

HISTORY 2135B
African American History
Winter 2024

Instructor: Laurel Clark Shire, Associate Professor
lshire@uwo.ca

This is a draft syllabus. Please see the course site on OWL for a final version.

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.

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

Due to the violent history of anti-black racism, the materials for this course are sometimes disturbing, explicitly violent, and difficult. You are ALWAYS free to stop engaging with them if you feel unable to safely continue.

Course Materials:

The following book will be used in this course (ordered some copies for Western bookstore, also available online in hard copy or e-book):

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

Each week, you will have things to watch, read, listen to, and/or write about before you arrive in class on Monday morning. 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.

Readings: the readings for this course are either in the Kendi & Blain book or 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. If that presents a financial challenge for you, please see me for help with access.

Methods of Evaluation:

Participation in discussions, in person: 25%

Reaction papers/Weekly Quizzes **on lecture and reading**: 20%

Midterm: 20%

Final Exam: 35%

Students must **submit every assignment and exam** in this course in order to pass.

Attendance in person is required in this course. Attendance is vital so that we can develop a supportive, collegial classroom community in which to study and discuss some very difficult and important topics. If you don't attend regularly, then you and your classmates will not get to know each other well enough to enable that kind of classroom community. It makes an enormous difference.

If you are ill, please do not come to class. If you have a cold, please wear a mask if you are able to do so, and I will do the same. **If you wish to be excused from class**, you must provide evidence to the Academic Counseling office in your home faculty that you were ill, or attending a medical appointment or participating in a University athletics match, or unable to attend due to a personal emergency. Unexcused absences, as well as frequent tardiness, will harm your participation grade and will hamper your ability to be successful in the course. It is up to you to provide explanations and supporting documentation to Academic Counseling, I will not remind you to provide them and I cannot accept them from you directly (to ensure privacy, confidentiality, and equity).

Students are expected to be prepared to discuss the readings assigned for each class meeting. There may be discussion questions, pop quizzes, or other weekly assessments in class, which will be marked as part of your participation grade. Our discussions will be as good, or as bad, as you make them. The tenor, value, and engagement of each seminar depends entirely on the preparation, attitudes, and generosity of each of you.

After the first week, we will meet 12 times, so each class meeting will be an opportunity for you to earn up to 1.92% of your 25% participation mark, or 7.7% out of 100%. You will earn all 7.7 points by attending on time, leaving on time, and **listening and participating** actively and respectfully in the discussion, being mindful not to dominate or derail it. I will take note each week of who is listening actively to your peers, who has useful and relevant things to contribute, who is distracted by their devices, and who is just taking up space. You will be marked accordingly: each week, half your participation mark is attendance, and the other half is how well you listened, contributed, and engaged. If you feel anxiety about speaking in class, please discuss your options with me as soon as you enroll in

the course. I have many strategies that I have used in the past to help shy or anxious students earn their full participation marks, and I will be very happy to work with you.

Please note that missing one class will result in a 0% for participation that week – and thus will reduce your best possible total participation mark to 92.3%, even if you are engaged at every other meeting. Missing two will reduce that best possible participation mark to 84.6%, missing 3 classes will reduce it to 76.9%, missing 4 classes will reduce it to 69.2%, and so on. Please understand how this math works before you skip class. An excused absence will not affect your grade, but it will change the way your other weekly participation scores are calculated (rather than 13 weeks to earn 100 points, you will only have 12, after 1 excused absence, for example, making each week worth more – 8.3 points rather than 7.7, thereafter).

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) into an email that you share with me prior to class discussion. Participation in class 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? Cumulative participation marks will be posted every 4th week in Gradebook on OWL.

Late Assignments: Some assignments will not be accepted after the deadline, such as weekly quizzes or reactions (see below). Unless you receive approval from academic counseling, late assignments will only 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 through Academic Counseling well in advance.

Short Reaction Papers/Weekly Online Quizzes: Each week, you will either be required to write a short reaction paper, or you will be required to complete a weekly quiz on the reading (the week's assignment will be on OWL). THESE ARE DUE BEFORE CLASS MEETS AND WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED LATE. When reaction papers are assigned, you will be required to write a one page (300-350 word, informal, double-spaced, 1 inch margins) reaction to the readings and other materials that week – there will be a specific writing prompt given on OWL. 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 text-based reactions should be double-spaced with 2.54cm margins in 12-pt font (if text based) and should conform to the page requirements. Please turn these in on OWL in either a .pdf or .docx format. When weekly quizzes are assigned, these will be on OWL, 10-15 questions each week, based on the assignments that week, and **due before class meets**. The two lowest quiz/reaction 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.**

Midterm: On DATE TBA you will write an exam about the history we have studied thus far. The format will be discussed prior to the exam.

Final Exam: There will be one comprehensive final exam in this course.

Extra Credit: If you attend one or two of the American Studies or History Speakers' talks (I will announce these in lecture and on OWL) I will apply up to 2 extra points to your overall participation mark (1 per lecture you attend). Please see me at the lecture and be sure I note your attendance. (Or screenshot yourself in the Zoom room and send that to me).

Course Schedule and Readings:

Mondays in Winter 2024: Jan 8- April 8

Jan. 8 - Introductions and Expectations. What is African American History?

Weekly themes and assignments

How does decolonization/indigenization apply to this course?

Connection to the present: weekly highlight

Jan. 15: Concepts and History. What is "race" and what is "racism"? How did slavery and colonialism help create them?

