time. Since last spring, several interesting things have surfaced (at least to me) that now force me to continue to think about and revise this course with YOU, the students that have registered for fall semester 2016. These include the following:

- The representation of President Barak Obama as an "invisible" president by the actor Clint Eastwood during the 2012
- The resurfacing of historical stereotypes of African Americans—stereotypes that are historically well documented including one of the watermelon eating, grinning darky
- The continuous focus of Hollywood—directly and indirectly—on the African American experience, most recently in *Lincoln*, *Django*, and *Twelve Years a Slave*.
- The shooting of several African American males, including Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, and Michael Brown
- The mass murder of nine (9) African American worshipers at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Charleston, S.C. by Dylann Roof
- Discussion of voting rights in the American South in 2015

I am as fascinated by the interest in or need to revisit, redefine or amplify the African American experience, as I am horrified by recent occurrences that are serving to currently define that experience; and I have a need to tease out of this interest its relevance to the course I am currently teaching.

As I began to rethink the general objectives that would govern my course, I reflected on two significant works of the African American literary tradition, Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks* and Ralph Ellison's *Shadow and Act*. I quoted from both works at the top of this syllabus. I can certainly add to these quotations from Dr. Martin L. King, Jr, and Malcolm X, but I will save them until later in the semester.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

-Introduce students to the general notions about race by examining the historical context of race in American culture.

-Conduct a general survey of the historical background of African Americans, including slavery and its legacies: family, education, religion, and economics.

-Discuss contemporary issues that are grounded in these legacies.

-Celebrate African American contributions to Western culture in general and American history and culture in particular literature, music, art, and dance

TEXTS

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow* (2010)

Hines, Darlene Clark. et al. *African Americans: A Concise History*. 5th Edition (2014)

Moore, Wes. *The Other West Moore: One Name, Two Fates* (2010)

ADDITIONAL READINGS

You will also find materials at the Reserve Desk in the Marriott Library that you can access electronically. Given the availability of so much material on the internet (and the easy access we have, we will be able to search for and read articles or view YouTube videos and documentaries, as well as watch movies that are relevant to our course.

Course Requirements

Papers

1. Thought Papers

Students must submit three (3) "Thought Papers," which will result, hopefully, from their personal, subjective responses to the course content: readings, class discussion, guests lecturers, public programs, visual and other media material, etc. **Essays must reflect careful thought and assessment, and offer close readings, honest assessments of the subject matter.** They are not to be mere summaries of course materials. Of course, essays are to represent college work of the

highest quality. No fragments. No outlines. Each essay must be typed, double spaced, and two (2) pages in length. (33 points each; a total of 100 points for 25% of final grade)

2. Final Research Paper

Students must complete a research paper of from 5-7 pages on some aspects of the African American Experience. This project, unlike your "Thought Papers," must be textually sound, which means I expect research and careful documentation. You may not merely "shoot from the hips" or openly and randomly brainstorm. A bibliography must be included with this final project. Topics will not be assigned. However, instructor must approve all topics. Student conferences will be held to set the process in motion. **Please keep copy of your essay. DUE Friday, December 7, 2015 by 6:00PM** (100 points; 25% of final grade)

CANVAS

Needless to say, because we do not meet as a class and, therefore, do not have in-class discussion, CANVAS will be our primary venue and fundamental format for. Consequently, everyone must use this venue to interact with each other, raise questions, respond to questions and comments to maintain some sense of in-class discussions. Use CANVAS to submit class assignments, access reading materials, course syllabus, etc. In order for our discussions and other classroom activities to work successfully, everyone must participate. It makes no difference what an individual's point of view may be, our class **MUST** provide an arena for respectful, open discussion and exchange at all times. We need everyone's participation for the desired classroom dynamics to be present. Students will receive points for participating in class discussion.

Examinations

Given the number of required papers, classroom discussion and format we will **not have a midterm exam**. However, we will have a final examination. This exam will be comprehensive, covering the general course content for the semester. It will have three parts: Identification, Short Essay, and Long Essay (100 points, 50 % of final grade)

Final Grades

Final grades will be based on thought papers, research paper, final exam, and class discussion/participation.

