

AAS/HIST 321: AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY SINCE 1900

TR 11:00-12:15 p.m. Spring 2021. Professor Plummer, bplummer@wisc.edu. Zoom office hours: Thursdays 1:20-2:20 pm or by appointment

S Y L L A B U S

What is this course about? This course examines twentieth century African-American history, beginning with its roots in rural society at the turn of the twentieth century. The African American experience encompasses the survival strategies of black people as they moved from country to town and city. It includes the cultural innovations made in response to changing conditions. The critical events studied include world wars, the development of an urban culture, the evolution of music and art, politics and protest, and the impact of African-American life and thought on modernity in the United States. Students will become acquainted with the momentous developments of the last century, including industrial and demographic transition, agricultural change in the South, the impact of world wars and the Cold War, and key events and issues of a long era of civil rights insurgency. Black radicalism is explored, as well as the policies of the federal government, the impact of world affairs, and the role of gender. The activities and life stories of individual participants and broad historical forces are considered. Students will further develop their analytical skills as they familiarize themselves with this history, a powerful tool for understanding the totality of American life.

What can students expect to learn? Familiarizing students with African Americans' lives during a critical era in their history as well as that of the country at large; fostering knowledge about the broader social context in which that history has unfolded and continues to evolve; making students aware of some of the rich resources for research available to them; exploring present-day issues and their relationship to the past; sharpening analytical skills.

This course fulfills an ethnic studies requirement. What's the purpose of the ethnic studies requirement? (This section is based on the University's statement on ethnic studies.) Ethnic studies courses are conscious of how society has valued certain histories and discounted others. They illuminate how these differences have promoted disparities in contemporary American life. Ethnic studies courses aim to apply critical thinking skills and encourage students to harbor a healthy skepticism towards knowledge claims about race and ethnicity, whether in the form of media, political, or popular representations. As part of this process, the ethnic studies requirement should challenge students to question their own assumptions and preconceived notions on these topics.

Awareness of self is linked with awareness of and empathy towards the perspectives of others. Ethnic Studies courses give students an opportunity to think about identity issues, including their own identity, as well as the connections they might have to people "outside" their focused social circle. Ethnic Studies courses endeavor to be relevant to students' lives outside the classroom by enhancing students' ability to effectively and respectfully participate in a multicultural society. This participation can include being able to discuss race and ethnicity with a colleague or friend, for example, or recognizing inequities that may occur in interpersonal or institutional contexts.

How will the course be organized? The class format will mix lectures and discussion led by students. Scheduled topics provide broad chronological and thematic continuity and supply background material for students' own research interests. Students are encouraged to use the archives at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, one of the finest in the country. Wisconsin also has one of the most extensive collections of newspapers, including the African American press. Some of these are also available digitally. The course offers an excellent opportunity to use these resources.

This 3-credit course meets online twice a week for two 75-minute sessions. The University expects students to spend nine hours a week on it. This includes in-class meeting sessions, time spent reading and writing, and online time where you are doing nothing else (no multitasking!), office hour visits with the professor, and test taking.

Each student will sign up to lead one day's discussion of assigned readings. Everyone will have at least one opportunity to organize discussion for the class. After making yourself familiar with the material you are to talk about, you will write down your talking points on a form that you will later hand in to me. The form is downloadable from Canvas. Discussion leading is graded by evaluating how clearly the discussant presents the reading. It assesses the ability to identify major points, put the material in context, and develop thoughtful questions.

There are two 5-page papers. The first will cover a pre-1945 topic, and the second a post-1945 topic. Students will be provided with a list of paper topics they can choose from, but those wishing to develop their own are free to do so after clearing the topic with the professor. Further instructions on writing the papers will be provided in a separate handout. There is a midterm and a final exam, both in essay format.

How are grades determined? Grades will be based on the following:

1. Pre-1945 paper, 5 pages - (20%)
2. A midterm exam (20%)
3. A final exam (20%)
4. Post-1945 paper, 5 pages - (20%)
5. A 20-minute discussion-leading session. (20%)

Grades are not curved.

Classroom policies. The more controversial a subject, the more we need to respect one another's viewpoints. Class discussions can be lively and intense, but they must be diplomatic. Thoughtfully criticize an idea; don't attack the person expressing it. Please turn off cell phones, laptops, and other devices while in class.

