

HISTORY 2135A  
**Struggles for Freedom: African American History**

Fall 2021  
Tuesdays, 12:30-2:30pm, Room TBA  
in-person, up to 200 students

**Instructor: Associate Professor Laurel Clark Shire**  
Office Hours: Thursdays 2:30-4:30 and by appointment  
Department of History, Office: Lawson Hall 2226  
Email: lshire@uwo.ca

---

**This is a draft syllabus. Please see your course OWL site for the final syllabus.**

**Course Description:**

This course explores African American history from the end of slavery to today. We trace the diverse experiences of people of African descent in the United States, including slavery and the struggle to end it, the segregated Jim Crow period, the Black Freedom/civil rights movement, and more recent developments.

*Prerequisite(s):* none

*Antirequisite(s):* History 3311F/G, History 3313F/G.

**Course Objectives:**

**Successful students will be able to:**

- Describe the major themes, trends and chronology of African American history
- Describe aspects of the diversity of Black life and experience in the United States
- Describe the ways in which blackness (and other racial categories) is socially and culturally constructed and historically contingent, and how its meanings have changed over time
- Become proficient at reading secondary sources strategically for the argument, content, and ideas that interest you the most so that you will retain this information
- Practice analyzing primary historical sources

**Course Materials:**

The following books **MAY** be used in this course (**confirm final syllabus before you purchase anything**):

Kendi, Ibram X. and Keisha N. Blain, Eds., *Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America, 1619-2019*, Random House, 2021

Smith, Clint. *How the Word is Passed: A Journey Across the Country That Black America Built*,  
Dialogue Books, 2021

Each week, you will have things to watch, read, listen to, and write about before you arrive in class on Tuesday afternoon. All the materials for that week will be linked under the Week Number (with dates) on the course OWL site. We will use class time to discuss, question, debate, and analyze the readings and primary sources each week.

Recorded lectures: before class each week, please watch the pre-recorded lecture (at your own pace, whenever you have the time). It will give you needed context for the readings and for our class discussion. In class, we will discuss the readings, primary sources, and other materials provided for the topic that week.

Readings: most of the readings for this course will be posted as PDFs, or linked to an electronic copy at Weldon Library, on OWL.

Films, Podcasts and Other Media: Links to these (some required, some recommended) are also on OWL. In some cases, there may be a small fee to stream a film.

### **Methods of Evaluation:**

Participation in discussions, in person and/or online: 20%

Small Group Discussion Leadership x 1: 5%

Reaction papers or Weekly Quizzes: 15%

Primary Source Analysis: 20%

Final Exam: 40%

Students must **attempt every assignment** in this course in order to pass.

**Attendance** is expected and required in order to be successful. If you are ill, please do not come to class. If you must miss class, please email your TA or Professor Shire and let us know the reason for your absence. If you require an extension, you must email us and request one as soon as you are able. Excessive and unexplained absences, as well as frequent tardiness, will harm your participation grade and will hamper your ability to be successful in the course. Family emergencies, religious holidays, games (for university athletes) and illness are excusable absences. It is up to you to provide explanations and supporting documentation, I will not remind you to provide them.

**Engagement:** Due to the size of this class, there are several ways in which you can participate. First, you can raise your hand and ask questions or offer your ideas and opinions (informed by course materials) in class. Second, you can write comments and questions (about the course materials, themes, and topics) on the course MS Teams site, which you will be added to in week 1. There, you'll be part of a smaller group that will have online discussions about the topics and themes each week. Participation in class and on Teams will be graded based on the quality, not the quantity, of your contributions. It should demonstrate that you have read/watched the assignments for that day, and reflected on them in the

context of the course: how do they illustrate broader themes? How do they expand or challenge what we have already learned about this topic? How do you connect them to the weeks before? You do not need to participate in both ways, but you may if you wish to. Cumulative participation marks will be posted every 4<sup>th</sup> week in Gradebook on OWL.

**Late Assignments:** Some assignments will not be accepted after the deadline, but you may switch weeks if you need an accommodation for a particular date (see below). Others will be accepted up to 7 days after the due date, with a 5 point penalty for every day late. If you know in advance that you will have difficulty meeting a deadline, please request an extension (or a switch) at least 3 days before an assignment is due. Most requests for an extension will be granted, so please ask.

**Accommodation for missed assignment deadlines with a Self Reported Absence:**

If a student reports a SRA for an assignment (i.e. an essay) the new due date will be 48 hours after the SRA was submitted. Students should be aware that when they have submitted an SRA for one test, they are not permitted to write a test or complete an assignment for another course during the period covered by the SRA. Failure to observe this regulation will result in the cancellation of the SRA and the possible application of late penalties.