OFFICE

LNCO 3407/ 801-581-3288

BUC 308

OFFICE HOURS

**M and W 11-11:45 in my Ethnic Studies Office BUC
308LNCO office or by appointment**

EMAIL ADDRESS

wilfred.samuels@utah.edu

The African American Experience

Ethnic Studies 2550

Fall 2015

Dr. Wilfred D. Samuels

Weekly Schedule

A. Notions of "Race": Does Race Matter?

Week 1 August 24-28 Introduction and Overview: Does Race Matter?

"True Colors" (Video): <http://stream.lib.utah.edu/index.php?c=details&id=8443>

"Black and Blue": Blacks in America, Soledad O'Brien, CNN:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jh4kVOpz4iQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDMoCUC4Mro>

"A Case of Severe Bias" ; Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy," from *American Quarterly* 47 (1995) and "Toxic Racism," *American Quarterly* 47 (1995) McIntosh (1997), "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack: Race an Anthology in the First Person." Reserve Marriott Library

B. Race and the American Self

Week 2 August 31-September 4

Metaphor of the American Self: Winthrop, "Model of Christian Charity"); Crevecoeur, "Letter III" from *Letters from an American Farmer* U.S. Constitution; Lecture by Professor Samuels

Week 3 September 7-11

Gates, "Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes" (Reserve); Crevecoeur, "Letter IX" (Reserve)

"Ethnic Notions" :
<http://digital.films.com.ezproxy.lib.utah.edu/PortalPlaylists.aspx?aid=6296&xtid=49775> (Links to an external site.)

hooks, "Choosing the Margins" from *Yearning* (Reserve)

THOUGHT PAPER #1 DUE

C. The African American Experience

Week 4 September 14-18

The African Past, Clark Hines, *African Americans: A Concise History*, Chapter 1, pp. 1-21

 Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, Chapter 1

http://history.hanover.edu/texts/equiano/equiano_contents.html (Links to an external site.)

Middle Passage: Clark Hines, *African Americans: A Concise History*, Chapter 2, pp. 22-43;

 Chapter 3 and 4, pp. 70-101

Week 5 September 21-25

The Peculiar Institution: Slavery

Clark Hines, *African Americans: A Concise History*, Chapter 5 See pp. 96-98 1, pp. 1-21; 293-295; 296-297

 Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of Frederick Douglass* (1845)

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/23/23-h/23-h.htm> (Links to an external site.)

 “Twelve Years a Slave” (Reserve Marriott) Library); Lecture by Dr.
Ronald G. Coleman

Legacies of Slavery

Week 6

Education: Clark Hines, *African Americans: A Concise History*, pp. 250-253; 268

Affirmative Action (Marriott Library Reserve)

Week 7 October 4-

Week 8 **OCTOBER 12-16 Fall Break**

E. Cultural Contributions

Week 9 October 19-23:

The Black Family: Clark Hines, *African Americans: A Concise History*, pp. 127-132; 524-525;

Moynihan Report; lecture by Irene Ota - click on My Media on the left and click on Irene Ota

The Black Church in America: Clark Hines, *African Americans: A Concise History*, Chapter 12,
See pp. 247-250; 319-320

Dr. France A. Davis, Pastor Calvary Baptist Church

Visit Calvary: 1090 S. State, Salt Lake City, UT 84111

THOUGHT PAPER # 2 DUE October 31, 2015

Week 10 October 26-30

The African American literary tradition

Clark Hines, *African Americans: A Concise History*, pp. 437-438

Harlem Renaissance, pp.372; 384-389

Week 11 November 2-6

African American literary tradition (contd)

Wes Moore, *The Other Wes Moore*

Week 12 November 9-13

African American Music pp. 334-335; 425-426

Dance, Clark Hines, *African Americans: A Concise History*, pp434-435

Alvin Ailey Dancers; Yasin Fairley, lecture/performance

Week 13 November 16-20

Contemporary Issues: From Civil Rights to Black Lives Matter Movement

Martin L. King, Jr. "Letter from a Birmingham Jail": Clark Hines, *African Americans: A Concise History*, pp 481-492; pp.510-511

Week 14 November 23-25: Thanksgiving Break 26-26

Week 15 November 30-December 4

African Americans and 21st Century

Issues of Social Justice, Clark Hines, *African Americans: A Concise History*, pp. 536-542:

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*

Week 16 December 7-11

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*

The election of President Barack Obama