

Freedom and Domination in Black Political Thought, Spring '24, AAAS 282-1/PPSCI 296-1

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Class times: MWF 11:50-12:40

This course is a survey of some of the canonical and some of the most exciting contemporary works in the field of Black political thought. We begin with foundational texts from Delany, Douglass, Du Bois, Garvey, Baldwin, King, Malcolm X, and Ellison. In the first half of the course we will focus on questions such as: What is the nature of the wrong(s) African Americans have suffered in the United States? What sustains systems of domination and exclusion? What responses, in addition to condemnation, do these systems of domination merit? What is a race? What does the long history of white domination in the United States say about ideals of liberalism and democracy? And what is the way forward? In the second part of the course, we will read contemporary works dealing with the nature and causes of racism in the 21st century, the future of Black political solidarity, and the claim that Blacks have and will never achieve any sort of emancipation in this world.

Readings:

I expect students to come to class, to have read the material assigned for that day, and to be ready to discuss it. Most of what you will get out of this, or any course, depends on this. I will supply all of the readings for this class. They will all be posted on a social e-reader called Perusall. There is a link to Perusall at the bottom of the course homepage on Blackboard. Once in Perusall, you will see a list of the reading assignments for the course. Most of the work for this course will involve reading the assignments, reflecting upon them, and discussing them with your classmates (on Perusall and in class). I've given more details about how Perusall works below.

Grades are based on:

Three three-page papers, 10% for the first and 20% for the second and third
Perusall, 30% (I'll explain what this is in class)
Participation, 20%

Some points about your papers:

1. **Establish a focus.** A good paper has a thesis, a central idea or claim that it is making, and it presents an argument supporting that thesis. You should be able to make an outline of your paper, which will at the same time be the skeleton of the argument you are making. It is often helpful to write out the outline – in sentence form, not simply as a list of topics – before writing the paper or, at least, the final draft. A good way to think about your paper is to ask yourself, “What do I want my readers to believe after they have read my paper? What reasons can I offer them to think that?” If you can answer these questions succinctly, you're off to an excellent start.
2. **Title.** The title should express the main idea or focus of your paper, preparing your reader to see immediately what you're going to say, and why it's interesting.
3. **Structure and organization.** The paper should have a clear structure, with an introduction presenting the central question or problem you are addressing, a body that sets out a logical development of the reasons and evidence you are offering, and a conclusion that ties the paper together. In the longer paper it is often useful to provide section headings. The introduction should generally state your main thesis, and provide an overview of the structure of the argument, to make it easier for your reader to follow it.

4. **Style.** I expect your papers to be well-written. Your sentences should be simple and clear. You should avoid obvious errors; use spell check. You should write more than one draft. And you should proofread them before handing them in.

5. **Guides.** There are a number of excellent guides for good writing. Strunk and White *The Elements of Style* is a classic, especially for grammar and word usage; it also offers a useful set of “principles of composition.” I especially recommend Joseph Williams, *Style: Toward Grace and Clarity*. His work is particularly helpful in offering examples of how awkward passages can be rewritten, using rules or principles that are fairly concrete and address specific issues such as clarity, cohesion, emphasis, etc. (these are all chapter headings in his book). Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, offers a helpful discussion of how to develop (and express) an argument in a tight, logical way.

6. **Grading.** “B” papers will fulfill the foregoing criteria adequately. “A” papers will do more. They will not only be clearly and forcefully written, but they will show evidence of deep engagement with the issues. They will argue something interesting, and thought-provoking.

How Perusall Works

I have not placed any book orders with the bookstore. I will be supplying the books for this course (with a few exceptions – in some courses, there will be one or two books you need to buy) through an online reading software package called “Perusall.” All of the reading assignments for the semester must be completed through this online software package, which you can access by clicking on the Perusall link on the bottom of the course’s Blackboard homepage.

Reasons I am doing this: *Perusall* helps you master readings faster, understand the material better, and get more out of the class. To achieve this goal, you will be collaboratively annotating the readings with others in the class. The help you’ll get and provide your classmates (even if you don’t know anyone personally) will get you past confusions quickly and will make the process more fun. While you read, you’ll receive rapid answers to your questions, help others resolve their questions (which also helps you learn), and advise me, the instructor, how to make class time most productive. You can start a new annotation thread in *Perusall* by highlighting text, asking a question, or posting a comment; you can also add a reply or comment to an existing thread. Each thread is like a chat with one or more members of your class, and it happens in real time. Your **goals** in annotating each reading assignment are 1. to stimulate discussion by posting good questions or comments, 2. to help others by answering their questions, and 3. to identify and evaluate the main claims in the piece.

Rubric: Research shows that by annotating thoughtfully, you’ll learn more and get better grades, so here’s what “annotating thoughtfully” means: *Effective annotations deeply engage points/arguments in the readings, stimulate discussion, offer informative questions or comments, and help others by addressing their questions or confusions.* To help you connect with classmates, you can “mention” a classmate in a comment or question to have them notified by email (they’ll also see a notification immediately if online), and you’ll also be notified when your classmates respond to your questions. For each assignment I will evaluate the annotations you submit on time (see below). Based on the overall body of your annotations, you will receive a score for each assignment as follows

10 = demonstrates **exceptionally thoughtful and thorough reading of the entire** assignment; student has engaged with others, asked questions others want answered, answers questions, and made important insights.

7-9 = **demonstrates thoughtful and thorough reading of the entire assignment**; occasionally engages with others, asks questions, and so forth. Some comments state the obvious or are the equivalent of saying “amen” or just free associating, as when someone says, “based off of what he said, I think” and then goes on to talk about something only tangentially related to the question or issue at hand.

4-6 = demonstrates superficial reading of the entire assignment Or thoughtful reading of only part of the assignment; comments state the obvious, are trivial, often irrelevant.

