

Rhode Island College
Department of History
History 334
Black Experience in America
Fall Semester

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“So long as we confine our conception of the political to activity that is openly declared we are driven to conclude that subordinate groups essentially lack a political life or that what political life they do have is restricted to those exceptional moments of popular explosion. To do so is to miss the immense political terrain that lies between quiescence and revolt and that for better or worse, is the political environment of subject classes. It is to focus on the visible coastline of politics and miss the continent that lies beyond.”

James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*

“Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded.

Karl Marx, *Capital*

“Callin' out around the world are you ready for a brand new beat? Summer's here and the time is right For dancin' in the streets. They're dancin' in Chicago Down in New Orleans Up in New York City.

Martha and the Vandellas, *Dancing in the Street*

Scope and Purpose:

The Black Experience introduces and identifies the major themes in African American history and provides a conceptual framework to analyze thematic content in greater depth. Although course content will focus on black America's turbulent past, students will gain a greater understanding of present conditions and future challenges. Students are required to read and interpret the rich and varied course materials and become familiar with the historiography of pivotal social, cultural, political, and economic events. As expected, students will strengthen their critical skills and sense of historical evaluation.

Structure:

History 334 meets two times per week for 90 minute class sessions. Although classroom instruction maintains a lecture format, class discussion is essential. Accordingly, students must read all assignments as scheduled and prepare comments and questions on such readings.

Student Responsibilities and Evaluation:

Students are expected to come to class everyday, on time, prepared and ready to participate and learn. Students are responsible for all required readings and must

participate in class presentations/discussion as a means of demonstrating their understanding of course themes and concepts. Three critical question essays will serve as the examinations for this course. Students will be provided essay questions one week before the essay is due. This is a take-home exercise. If you miss an essay deadline due to illness or accident, you must provide the instructor with written documentation; an unexcused absence results in a failing grade. The remaining percentage of your grade will reflect your performance on a major written assignment and class presentations. The specifics of the written assignment are covered in a separate section of the syllabus. The presentations involve a short roundtable discussion on selected themes in the African American experience. Please note that no make-up dates will be given or late papers accepted, unless arrangements have been made before the due date.

Research Paper: Newark: Anatomy of a Riot Project

During the summer of 1967, Newark, New Jersey experienced one of the most explosive urban race riots in American history. 2007 marked the 40th anniversary of the event and, as part of the commemoration; scholars have asked a new set of questions regarding the origins and significance. The result of this renewed interest is an outpouring of historical studies that place the riot in the broader context of post World War II public policy decisions that had tremendous impact on Newark's economy and patterns of residential segregation. In this writing assignment, you will consider the city's troubled racial history and the volatile summer of 1967. The sources of information for your paper are traditional secondary accounts of the event and a website created by the *Newark Star Ledger* that provides both primary and secondary accounts of the event. During the opening weeks of class, the instructor will introduce you to the site and explain the precise nature of the writing assignment. The link is <http://www.nj.com/newark1967/>.

Student Portfolios and Programmatic Assessment:

During the first class meeting, the instructor will distribute a matrix clearly stating which departmental outcomes are met by this course. If you plan to submit a course artifact for your portfolio, please make arrangements with the instructor to obtain his signature on a clean copy of the assignment.

Plagiarism:

The History Department wishes to inform all students of its policies and procedures with respect to Academic Honesty. Please find attached to the syllabus the Department's Academic Honesty Policy. Read it carefully.

Disability Statement:

If you have any special needs or problems such as learning disabilities or physical impairments that may interfere with your ability to learn and to succeed in this course, please talk to me and we can arrange reasonable accommodations.

Course Grade Summary:

Critical Essay #1	20%
Critical Essay #2	20%

Critical Essay #3	20%
Newark: Anatomy of a Riot Project	30%
Book Review	10%

Required Reading:

Darlene Clark Hine, et al., *African Americans: A Concise History* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2010).

Peter H. Wood, *Strange New Land: Africans in Colonial America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1996).