Students with disabilities. Students with a disability should contact the professor as soon as possible to arrange for alternative testing accommodations or any other special needs.

Attendance requirement: Many professors are not monitoring attendance closely during the pandemic. However, Zoom software indicates if people are present at a meeting, when they have signed on and off, and how long they were there. Poor attendance thus indicates that there is a problem that may or not affect a student's grade. Attendance is important because students help create a community by their presence. It is based on the idea of a classroom as a social entity and education as a commitment.

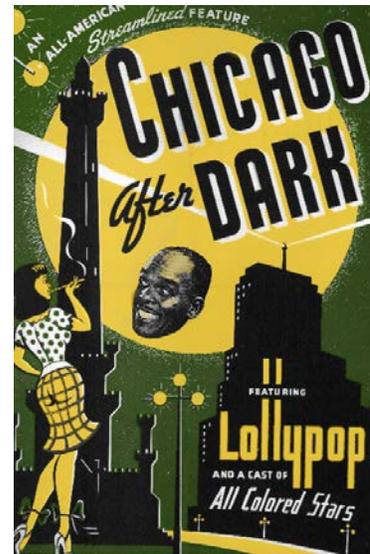
Due dates:

Midterm – March 11

First paper – April 6

Second paper – April 29

Final exam – May 3, 2:45-4:45 p.m.



A poster for one of the "race movies" that served the black film audience in the 1920s through 1940s

What will we read? Articles and excerpts are in digital form and will be downloadable from Canvas. You can purchase the two required books on your own and/or look for new and used copies at the University Bookstore.

[BOOK] Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, eds., *To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans from 1880, volume 2 only*. (Oxford University Press, 2005). *This book is also online through the Library.*

[BOOK] Thulani Davis, *1959* (Grove/Atlantic, 2001)

Articles and excerpts in alphabetical order: (These are posted to Canvas)

W. E. B. Du Bois, from “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others” from *Souls of Black Folk*

Excerpt from a 1921 speech Marcus delivered in New York

F. Sheffield Hale, “Finding Meaning in Monuments,” *History News* 71 (Autumn 2016): 20-24

Danielle L. McGuire, “‘It Was like All of Us Had Been Raped’: Sexual Violence, Community Mobilization, and the African American Freedom Struggle,” *Journal of American History* 91 (Dec. 2004): 906-931



From Aaron Douglas's art deco mural "Building More Stately Mansions," completed in 1944

Peniel Joseph, “Dashikis and Democracy: Black Studies, Student Activism, and the Black Power Movement,” *Journal of African American History* 88 (2:2003): 182-204

Robin Kelley, “Congested Terrain,” from Kelley, *Race Rebels*

Abby J. Kinchy, “African Americans in the Atomic Age: Postwar Perspectives on Race and the Bomb, 1945–1967,” *Technology and Culture*, 50, No. 2 (Apr. 2009), pp. 291-315

Claude McKay, “If We Must Die”; (poem)

Kristi Tillett, “‘Free That Brown Eyed Man’ The United States v. Chuck Berry,” *Safundi* 13 (3-4:2012): 339-356

Jean Toomer, “Song of the Son,” and “Georgia Dusk” (poems) from Toomer, *Cane*

Ida B. Wells, from *Southern Horrors*

How can I contact other students and the professor?

The class list address is: afroamer321-1-s20@lists.wisc.edu. You are automatically subscribed to it if you are registered. Students should also feel free to use the list to communicate with one another and share information about the course. That’s not a substitute, however, for class attendance and participation.

Professor's office hours: 11:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. on Wednesdays via Zoom.

E-mail address: bplummer@wisc.edu

LEADING DISCUSSION: GUIDELINES

Each student will sign up to lead one day's discussion of assigned readings. Student can work in pairs or individually on this assignment.

Leading the class discussion. Everyone will have an opportunity to organize discussion for the class. After making yourself familiar with the material you are assigned to present, write down your talking points on the form that you will hand in to me. Your discussion focuses on what you got out of the reading and what you want the class to discuss and can be a set of questions. Your introductory remarks should take no more than 5 minutes. You will lead discussion for 20-30 minutes.

Successfully facilitating a seminar discussion requires attention to several areas:

1. Being grounded in the reading
2. Presenting the material simply, clearly, and interestingly.
3. Knowing how to identify major points and separate them from less relevant material. What do you see as important in the reading?

