

CONTEMPORARY AFRICANA SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY (D)

Instructor: Dr. Neil Roberts
Williams College
Tu, 1:10-3:50 PM
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Spring 2011
AFR132.01/PSCI132.01
Office hours: Wed, 2-4:00PM
Hollander Hall 213, x4772

Course description:

This introductory seminar investigates the relationship between three major schools of thought in contemporary Africana social and political philosophy, namely the African, Afro-Caribbean, and African-American intellectual traditions. We will discuss a range of thinkers including Kwame Anthony Appiah, Maryse Condé, Angela Y. Davis, Paul Gilroy, Édouard Glissant, Lewis R. Gordon, Kwame Gyekye, Wilson Harris, Paget Henry, bell hooks, Charles W. Mills, Nkiru Nzegwu, Lucius Outlaw, Oyèrónke Oyěwùmí, Tommie Shelby, Cornel West, and Sylvia Wynter. A primary goal of the course is to provide students with the intellectual resources to decipher problems central to philosophical discourse and to allow students an opportunity to apply what they learn to critical issues in current geopolitics. This seminar is part of the Exploring Diversity Initiative, and as such we shall investigate—via the authors mentioned—comparative philosophical analyses, the connection between universality and particularity in the world of ideas, critical theorization, and the plurality of global thinking in contemporary social and political philosophy.

Course requirements:

Participants are expected to attend class regularly and complete readings for class listed on the syllabus. I will generally begin each class summarizing briefly the previous session's main points, and shall proceed to lecture for a portion of time about the current day's topic. Since this is a seminar, you should be prepared to engage in a class discussion, close textual analyses, and group activities.

The following requirements serve as the basis for course evaluation:

- (1) Attendance (**10%**)
- (2) Participation (**20%**): this includes a single session whereby you shall (a) submit 1 reading E-post to Glow prior to class to which peers may respond; and (b) lead class discussion on the session's reading.
- (3) Two 5-7 -page essays (**40%**)
- (4) One 10-page Final Paper (**30%**)

Required readings available for sale and on library reserve:

Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (Columbia)
Lewis R. Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (Cambridge)
Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme* (Temple)

Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (Routledge)

Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minnesota)

Tommie Shelby, *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity* (Harvard)

Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Westminster John Knox, *Revised 2002 edition*)

Course Reading Packet (available from campus printing services) = [CP]

Recommended readings available for sale and/or on library reserve:

Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (Virginia)

bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (South End)

All other readings are available on reserve, Glow, and/or through JSTOR.

Course policies:

Attendance:

It is paramount for you to attend the sessions in order for all of us to best be able to discuss and decipher the course materials and lectures. Attendance will be taken each class period and you will be required to attend the entire class session to receive full credit. In case of sickness or other legitimate reason for absence, it is your responsibility to inform Prof. Roberts in advance or as soon as possible after the class. Every absence after two instructor excused absences will result in the reduction of your overall grade by a third of a letter grade (e.g. an A becomes an A-, a B+ becomes a B, etc.). To earn full attendance credit, you must come to class prepared to discuss the readings assigned for that session and with the necessary materials, required books, articles, paper, and writing utensil.

Reading Responses:

Each student is required to submit a single reading response to at least one reading per designated week on the course Glow site. This response is intended both to help prepare you for leading class discussion during the specified week and to process your opinions on the readings in relation to the feedback of your peers. ***All responses are due by 10:00am the morning of class on Tuesdays.*** Only responses posted by this time will count for the week's reading and participation. *Reading responses cannot be made up.* The response should be between *at least 275-300 words* and should analyze or evaluate the readings. I will monitor the discussion regularly, but not participate. A note for ***peer readers***: your feedback on Glow to a student's lead post is ***voluntary, but highly encouraged***, as dialogue amongst one another outside of class provides a strong rubric for engaging in-class discourse. No reading responses shall be due in weeks that you submit the final version of a larger writing requirement.

How to Post Reading Responses to Glow:

- 1) Go to <http://glow.williams.edu> and log in with your username and password.
- 2) Click on this course and then the specific Discussion Forum listed by the Week for which you will be posting a response.
- 3) Click on Add a New Discussion Topic and enter your response, making sure to include a Subject heading for your post.
- 4) Click Post to Forum.

