

Syllabus

Philosophy and the Black Experience 21:730:358

Instructor: David E. McClean, Philosophy
Room 346, Conklin Hall
Mondays, 6 – 9 p.m.
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Office Hours: By Appointment.



Course Objective: This course is intended to add critical thinking skills, via the use of philosophical concepts and arguments, to the student's analysis of the history, literature, and experiences of African peoples (and their descendants) in America and elsewhere. We will bring to bear basic ideas from the philosophical branches of ontology, metaphysics, ethics, political theory, and aesthetics as they may enlighten various issues, goals, successes, and problems in "the black experience." In considering "the black experience" (which can be, alternatively construed, as black *experiences* and/or "Africana" *experiences*), the course will review and explore what we mean by the concepts we use to review and understand those experiences, and will examine assumptions and presuppositions regarding such notions as, among others: "struggle," "agency," "rights" and "inalienable rights," "constructivism," "power," "self-reliance," "racism," "laissez-faire racism," "civil disobedience," "non-violence," "legitimacy," "privilege," "solidarity," "universalism," "intersectionality," "race," "ethnicity," "color-blindness," "violence," "Afrocentricity," "class," and "identity."

Requirements: There are three required texts for this course. All three texts must be read by the completion date indicated (and sections read by the due dates): *The History of White People*, by Nell Irvin Painter, *The Fire Next Time*, by James Baldwin, and *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity*, by Kwame Anthony Appiah. In addition, students will be required to read certain brief handouts treating of such subjects/matters as the nature and tools of critical thinking, logical fallacies, and an overview of the various philosophical branches referenced, above. Also, short writings from key thinkers will be distributed on such subjects as, among others, black power, "Negritude," separatism, and integration.

The student will be responsible for a brief summary (one or two paragraphs) of each of the assigned readings and/or films which will be due **no later than seven days** after assignment. The summaries must be e-mailed to the instructor as designated during the first week of class. Sufficient detail should be provided in these summaries to demonstrate an appropriate familiarity with the material. The student may include questions in the summaries for further clarification by the instructor during class time or via e-mail (etc.). It should be noted that not all of the readings from the text will be immediately discussed in class, but each will eventually be discussed or woven into class discussions and lectures regarding various issues and topics. In addition, certain readings may/will be made available by e-mail or posted on a web site designated by the instructor.

NOTE ON THE READINGS: Regarding the Appiah text, **RELAX**. You should wrestle with the text, but if you have no background in philosophy don't be daunted or alarmed. The instructor will guide you through it. You will note that Appiah *drops a lot of names* with which you may not be familiar. You should research the people he references, but the main mission is to grasp the thrust of his arguments. You will find the Painter and the Baldwin easier to grasp.

Absences: More than two unexcused absences may have a negative impact on your grade.

Class Participation: Students are different and some are less talkative and outgoing than others, but participation will be considered when calculating your final grade.

Plagiarism: See the college policies on plagiarism on-line. If you don't know what plagiarism is by now, please make sure you understand it before you start submitting written work. See the instructor if you are unsure. Plagiarism cannot be tolerated.

On-Line Resources: A list of online resources will be provided during the first week of class. Here is a good place to start if you have no background in philosophy:

<http://www.philosophybasics.com/index.html>

Exams and Quizzes: There will be a mid-term exam and several quizzes.

Papers: A term paper is required. The term paper will be 8-12 pages (**single-spaced**) on any of the themes discussed during the course or from the readings. **YOU MUST PROVIDE THE TOPIC OF YOUR PAPER BY MID-TERM.**

Grades/Grading: Summaries of the readings (and handing them in on-time) will constitute **1/4** of the final course grade. The quizzes will constitute **1/4** of your final course grade. (The summaries and quizzes will be graded in the aggregate, **not individually**, for the purposes of inclusion in the final course average. Quality of the writing counts, so please note.) The term paper will constitute **1/4** of the final course grade. The Mid-Term Exam will constitute **1/4** of the final course grade. Note: You need not feel compelled to participate and "hold forth" in class each week, but you should not remain silent during most the semester. Each student should expect the instructor to pose questions directly to him or her throughout the semester. Discussion groups and role play will count toward participation.

Deductions from Final Grade: See above. As well, the instructor retains discretion to reduce the final grade based upon: noted class unpreparedness; failure to hand-in assignments on time; poor participation; poor preparation; absences; frequent lateness to or early departure from the class; or for violations of student obligations as imposed by the University including, but not limited to, plagiarism.