Suggestions:

Lead into your discussion with a theme that links the reading to a current event or topic of current interest.

Place the material in historical context.

Use controversies to stimulate debate.

Develop solid questions.

Time yourself: How many minutes are you going to spend on summation? How many on developing discussion points?

Don't:

Summarize in great detail what everyone is supposed to have read. The purpose is not simply to echo the text.

Retire from the discussion after you have introduced it. You're still responsible for running it.

Don't be afraid to express your own views.

Lose track of the time while you're talking. Keep your remarks succinct. If you know you have a tendency to ramble, work from an outline.

Grading criteria for class presentation:

- How well the presentation is organized. Does the presenter convey the information clearly? How effectively does the presenter facilitate discussion?
- Does he/she/they appear to know the material and/or to have made an honest effort to grapple with material that might be complex or confusing?

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 : Jan. 26 - Introduction to the course

Jan. 28 - The Nadir

Reading: Wells, "Southern Horrors;"

Hale, "Finding Meaning in Monuments"

WEEK 2: Feb. 2 – Institution building

Reading: *To Make Our World*, ch. 1, pp. 32-66

Feb. 4 – Historical Society visit with Cynthia Bachhuber

Reading: no assignment

WEEK 3: Feb. 9 – Race Radicals

Du Bois, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others"; *To Make Our World*, ch. 2, pp. 67-86.

Feb. 11- Conserving a usable past

Reading: Jean Toomer, "Song of the Son," and "Georgia Dusk"; *To Make Our World*, ch. 2, pp. 87-110

WEEK 4: Feb. 16– "Ragtime and blues

Reading: *To Make Our World*, ch. 2, pp. 111-130

Feb. 18 – World War I

Reading: *To Make Our World*, ch. 3, pp. 131-148

WEEK 5: Feb. 23 – Urban Meccas and Renaissances

Reading: *To Make Our World*, ch. 3, pp. 148-166; Claude McKay, "If We Must Die,"

Feb. 25– Garveyism

Reading: Excerpt from Marcus Garvey speech, 1921; *To Make Our World*, ch. 4, pp. 167-192.

WEEK 6: Mar. 2 – Political experiments

Reading: *To Make Our World*, ch. 3, pp. 131-148

Mar. 4 – Depression and the interwar era

Reading: *To Make Our World*, ch. 3, 148-166.

WEEK 7: Mar. 9 – Midterm prep

Reading: no assignment

Mar. 11 – MIDTERM

Reading: no assignment

WEEK 8: Mar. 16 - A New Deal for some

Reading: *To Make Our World*, ch. 4, pp.167-192

Mar. 18– African Americans and World War II

Reading: Kelley, "Congested Terrain"

WEEK 9: Mar. 23 – The Cold War

Reading: Kinchy, "African Americans in the Atomic Age," Davis, *1959*, pref. and ch. 1

Mar. 25 – Civil rights before *Brown*

Reading: *To Make Our World*, ch. 4, pp. 192-214.

WEEK 10: Mar. 30 – Popular culture

Reading: Tillett, "Free that Brown-Eyed Man;" *To Make Our World*, ch. 4, pp. 192-214

April 1 – Civil rights insurgency

Reading: McGuire, "It Was like All of Us Had Been Raped"; *To Make Our World*, ch. 4, pp. 214-236

WEEK 11: Apr. 6 – Black nationalism after Garvey

FIRST PAPER DUE

Reading: no assignment

April 8 – War and reform in the Great Society

Reading: *To Make Our World*, ch. 4, pp. 236-251; Davis, *1959*, ch. 2

WEEK 12: April 13 – Black Power

Reading: *To Make Our World*, ch. 5, pp. 251-273; Davis, *1959*, ch. 3

Apr. 15 – African American internationalism

Reading: *To Make Our World*, ch. 5, pp. 273-295; Joseph, "Dashikis and Democracy" *1959*, ch. 4

WEEK 13: Apr. 20 – The rise of conservatism

Reading: *To Make Our World*, ch. 5, pp. 295-318; Davis, *1959*, ch. 4

April 22 – The carceral state

Reading: Davis, *1959*, ch. 5

WEEK 14: Apr. 27 – African Americans at the turn of the century

Reading: *To Make Our World*, ch. 5, pp. 318-341

Apr. 29– Summary and conclusion

SECOND PAPER DUE

May 3 - Final exam, 2:45-4:45 p.m.