Schedule of readings by week:

**MODERN FOUNDATIONS:
THE CONTOURS OF AFRICANA SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

Week 1, February 2 (organizational meeting):

Lucius Outlaw, "Africana Philosophy" [CP]

Recommended: Lewis R. Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy*, Ch. 1

Week 2, February 8:

Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Introduction & Ch. 1 [to be distributed]

Sylvia Wynter, "Columbus, the Ocean Blue, and Fables That Stir the Mind: To Reinvent the Study of Letters" [CP]

CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN THOUGHT

Week 3, February 15:

Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, Ch. 1 [CP]

Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*

Week 4, February 22:

Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*

Week 5, March 1:

Oyèrónke Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*

Recommended: Nkiru Nzegwu, *Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture*, Introduction [CP]

- ***PAPER 1 (MATERIAL THROUGH WEEK 5) DUE MONDAY MARCH 7, 12:00 NOON***

CONTEMPORARY AFRO-CARIBBEAN THOUGHT

Week 6, March 8:

Stuart Hall, “Negotiating Caribbean Identities” [CP]

Paget Henry, *Caliban’s Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy*

- *No reading response due.*

Week 7, March 15:

Wilson Harris, “History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas” [CP]

Harris, “Letter from Francisco Bone to W.H.” (from *Jonestown*) [CP]

Henry, *Caliban’s Reason*

SPRING BREAK MARCH 19-APRIL 3 (NO CLASSES)

Week 8, April 5:

Maryse Condé, “*Créolité* without Creole Language ?” [CP]

Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (selections) [CP]

CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN-AMERICAN THOUGHT

Week 9, April 12:

Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*

Week 10, April 19:

Bernard Boxill, “Two Traditions in African-American Political Philosophy” [CP]

Tommie Shelby, *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity*

- *No reading response due.*
- ***PAPER 2 (MATERIAL THROUGH WEEK 10) DUE FRIDAY APRIL 22, 5:00PM***

Week 11, April 26:

Angela Y. Davis, “The Unfinished Lecture on Liberation—II” [CP]

bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (selections) [CP]

AFRICANA SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE

Week 12, May 3:

Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*

- First half of class: analysis and discussion of Gilroy text.
- *Peer Review second half of class*: work on final research papers or final review essays.

Week 13, May 10 (Last Class)

No assigned reading; course summary.

- Reading Period: May 14-17; Final Exam Period: May 18-23
- ***Final Paper due to Prof. Roberts: Thursday May 19 by 12:00noon* (Hardcopy, Hollander Hall Room 213 & E-version)**

Books to utilize for final paper or to select a single text from for a final review essay:

- Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen* (WW. Norton)
- Anthony Bogues, *Empire of Liberty: Power, Desire, and Freedom* (Dartmouth)
- Bernard Boxill, *Blacks and Social Justice* (Rowman & Littlefield)
- Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh)
- Andrew Bundy, editor, *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris: The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination* (Routledge)
- Hazel V. Carby, *Race Men* (Harvard)
- Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Routledge)
- Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Duke)
- Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (Vintage)
- Natalie Etoke, *Melancholia Africana : L'indispensable dépassement de la condition noire* (Éditions du Cygne)
- Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Duke)
- Paul Gilroy, *Darker than Blue: On the Moral Economies of Black Atlantic Culture* (Harvard)
- Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America* (Chicago)
- Édouard Glissant, *Poetic Intention* (Nightboat)
- Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought* (Harvard)
- Lewis R. Gordon, *Existential Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (Routledge)

- Michael Hanchard, *Party/Politics: Horizons in Black Political Thought* (Oxford)
- bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (South End)
- Joy James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth: Black Leaders and American Intellectuals* (Routledge)
- Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux)
- Teodros Kiros, *Zara Yacob: Rationality of the Human Heart* (Africa World)
- Mahmood Mandani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton)
- Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (California)
- Andile Mngxitama, Amanda Alexander, and Nigel Gibson, editors, *Biko Lives!: Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko* (Palgrave MacMillan)
- Howard McGary, *Race and Social Justice* (Blackwell)
- Howard McGary and Bill Lawson, *Between Slavery and Freedom: Philosophy and American Slavery* (Indiana)
- Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minnesota)
- Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Vintage)
- V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Indiana)
- Brian Meeks, *Envisioning Caribbean Futures: Jamaican Perspectives* (UWI)
- Nkiru Nzegwu, *Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture* (SUNY)
- Lucius T. Outlaw, *On Race and Philosophy* (Routledge)
- Oyèrónke Oyěwùmí, editor, *Gender Epistemologies in Africa: Gendering Traditions, Spaces, Social Institutions, and Identities* (Palgrave Macmillan)
- Carole Pateman and Charles W. Mills, *Contract and Domination* (Polity)
- Reiland Rabaka, *Africana Critical Theory: Reconstructing the Black Radical Tradition from W.E.B. Du Bois and C.L.R. James to Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral* (Lexington)
- David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Duke)
- Tsenay Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse* (Routledge)
- T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women* (Minnesota)
- Hortense J. Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago)
- Ngũgi wa Thiong'o, *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance* (Basic Civitas)
- Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight against Imperialism* (Penguin)
- Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Indiana)
- Sylvia Wynter, *The Hills of Hebron* (2010 republished edition, Ian Randle).