The Black Atlantic: African Migration and Modern Culture  
(HONORS 200-016)  
MW 3.30-4.45PM  
HON 195  
Professor S. Ani Mukherji  
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Honors 151, Honors College  
Office Hours: Tuesday, 10-11AM; Wednesday, 1-3PM

African Delegation at 1927 League Against Imperialism Congress, Brussels

Course Description

What does it mean to be modern? The last four centuries of human history witnessed remarkable transformations in government, economy, society, and culture. These changes are often understood according to a model in which philosophical and scientific enlightenment led the way to social, economic, and political progress. Yet, during this same period, European powers unleashed slavery, colonial conquest, and genocidal violence onto the world. Nowhere was this profound contradiction more clear than in the lives and thought of Black people in Europe, Africa, North America, and the Caribbean.

This course will explore the ambiguous nature of the modern era from the perspective of the Black Atlantic, from the slave narrative of Olaudah Equiano to the contemporary dub poetry of Linton Kwesi Johnson. We will ask: How have Black artists, writers, and thinkers perceived their experiences? What types of political thought and cultural expression have they developed? And, finally, how have they sought to transcend and to transform the limits of the modern world?
Required Reading

- Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*
  ISBN: 978-0142437162
- Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus*
  ISBN: 978-0691147963
- W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dark Princess*
  ISBN: 978-0878057658
- Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*
  ISBN: 978-0802143006
- Various online readings, per course schedule
  *Online reading should be printed out and brought to seminar.*

Viewing

- Kenneth Macpherson, *Borderline*
- Ousmane Sembene, *Black Girl*
- Branwen Okpako, *Valley of the Innocent*

Course Assignments

I. **Active participation in class and online responses to other students’ reflections**
   [15% of the final grade]

Seminars are intended to be active sites of inquiry and sharing. Students are expected to complete ALL assigned readings, come to every class with ideas and questions about the reading, and participate in discussions. Completing the reading does not mean that your eyes passed over the words; rather, you should be able to state the major point the author intended to make, to evaluate how well the author accomplished this task, and to connect the new evidence and interpretations with previous readings.

**GRADING**

**A** – frequent, unprompted class participation that demonstrates an engagement with assigned texts and the ideas of fellow students. Regularly introduces new questions, ideas, and perspectives. In-class writing is always clear and thoughtful. Frequent comments on other student’s posts on the online discussion forum. No absences.

**B** – regular class participation that demonstrates an engagement with assigned texts and ideas of fellow students. In-class writing demonstrates reading of the assigned texts and an honest attempt to understand texts.

**C** – occasional class participation. In-class discussion and writing demonstrates a familiarity with the texts and lectures, but no depth of engagement.

**F** – more than three unexcused absences; little or no active participation in class.
II. Two short online reflections (300-500 words) on the assigned reading posted to the course website
   [15% of the final grade]

   Over the course of the quarter, students must post TWO short reflections to the class discussion forum. These posts should be treated as formal writing assignments.

   Each post should have a clear argument that synthesizes ALL of the assigned readings for the week or answer the posted question for the week. The post SHOULD NOT just summarize the reading. Rather, you should make your own argument about the topic for the week BASED on the arguments and evidence in the assigned reading and classroom discussions.

   At the conclusion of each post, you should pose TWO discussion questions for the class to consider. A good discussion question should spark a conversation or debate, bringing up the big issues from the readings.

   **THESE MUST BE POSTED BEFORE 6PM ON TUESDAY.**

   You are free to choose which two weeks you would like to post your reflections. You are encouraged, however, to complete the reflections early in the semester, both to get feedback on your writing and to clear your schedule for later in the semester when your energies should be dedicated to the final essay.

III. Two short formal papers (3-4 pages, 800-1000 words); students will be able to revise these papers for a higher grade
   [40% of the final grade]

   At the conclusion of the first two units of this seminar, you will be given a set of questions about the major themes dealt with in each unit. Using the insights gained from the course readings and classroom discussions, you will be asked to answer one of these questions. You will have at least 72 hours to produce this work.

   Students will be encouraged to revise these papers in order to clarify their ideas and arguments; improve their prose; and clean up any remaining grammatical or typographical errors. If students choose to revise their paper, the final grade for the paper will be calculated as follows: (First Revision * 33%, +Second Revision * 67%)
IV. One longer formal paper (5-7 pages, ~1500 words)  
[30% of the final grade]

For the final essay, you are asked to theorize some aspect or aspects of modernity and Africans in the West. “Theory,” as I mean it here, refers to the practice of making wider claims about (1) the characteristics of a set of texts, (2) the nature of an idea or ideas, and/or (3) the qualities of certain practices.

