

**AFAM 101-01: Introduction to African American Studies  
Summer, 2017**

**This course is required for the major and minor in African American Studies. This course may satisfy two of the GC Core Requirements: HALC and Engaging Diversity.**

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Your country. How came it yours? Before the Pilgrims landed we were here. Here we have brought our three gifts and mingled them with yours: a gift of story and song—soft, stirring, melody in an ill-harmonized and unmelodious land; the gift of sweat and brawn to . . . conquer the soil, and lay the foundations of this vast economic empire two hundred years earlier than your weak hands could have done it; the third, a gift of the spirit.

--W.E.B. DuBois

History does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do.

--James Baldwin

To talk about race in America is to explore the wilderness inside ourselves and to come to terms with a history that we'd rather conceal.

--Cornel West

Race has become metaphorical, a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological "race" ever was.

--Toni Morrison

I have never lived, nor has any of you, in a world in which race did not matter.

--Toni Morrison

To get beyond racism we must first take account of race. There is no other way.

--Justice Harry Blackmun

It's not good enough to just interpret the world. You have to find a way to change it.

--Manning Marable

The aim of the contemporary cultural studies investigator is not to generate another good theory, but to give a better theorized account of concrete historical reality.

--Stuart Hall

**Required Texts**

- ♦ *Walkin' the Talk: An Anthology of African American Studies* (V. Johnson and B. Lyne, eds.)
- ♦ *"Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria" and Other Conversations about Race* (Beverly Tatum)
- ♦ *Citizen* (Claudia Rankine)
- ♦ *Between the World and Me* (Ta-Nehisi Coates)
- ♦ *The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks about Race* (Jesmyn Ward, ed.)
- ♦ *Just Mercy* (Bryan Stevenson)
- ♦ *Get Out* (written, directed, and produced by Jordan Peele)
- ♦ *Fences* (written by August Wilson; directed by Denzel Washington)

- ◆*Hidden Figures* (directed by Theodore Melfi; written by Melfi and Allison Schroede)
- ◆*A Raisin in the Sun* (Lorraine Hansberry)
- ◆*I Am Not Your Negro* (written by James Baldwin and Raoul Peck; directed by Peck)
- ◆*Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution* (written and directed by Stanley Nelson)

### **Course Description**

African American Studies is a vital program of critical and intellectual inquiry. This course offers students the opportunity to examine interdisciplinarily and multidisciplinarily the vast experiences and contributions of African Americans in the United States. Largely constructed around the voices of African Americans, the course surveys key concepts and defining movements in African America. We will explore the historical, cultural, economic, political, religious, literary, and social in relation to African American life. You are encouraged to make connections between the texts and to think critically and creatively across disciplinary boundaries. We will rely heavily on our anthology—*Walkin' the Talk*. You will also read written and visual texts about African American experience that imaginatively illuminate the complexities of African American identity. Topics discussed will include social constructions of race, class, gender and sexuality as well as identity, history, freedom, equality, slavery and abolition, arts and literature, feminism, aesthetics, family, education, law, film, music, politics, and economics. The diverse content of the course reflects the richness of the field of African American studies. Theories of critical race (CRT) and intersectionality will foreground and inform our critical analyses. Course readings, lectures, discussions, and visual and audio sources are all essential to your learning. This course provides a solid foundation from which students can pursue more advanced and more specialized studies of the African American experience, history, and culture.

### **Course Objectives**

- To introduce the field of African American Studies and its methodologies
- To chronicle African American cultural, social, and political histories and experiences
- To read foundational texts and contemporary research in African American studies
- To provide a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach to the study and interpretation of African American experiences
- To explore the historical development of contemporary issues relevant to African Americans
- To guide students in thinking critically and writing cogently about the meaning and significance of race and racism in the US
- To understand key moments in African American history

### **Course Requirements and Evaluation Criteria**

#### **Class participation and activities: 15 points**

To earn all points, your participation in class discussions and activities must be brilliant and sustained. Remember that you may also discuss on our Blackboard site as well.

**Exams: 70 points**

The exams will require that you have read the assignments, that you have been in class and have taken notes, and that you can both acquire and analyze information. The exams might take the form of short answers, fill in blanks, passage identification and explication or essay prompt.

**Community Service Proposal (5pp): 25 points**

Institutions of higher education are the sites from which knowledge is produced. An eternal question: how do we make what we do in the academy have meaning beyond the academy? You will develop a proposal for a community service project that requires active participation outside of the classroom. What challenge, rooted in race and/or racism and its intersections in our society would you like to help solve? The proposal, which presents and sells the idea, should be no more than five (5) ds pages and should be written for both academic and nonacademic audiences.

There are many possibilities for this assignment based upon your own personal and academic interests. **To paraphrase Gandhi, how can you be the change you wish to see in the world?** These proposals should be viable community service projects that might be attractive to a variety of agencies, activists, and leaders, so research is strongly recommended, and you should include a bibliography.

**Discussion Starters: 15 points**

Each student will begin our discussion for at least one class session. Plan to present briefly (no more than 15 minutes), beginning our discussion with provocative observations, quotations, and/or questions. **No later than the preceding class**, post on Bb any notes, questions, or comments you will use for your starter, and email your document to me.

**Debates: 20 points**

At the semester's end, there will be class debates. Teams will be assigned, and the debate question will be revealed two weeks before the debate. Teams will not know which side (pro or con) they will argue until the day of the debate. In terms of format, each side will present its position. There will be one opportunity for rebuttal for each side, and one closing statement for each side. Remember to argue the merits and expose the fallacies. You should strengthen your argument with research, and you should also meet as a team to prepare. Additionally, each student will submit an individual paper (no more than 4 pages, ds) in which he/she argues his/her position on the topic with facts.

**Field experience: 30 points**

You will visit the National Museum of African American History and Culture at least twice. After each visit, you will submit a reflection of 500-600 words (ds) concerning a specific exhibit or a theme, responding to one of these prompts: how did the visual culture assist in telling the narrative of African America; what does exploring the material culture of African America reveal; or how does history inform of our understanding of the present? Submit your ticket stubs with your papers.

**Attendance: 25 points** (approximately one point per day)

**Grading Scale:** A (200-191); A- (190-185); B+ (184-180); B (179-170); B- (169-165); C+ (164-159); C (158-149); C- (148-143); D+ (142-139); D (138-130); F (129-0)