<4 = demonstrates superficial reading of only part of the assignment; comments state the obvious, are trivial, often irrelevant.

How many annotations do I need to enter?

When I look at your annotations I want them to reflect the effort you put in your study of the text. It is unlikely that that effort will be reflected by just a few thoughtful annotations per assignment. At the other extreme, 30 per assignment is too many, unless a number of them are superficial or short comments or questions (which is fine, because it is OK to engage in chat with your peers). Somewhere in between these two extremes is about right and, thoughtful questions or comments that stimulate discussion or thoughtful and helpful answers to other students' questions will earn you a higher score for the assignment. Note, also, that to lay the foundation for understanding the in-class activities, you must familiarize yourself with each assignment *in its entirety*. Failing to read and annotate across the entire assignment will result in a lower score.

What does "on time" mean?

The work done in class depends on you having done the reading in advance, so it is necessary to complete the reading and post your annotations before the deadline to receive credit. I allow a late annotation period of two days during which the credit for your annotations linearly decreases from 100% at the deadline to 0% at the end of the late annotation period. Similarly, to encourage you to talk to each other, there is a reply window after each deadline during which you can continue to reply, for full credit, to questions posted by others. However, the number of additional points you can earn after the deadline is capped at the credit you receive for annotations made on that assignment before the deadline.

- Jan 17 Introduction
- Jan 19 Michael Dawson, pp. 1-43, *Black Visions*
- Martin Delany** – Origins of Black nationalism.
- Jan 22 “The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States”
- Jan 24 “ Call for a National Emigration Convention of Colored Men”
Letters, pp. 217-244
“Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent,” (1854), 245-279.
- Frederick Douglass** – The nature of slavery and the nature of freedom – can you figure out what it is to be free by figuring out why it is bad to be a slave?
- Jan 26 *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Editor’s Preface, Intro (pp. 5-25), chs. 1-14
- Jan 29 *My Bondage...*, chs. 15-25
- Jan 31 "Letter to His Old Master" (1849); "The Nature of Slavery" (1850); "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" (1852); "The Fugitive Slave Law" (1852)
- Feb 2 “The Present Condition and Future Prospects of the Negro People” (1853); “The Constitution of the United States: Is it Pro-Slavery or Anti-Slavery?” (1860); “The Dred Scott Decision” (1857); “The Union and How to Save It” (1861); “The Dissolution of the American Union” (1861); “The Decision of the Hour” (1861)
- Feb 5 “An Address to the Colored People of the United States,” (1848); “The Future of the Negro People of the Slave States” (1862); Freedmen’s Monument – Oration for Lincoln (1876); “I denounce the so-called emancipation as a stupendous fraud” (1888); “The Nation’s Problem” (1889)
- Feb 7 Douglass, “The Negro Ethnologically Considered,” and “Our Composite Nationality”:
Dubois, “Conservation of the Races”
- Dubois**
- Feb 9 *Souls of Black Folk*, Forethought-ch. 3
and Booker T. Washington, “Atlanta Exposition Address”
- Feb 12 *Souls of Black Folk*, chs. 4-5
- Feb 14 *Souls of Black Folk*, chs. 6-8
- Feb 16 *Souls of Black Folk*, chs. 9-10
- Feb 19 *Souls of Black Folk*, ch. 11 – Afterthought
“The Concept of Race,” and “The Souls of White Folk,” from *Dusk of Dawn*

Feb 21 Barbara Fields, "Whiteness, Racism, and Identity"

Marcus Garvey

Feb 23 pp. 1-47, from *Selected Writings and Speeches*

Feb 26 pp. 48-82, from *Selected Writings*

Feb 28 pp. 119-22, 138-47, 160-9, 181-94, *Selected Writings*

Voices from the Civil Rights Era

Mar 1 Martin Luther King, "American Dream," and "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," and "I Have a Dream"

Mar 4 James Baldwin, "Many Thousands Gone"; "Nobody Knows my Name: A Letter from the South"

Mar 6 Baldwin, "The Price of the Ticket"; "Princes and Powers"

Mar 8 Baldwin, first half of *The Fire Next Time*

Mar 9-17 **Spring Break!**

Mar 18 Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, finish

Mar 20 Malcolm X, "Message to the Grassroots," "The Ballot or the Bullet," and "At the Audubon"; Angela Davis, "Political Prisoners, Prisons and Black Liberation"; Newton and Seale, "What We Want/What We Believe"

Mar 22 King, chs. 4-6, *Where do we go from here?*

Mar 25 Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, *Black Power*, preface and chs. 1-2

Mar 27 *Black Power*, chs. 3-4

Mar 29 *Black Power*, chs. 5-6

Mar 31 *Black Power*, chs. 7-8

Ralph Ellison

Apr 1 "Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity"

"Hidden Name and Complex Fate"

Apr 3 "On Initiation Rites and Power: A Lecture at West Point"

"The Novel as a Function of American Democracy"

"America without Blacks"

Contemporary Scene

- Apr 5 Thomas Holt, introduction and chapter 1, *The Problem of Race in the 21st Century*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 2000.
- Apr 8 Holt, chs. 2-3
- Apr 10 Holt ch. 4 and epilogue
- Apr 12 Tommie Shelby, introduction and chapter 1 of *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 2007.
- Apr 15 Shelby, chs. 2-3
- Apr 17 Shelby, chs. 4-5
- Apr 19 Shelby, ch. 6 and conclusion
- Apr 22 Frank Wilderson, chs. 1-2, *Afropessimism*, (New York: Liveright), 2021.
- Apr 24 Wilderson, chs. 3-4
- Apr 26 Wilderson, chs. 5-6
- Apr 29 Wilderson, finish