Your essay should consider at least one of the writers, artists, or thinkers from this course (e.g. Equiano, Cugoano, Du Bois, Fanon). All topics must be approved by the instructor, either in class or during office hours.

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR FORMAL WRITING

Content: All written work should insightfully and innovatively address its subject matter. Argumentative essays should state a clear, substantive, contestable, and precise claim early and support this claim with appropriate evidence.

Clarity: Written work should present information in a clear, logical fashion. In particular, paragraphs should typically begin with precise topic sentences, followed by clear, well-organized sentences that support the topic sentence. The writer should use transitional words and phrases effectively to guide the reader through the information.

Readability: Written work should engage the reader with lively, concise writing and should generally lack typographical errors, as well as lapses in tone, register, punctuation, spelling, word choice, and grammar. Written work should effectively incorporate source material with proper use of attribution, paraphrases, and quotations. Longer essays should begin with an engaging introduction and include a satisfying conclusion. Essays also should have an attractive, professional appearance.
Course Schedule

**Week One: Introductions**

4 September

- Slideshow: *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, vol. III

**UNIT ONE: From the Early Modern Period to 1850**

**Week Two: Africa and Europe—Early Modern Exchanges**

9 September

- Paul Gilroy, “The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity”

11 September

- David Northrup, *Africa’s Discovery of Europe, 1450-1850*, pp. 115-156

**Week Three: Liberty and Slavery I**

16 September

- Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, pp. 31-112

18 September

- Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, pp. 113-236

**Week Four: Liberty and Slavery II**

23 September

- Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, 9-54


25 September

- Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, 54-111


- OPTIONAL: Anthony Bogues, “The Political Thought of Quobna Cugoano”
Week Five: Race and Gender, Bodies and Lives—“The Hottentot Venus”

30 September

- Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus*, 1-87

2 October

- Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus*, 87-180

Week Six: A Servant, a Poet, and Race in Imperial Russia—Gannibal and Pushkin

7 October

- A.S. Pushkin, “Peter the Great’s Blackamoor”
- N.K. Teletova, “A.P. Gannibal”

9 October

- David Bethea, “How Black was Pushkin? Otherness and Self-creation”
- Richard Borden, “Making a True Image: Blackness and Pushkin Portraits”

Week Seven: Unit One Wrap – Early Modern Africans in the Western World

14 October

- Re-read: Gilroy, “The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity”

16 October

- Paper #1 Workshops
UNIT TWO: Empire, Anticolonialism, and the New Negro, 1900-1945

Week Eight: Metropoles and Ports I—Imperial Circulation of Ideas and Lives

21 October

- Tyler Stovall, “Murder in Montmarte: Race, Sex and Crime in Jazz Age Paris”

23 October

- Claude McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, [section on life in Europe]
- Brent Hayes Edwards, “The Shadow of Shadows”

Week Nine: Metropoles and Ports II—Imperial Circulation of Ideas and Lives

28 October


30 October

- W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dark Princess*, books 3-4
  Challenge reading: Dohra Ahmad,

Week Ten: The Black Body and Modernism in the Western World

4 November

- Kenneth Macpherson, *Borderline* (1930)
- Hazel Carby, “Body and Soul of Modernism”

6 November

- James Smalls, “Feral Benga’s Body”

Week Eleven: Black Anticolonialism and the End of White Supremacy?

11 November

- Susan Pennybacker, “George Padmore and London”

13 November

- Paper #2 Workshop
UNIT THREE: The Empire Strikes Back: 1945-present

Week Twelve: “Look, a Negro!” and Black Girl – Theorizing Africans in Post-War Europe I

18 November

➢ Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 7-140

20 November

➢ Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 210-232
➢ Screening: Ousmane Sembene, Black Girl (1966)

Week Thirteen: “Look, a Negro!” and Black Girl – Theorizing Africans in Post-War Europe II

26 November

➢ Lewis Gordon, Fanon and the Crisis of European Man, 5-35

Week Fourteen: Race, Diaspora, and Contemporary Black Europe

2 December


4 December

➢ Michelle Wright, “Middle Passage Blackness and its Diasporic Discontents: The Case for a Post-War Epistemology”
➢ Kwame Nimako and Stephen Small, “Theorizing Black Europe and African Diaspora”

Week Fifteen: Race Riots/Urban Uprisings in Contemporary Europe

9 December

➢ Race and Class Editors, Excerpts from special October 1981 issue on the “Brixton Riots”
➢ Linton Kwesi Johnson, “Di Great Insohreckshan” and selections from Mi Revalueshanary Fren

➢ OPTIONAL: Ranajit Guha, “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency,” 1-3

11 December

➢ Final Paper Workshops