See the University Code of Conduct during the first week of the course:

<http://judicialaffairs.rutgers.edu>. It contains information about plagiarism and other matters.

The Final Grade: Unless otherwise indicated during the first week of classes, the grading scale will be as follows:

A = 93-100; B+ = 89-92; B = 81-88; C+ = 77-80; C = 70-76; D = 65-69; F = 64.

Reading and Viewing

Note: The instructor will, from time to time, provide short hand-outs or internet references to help clarify readings or concepts.)

| Day | Reading and Viewing Assignments |
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| Session 1 | Painter, Introduction through Chapter 4 Baldwin, <i>My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation</i> View: James Baldwin's 1986 National Press Club Speech and Q&A (YouTube) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTjY4rZFY5c |
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| Session 2 | Appiah, <i>The Lies That Bind</i> , Introduction and Chapter One Painter, Chapters 5 through 7 Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races" - http://www.gutenberg.org/files/31254/31254-h/31254-h.htm or any other source View: Movie - "Imitation of Life" (1959) |
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| Session 3 | Appiah, Chapter Two Baldwin, Finish Book View: James Baldwin/William F. Buckley, Jr. Debate (YouTube) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFeoS41xe7w View: "I Am Not Your Negro" - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXfzFh0eBZQ View: President Lyndon Johnson's speech, Howard University (June 1965) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcfAuodA2x8 |
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| Session 4 | David E. McClean, "Should We Conserve the Notion of Race?" (Handout) Paul C. Taylor, "Pragmatism and Race" (Handout) Excerpt: Martin Luther King, Jr., "Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?" (Handout) View: "The Color Purple" (1985) |
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- Session 5 Appiah, Chapter Three
Painter, Chapters 7 – 11
View: Malcolm X: “The Ballot or the Bullet” - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oVW3HfzXkg&t=7s>
Excerpt: Molefe Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Handout)
“Négritude” - <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africanaage/essay-negritude.html>
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- Session 6 Painter, Chapters 12-14
Appiah Chapter 4
Film: “Cry Freedom”
View: Angela Davis Speech, UC Berkeley - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxCqTEMgZUC>
View: Kwame Nkrumah, “Address at Conference of African Freedom Fighters,” Accra (June 4, 1962) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1fyd9AXlw>
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- Session 7 Painter, Chapters 15 -18
Appiah, Chapter 5
Handout: Michelle Alexander – Excerpt or PPT from *The New Jim Crow*
[Frantz Fanon Film [in class]: “Black Skin, White Masks”
View: Speech: Shelby Steele: “Is White Guilt Destroying the Promise of Civil Rights?” - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HF3VaJdConY>
View: William Crystal interview of Justice Clarence Thomas - <https://youtu.be/Q3rZknW5gAk>
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- Session 8 Painter, Finish Book
Appiah, Chapter Six
Alain L. Locke, “Who and What is ‘Negro’?” [Handout]
Excerpt: Shelby Steele, “The Content of Our Character”
Barack Obama Speech: “A More Perfect Union” - <https://youtu.be/zrp-v2tHaDo>
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- Session 9 Appiah, *Coda*
View: Lecture, “Professor Tricia Rose: Black Feminism, Popular Culture and Respectability Politics” - <https://youtu.be/57EW8AElyVU>
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- Session 10 **View:** Black Lives Matter TED Interview - https://www.ted.com/talks/alicia_garza_patrisse_cullors_and_opal_tometi_an_interview_with_the_founders_of_black_lives_matter?utm_campaign=tedsread--a&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare
McClean: “Black Lives What? On Slogans, Flash Movements, and the Pursuit of Real Black Power” [Handout]
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- Session 11 Handout [Professor McClean, Recap]
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Session 12 **In Class Viewing:** “The Black Panthers – Vanguard of the Revolution”

Session 13 Review and Term Paper Discussions with Instructor

Suggested Reading:

The Souls of Black Folk, W.E.B DuBois

Race Matters, Cornel West

In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture, Kwame Anthony Appiah

On Race and Philosophy, Lucius Outlaw

The Philosophy of Alain Locke: Harlem Renaissance and Beyond, Leonard Harris

I Am Because We Are: Readings in Africana Philosophy, ed. Fred Lee Hord and Jonathan Scott Lee

Philosophy of Race: An Introduction, Naomi Zack

African American Religious Thought: An Anthology, ed. Eddie Glaude, Jr. and Cornel West