**Short Reaction Papers/Weekly Online Quizzes:** Depending on the size of this course, you will either be required to write a short reaction paper three times during the semester, or you will be required to complete a weekly quiz on the reading (on OWL). If reaction papers are used, you will be required to write a one page (300-350 word, informal, double-spaced, 1 inch margins) reaction to the reading 3 times during the term. Your reaction can be in any form – an informal essay, a letter, a journal entry, song lyrics, even a full-page cartoon or image that you draw. It should demonstrate that you have read/watched the assignments for that day, and reflected on them in the context of the course: how do they illustrate broader themes? How do they expand or challenge what we have already learned about this topic? How do you connect them to the weeks before? ALL reactions should be double-spaced with 2.54cm margins in 12-pt font (if text based) and should conform to the page requirements. The reaction paper is individual work; the group just indicates who is required to write a reaction paper before that class meeting. If weekly quizzes are used, these will be on OWL, 10-15 questions each week, based on the assignments that week, and due before class meets on Tuesday. The two lowest quiz grades will be dropped from your quiz average at the end of the term.

\*\*\*Due dates and times: reactions and quizzes are due on OWL before class begins on the date they are assigned. **These will not be accepted late.** If you need to switch dates for reaction papers, ask beforehand, or in the case of illness or emergencies, request a new date to write your reaction (on the material for a future week) as soon as possible.

**Primary Source Analysis:** Once during the semester you will write a Primary Source Analysis essay. This is an analytical assignment in which you will use what you have learned to analyze a primary historical source. Use the “7 questions” to help get your analysis off to a strong start and help you organize your thoughts. DO NOT, however, simply turn in answers to those questions – formulate an argument about the source and the significance of this document in African American history. Write a 3-4 page essay (double-spaced, 1 inch margins, 12 pt font) that supports your thesis argument with evidence drawn from course materials and discussions. You are strongly discouraged from using outside sources, as this assignment is designed to measure your ability to analyze sources yourself. If you simply

copy someone else's analysis, you will lose points. If you plagiarize someone else's analysis (copy it without giving them credit) you will fail this assignment and the course.

**Exam:** There will be one comprehensive final exam in this course. It is likely to include identifications, ordering, primary source analysis, and essays.

**Extra Credit:** If you attend one or two of the American Studies or History Lectures (I will announce these in lecture and on OWL) I will apply 2 extra points to your overall participation mark. Please see me at the lecture and be sure I note your attendance.

### **Course Schedule and Readings:**

12 weekly meetings, with lecture and discussion of readings and primary source at each. **This is a tentative preliminary list of topics and readings, it will change and more readings will be included.**

#### **1. Sept.14 - Introductions and Expectations. What is African American History?**

How to read in this course: secondary sources v. primary sources

How to write for this course: analytical arguments v. descriptive arguments

Weekly themes and assignments

How does decolonization/indigenization apply to this course?

Connection to the present: weekly highlight

#### **2. Sept. 21 – Concepts and History.** What is “race” and what is “racism”? How did slavery and colonialism help create them? Read:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnfKgffCZ7U> – Race Isn't Real – Vox.

\*Smedley and Smedley, “Race as Biology is Fiction, Racism as a Social Problem is Real” and

\*Omi and Winant, “Racial Formations”

\*\*Brian Resnick, “The limits of ancestry DNA tests, explained,” *Vox.com*, updated May 23, 2019

<https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2019/1/28/18194560/ancestry-dna-23-me-myheritage-science-explainer>

Video - TED Talk about race - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZtG9Z0Hquuc>

What is it that we want to know about when we ask about “race?” Lived experiences of racism?

Two ways race matters – how the world has treated you, and how you identify and ally with others/

Primary source: <https://nsjonline.com/article/2021/05/editorial-cartoon-critical-race-theory/>

<https://www.cagle.com/dick-wright/2021/04/critical-race-theory-monster>

Connection to the present: weekly highlight – controversy over “critical race theory” in US politics

<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/what-is-critical-race-theory-and-why-is-it-under-attack/2021/05>

<https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/what-is-critical-race-theory-and-why-are-people-so-upset-about-it>

> Optional: If you find social constructionism and “racial formation” to be difficult concepts, you may wish to watch this lecture online: Stuart Hall, “Race: the Floating Signifier,” available in 7 parts on Youtube.

**Due before class from ALL STUDENTS:** 1 page (300-350 words) response paper – what does it mean to say that race is a social construction or a social formation? Why is this an important concept for the study of history?

**3. Sept. 28: The Life and Times of Enslaved People** This week includes violently explicit texts.

Primary source:

\*selections from Northup, Solomon. *12 Years A Slave* (1853), Chapters 1, 3 and beginning of 4 (Eliza’s story), 6, 12, 18, 22. Find the full text online for free here: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/45631/45631-h/45631-h.htm>

Optional - Watch: “12 Years a Slave” (2013), 134 minutes

Connection to the present: meme about how recent slavery was. Tourism at plantations.