Read:

Kendi & Blain, Introduction (pp. xiii-xvii) and selections from Part One, pages 3-7 (Arrival), 11-14 (Whipped for Lying with a Black Woman), 18-21 (Black Women's Labor), 30-33 (Unfree Labor), 13 pages

*Omi and Winant, "Racial Formations" (pp. 9-15) 6pp

Optional: *Smedley and Smedley, "Race as Biology is Fiction, Racism as a Social Problem is Real" (pp. 16-26, 8.5pp of text)

Connection to the present: Primary source: Ancestry and 23 and Me Advertisements

**Brian Resnick, "The limits of ancestry DNA tests, explained," *Vox.com*, updated May 23, 2019 Watch: <https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2019/1/28/18194560/ancestry-dna-23-me-myheritagescience-explainer>

Due before class from ALL STUDENTS: brief response (150-200 words) – 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?

Jan. 22. The Life and Times of Enslaved People This week includes explicitly violent texts. Reading: Kendi & Blain, selections from Parts Two, Three, and Four - pages 39-42, 47-67, 77-92, 96-100, 111-114, 119-125, 135-140 (47 pages) Primary source:

*selections from Northrup, 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/45631/45631h/45631-h.htm>

Optional - Watch: "12 Years a Slave" (2013), 134 minutes Connection to the present: Tourism at former plantations.

Jan. 29. Free People of Color and the Abolition Movement.

Reading: Kendi & Blain, selections from Parts Five and Six, pages 153-180, 187-217 (57 pp)

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

Feb. 5. The Civil War & Reconstruction.

Reading: Kendi & Blain, selections from Part Seven, 225-243 (18 pp) Primary

Sources:

*"We Are Left in a More Unpleasant Condition than Our Former" *"Black Codes"

**"Georgia Labor Contract"

Watch: "Glory" (1989), 122 minutes (Netflix)

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

Feb. 12. The Violence of Jim Crow America: Lynching and Segregation This is a very intense and explicitly violent set of readings and images.

Reading: Kendi & Blain, selections from Part Seven, 244-261 and Part Eight, 271-282 (28pp) Primary sources:

*Ida B. Wells-Barnett, "The Lynch Mob's 'Thread-Bare Lie'" and "A Negro'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 Optional, as these are disturbing, violent, and explicit - **View some of the Lynching images at **

<http://withoutsanctuary.org/main.html>

Recommended read: Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns* (nonfiction, but almost reads like a novel)

Connection to the present: see OWL

Feb. 19 – no class, reading week

Feb. 26. Survival, Resistance, Migration: African Americans Struggle Against Jim Crow

Reading: Kendi & Blain, selections from Part Eight, 267-270, 283-286 (7 pages) 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”

Optional Watch: “The 24th” (2020), 113 minutes (Amazon Prime rental)

Connection to the present: debates today about Black education and individual/collective “advancement.”

March 4. Black Arts and Black Artists: from the Harlem Renaissance to the 1970s Kendi & Blain, pages 287-305, and Part Nine 307-324 (35 pages) Primary sources:

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

*Alain Locke, “The New Negro”

*Zora Neale Hurston, selected short stories

Watch: “Billie” (2019), 98 minutes, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8019486/> (Amazon Prime)

Connection: Black arts and artists today

March 11. The “Civil Rights Movement,” or, the Moment When White People Finally Start Paying Attention to the Black Freedom Struggle

Reading: Kendi & Blain, Part Nine, 325-329 (5 pages)

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

*Fannie Lou Hamer, “And I Said...”

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

Watch: “John Lewis: Good Trouble” (2020), 97 minutes (YouTube rental)

Connection to the present: the GOP attack on voting rights since 2013

March 18. The Black Freedom Movement in the Context of Global History and the Cold War

*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’” (1967)

*Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet” (1964)

Optional watch: “Brother Outsider,” (2002), 83 minutes (Vimeo) and/or “MLK/FBI” (2021), 104 minutes

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?

March 25. Say It Loud: Black Power Reading: Kendi &

Blain, Part Nine, 330-349 (20 pages) Primary Sources:

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

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

*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)

Watch: “Judas and the Black Messiah” (2021), 125 minutes

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?

April 1. The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration, Policing, and Race in America Today

Reading: Kendi & Blain, Part Ten, 351-386 (35pp)

If you’ve never seen it, watch: 13th, Dir. Ava DuVernay, Netflix, 2016 Primary sources

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

Connection to the present: Anti-black violence at the hands of the state and police; 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?

April 8. 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>

Primary sources: anti-black racism at Western and in Canada

**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?

Additional Statements

Communication policies:

The best way to reach me is email, lshire@uwo.ca (which pops to profshire@gmail.com). Please feel free to drop in during office hours, which is time set aside for you to come and speak with me about anything related to the course, or to your academic career. I also encourage you to email me to set up an appointment anytime. I am happy to meet over Zoom or in person at a time that will work for both of us.

Classroom behavior:

Please be on time for class, and please be respectful of me and your peers at all times. We will take a break about 75 minutes into class, and if possible please use that opportunity to use the washroom without leaving class while it’s in session. You may eat and drink in class, so long as you clean up after yourself, and are not disruptive to the discussion.

Use of electronic devices:

Please do not use electronic devices for tasks unrelated to the seminar discussion during class. If you must access the reading that week on a screen, be sure to stay on task and turn off any notifications or sounds that might distract you and those around you. If you are off task on a device during class, that will be obvious to me and everyone else around you, and you will receive a zero for participation that day. You will not be allowed access to electronic devices during pop quizzes, tests or exams. Do not record audio or video of our class meetings without written permission from me and from your classmates.

Use of generative AI tools: All work submitted in this course must be your own. You may not make use of generative AI tools like ChatGPT for any assignments in this course. Please review the Department of History's shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at: https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.