In addition to these required readings, the instructor will provide several handouts. Please check the syllabus for due dates on these reading assignments.

Topics and Required Reading Schedule:

Week 1. August 30. Introduction: An Opening Conversation on Race, Class, and Culture. September 1. Major Themes and Concepts in African American History and Life. Required Reading: Begin Wood, *Strange New Land*.

Week 2. September 6. No Class. September 8. African Beginnings. *African Americans*, Chapters 1 and 2 and Wood, *Strange New Land*.

Week 3. September 13. The Politics of Slavery: From Colonial Times to 1860. *African Americans*, Chapters 3 and 4 and Wood, *Strange New Land*. September 15. *African Americans*, Chapters 5 and 6 and Wood, *Strange New Land*.

Week 4. September 20. The Politics of Slavery: From Colonial Times to 1860. *African Americans*, Chapters 7 and 8. **Book Review Due September 20.** September 22. *African Americans*, Chapters 9 and 10.

Week 5. September 27. The Politics of Emancipation: African Americans and the Civil War. *African Americans*, Chapters 11 and 12. September 29. The Politics of Emancipation, 1860-1877. *African Americans*, Chapter 13.

Week 6. October 4. The Politics of Survival, 1877-1910. **Essay #1 Due.** *African Americans*, Chapter 14. October 6. *African Americans*, Chapters 15.

Week 7. October 11. No Class. October 13. The Politics of Entrée, 1910-1938. *African Americans*, Chapter 16.

Week 8. October 18. The Politics of Entrée, 1910-1938. *African Americans*, Chapters 17 and 18. October 20. The Politics of Reform, 1938-1955. *African Americans*, Chapters 19 and 20.

Week 9. October 25. The Politics of Participation, 1955-1965. *African Americans*, Chapter 21. October 27. Kelley, *Race Rebels*, pp. 55-100.

Week 10. November 1. **Essay #2 Due.** 1965, The Turning Point: The American War in Vietnam and the Civil Rights Movement. November 3. The Politics of Liberation, 1965-1980. The Revolt of the Black Athlete. Handouts.

Week 11. November 8. The Politics of Liberation, 1965-1980. *African Americans*, Chapter 22. November 10. No Class.

Week 12. November 15. The Politics of Backlash, 1980-Present. *African Americans*, Chapter 23. November 17. *African Americans*, Chapter 24.

Week 13. November 22. The Election of Barack Obama. *African Americans*, pp.641-658. November 24. The Politics of Race and Class. Kelley, *Race Rebels*, pp. 1-53

Week 14. November 29. The Politics of Race and Class. Kelley, *Race Rebels*, pp. 1-53. December 1. Kelley, *Race Rebels*, pp. 183-227.

Week 15. December 6. Newark Riots Roundtable discussion and **Paper Due: December 6.** December 8. Conclusion and Final Assessment.

Final Exam. **Essay #3 Due TBA.**

Voices: Required Reading

Dysentery (or the Bloody Flux)	p. 39
A Description of an 18 th Century Virginia Plantation	p. 60
Boston's Slaves Link Their Freedom of American Liberty	p.83
Absalom Jones Petitions Congress	p. 110
Frederick Douglass on the Readiness of Masters	p. 132
A Black Woman Speaks Out	p. 180
Martin R. Delaney Describes His Vision	p. 204
African Americans Respond to the Fugitive Slave Law	p. 216
A Black Nurse on the Horrors of War	p. 250
A Northern Black Woman on Teaching Freedom	p. 276
Black Leaders Support the Passage of a Civil Rights Act	p. 302
Cash and Debt for the Black Cotton Farmer	p. 335
Black Men in Battle in Cuba	p. 358
DuBois on Being Black in America	p. 378
The Negro National Anthem	p. 412
Philip Randolph Inspires a Young Black Activist	p. 449
Margaret Walker on Black Culture	p. 470
William H. Hastie Resigns in Protest	p. 496
Bernice Johnson Reagon on How to Raise a Freedom	p. 532
The Black Panther Party Platform	p. 552
Black Women in Defense of Themselves	p. 586