**4. Oct. 5 Free People of Color and the Abolition Movement.**

Primary sources:

\*David Walker’s “Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World”

\*Maria Stewart, “There Are No Chains So Galling as the Chains of Ignorance”

Connection to the present: abolitionism today

**5. Oct. 12 The Civil War & Reconstruction.**

Primary Sources:

\*“We Are Left in a More Unpleasant Condition than Our Former”

\*“Black Codes”

\*“Georgia Labor Contract”

Connection to the present: Confederate flags and statues in history, memory, current US cultural debates

**6. Oct. 19 The Violence of Jim Crow America: Lynching and Segregation**

This is a very intense and violently explicit set of readings and images.

\*Ida B. Wells-Barnett, “The Lynch Mob’s ‘Thread-Bare Lie’” and “A Negroe’s Life is a Very Cheap Thing in Georgia”

\*Theodore Rosengarten, *All God’s Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975, excerpts

\*\*View some of the images at \*\* <http://withoutsanctuary.org/main.html>

Connection to the present: Black Lives Matter, Covid-19, and disregard for black life, indigenous life OR something about what “integration” meant for Black kids, neighborhoods, and families

**7. Oct. 26. Survival, Resistance, Migration: African Americans Struggle Against Jim Crow**

Primary sources:

\*\*W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) (<http://www.bartleby.com/114/>): read the Forethought and chapters I, III, and VI

\*Booker T. Washington, “The Atlanta Compromise,”

\*Marcus Garvey, “Africa for the Africans”

\* Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain”

Connection to the present: What are the debates today about Black education and individual/collective “advancement?” Maybe the debate over rap, hip-hop and race representation?

## **8. Nov. 2 – no class, study week. Primary Source Analysis due Monday Nov. 8**

### **9. Nov. 9. The “Civil Rights Movement,” or, the Moment When White People Finally Start Paying Attention to the Black Freedom Struggle**

Primary source: \*Fannie Lou Hamer, “And I Said...”

Optional, watch “Selma” (2014), 128 minutes

Connection to the present: how have some of the victories of this era recently been reversed or challenged? New voting laws in the US that will limit black voting.

### **10. Nov. 16. The Black Freedom Movement in the Context of Global History and the Cold War**

\*John D’Emilio, “Remembering Bayard Rustin,” *OAH Magazine of History*, 2006, 12-14.

\*Mary L. Dudziak “Brown as a Cold War Case,” *The Journal of American History* 91, (June, 2004), pp. 32-42.

Primary sources:

\*Martin Luther King, “Vietnam: ‘A Time Comes When Silence is Betrayal’”

\*Bayard Rustin, “Nonviolence v. Jim Crow,” and “‘Through Non-Violence, Courage Displaces Fear,’ the Student Sit-Ins of 1960-61”

Connection to the present: Global context of BLM, Defund the Police, Prison Abolition – how are these also decolonizing movements? Or how might they become so?

### **11. Nov. 23. Say It Loud: Black Power**

Primary Sources:

\*Listen and read: \*Nina Simone, “Mississippi Goddam,” 1964

\*\* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVQjGGJVSXc>

\*Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet”

\*Black Panther Party, “We Believe This Racist Government Has Robbed Us,” the BPP Platform and Program

\*Michelle Wallace, “Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman” (this is appended to Matthews’ article in the pdf on OWL)

Connection to the present: how have some portrayals of BLM drawn on the old misrepresentations of Black Power leaders? How many of those people are still in prison or in exile?

### **12. Nov. 30. The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration, Policing, and Race in America Today**

Watch: 13th, Dir. Ava DuVernay, Netflix, 2016

Primary sources:

\*\*BLM “What We Believe” <http://blacklivesmatter.com/guiding-principles/>

How George Floyd changed the world

Connection to the present: what should we do about all the folks still in prison for marijuana violations?

If most of them were white, would we have already expunged those records and let them go home?

### **13. Dec. 7 Wrapping It Up: What Did You Learn?**

\*James Baldwin, “My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of Emancipation,” from *The Fire Next Time* (Vintage, 1962), 1-10

\* Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations”

<http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/05/the-case-forreparations/361631>

\*\*Desmond Cole, *The Skin We’re In* excerpt

\*\*Eternity Martis, *They Said This Would Be Fun*

\*\* Robyn Maynard, *Policing Black Lives*

Connection to the present: your turn – what has this course helped you to understand better about the world we live in today in 2021?

### **Use of Electronic Devices:**

Unless you are taking an accommodated exam that allows the use of a computer, no electronic devices (phones, tablets, computers) will be permitted during the final exam.

### **Additional Statements:**

Please review the Department of History Course Must-Knows document,

<https://www.history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/Docs/Department%20of%20History%20Course%20Must-Knows.pdf>, for additional information regarding:

- Academic Offences
- Accessibility Options
- Medical Issues
- Plagiarism
- Scholastic Offences
- Copyright
- Health and Wellness