

Philosophy and the African-American Experience: African-American Philosophy
Course Number: H195 / Section: 001

Professor Lewis R. Gordon / Email: gordonl@temple.edu

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:10 PM to 2:30 PM

206 Anderson Hall, Temple University

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This course is an intermediate-level exploration of some of the central themes and scholars in African-American philosophy.

Required Books:

W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. Dover. ISBN: 0486280411

Anna Julia Cooper. *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*. Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN: 0847684083

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Grove Press. ISBN: 0802150845

Cornel West, *Prophesy, Deliverance!* Westminster. ISBN: 0664223435

John Pittman. *African-American Perspectives on Philosophy*. Routledge. ISBN: 0415916402

Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race*. Temple UP. ISBN: 1566392659

Lucius T. Outlaw, *On Race and Philosophy*. Routledge. ISBN: 041591535X

Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*. Cornell UP. ISBN: 0801484634

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*. Routledge. ISBN: 0415924847

Lewis Gordon, *Existential Africana*. Routledge. ISBN: # ISBN: 0415926440

Recommended books and articles:

Gordon, Lewis R (ed.). 1997. *Existence in Black: A Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*. Routledge.

Henry, Paget. 2000. *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy*. Routledge.

Lott, Tommy and John Pittman (eds.). 2003. *A Companion to African-American Philosophy*. Blackwell's.

Neves, Walter A. and Joseph F. Powell, Erik G. Ozolins. 1999. "Modern Human Origins as Seen from the Peripheries." *The Journal of Human Evolution* 37, no. 1 (July): 129–133.

Neves, Walter A., André Prous, Rolando González-José, Renato Kipnis, Joseph Powell. 2003. "Early Holocene Human Skeletal Remains from Santana do Riacho, Brazil: Implications for the Settlement of the New World." *Journal of Human Evolution* 45, no. 1 (July): 759–782.

Paul Taylor. 2004. *Race: A Philosophical Introduction*. Polity /Blackwell.

George Yancy, *African-American Philosophers: 17 Conversations*. Routledge.

Requirements: You will be required to submit 5 out of 7 assigned one-page papers, attend the opening session, Thursday evening plenary discussion on Africana philosophy, and at least 2 sessions of the Africana Philosophy conference (April 7–8, 2005), and then complete a take-home examination, which will be assigned on the final day of class. The 5 papers will constitute 50 percent of your grade; class participation and attendance will constitute 10 percent; and the final take-home examination will be the remaining 35 percent.

Sessions

Topics and assigned readings

- 1/18 Introduction: What is Philosophy, Africana Philosophy, and African-American Philosophy? *Recommended reading*: Gordon, *Existential Africana*, chap. 1; Pittman and Lott, *A Companion to African-American Philosophy* (library); and chapter on African-American philosophy in Paget Henry's *Caliban's Reason* (library)
- 1/20 Discussion: The conceptual emergence of "Africa" and "America" and their convergence in "Black American" and subsequently "African American." *Recommended reading*: Walter Neves et al, "Modern Human Origins as Seen from the Peripheries," *The Journal of Human Evolution* 37, no. 1 (July 1999): 129–133 and "Early Holocene Human Skeletal Remains from Santana do Riacho, Brazil: Implications for the Settlement of the New World," *Journal of Human Evolution* 45, no. 1 (July 2003): 759–782. Also, Tzevan Todorov, *The Conquest of America* (library) and Frank Kirkland's essay on modernism in Pittman's *African-American Perspectives on Philosophy*

Part I: Classic Founding Texts

- 1/25 W.E.B. Du Bois and the problem of being a problem and the consciousness thereby stimulated. *Reading*: Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. *Recommended reading*: Du Bois, "The Conservation of the Races" and *Darkwater*
- 1/27 Continued discussion of Du Bois
- 2/1 Anna Julia Cooper and the question of "worth." *Reading*: Cooper, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, selections from *A Voice from the South*
- 2/3 Cooper continued and Alain Locke and "the New Negro" and the imperatives of value. *Readings*: Locke, "The New Negro" and "Values and Imperatives" (handout)
- 2/8 Frantz Fanon's existential sociogenetic critique of method and the dialectics of recognition. *Readings*: Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Intro. And chap. 1)
- 2/10 Fanon continued—*Black Skin, White Masks* (Chapters 2–5)
- 2/15 Fanon continued—*Black Skin* (chapters 6 through conclusion)

Part II: Contemporary African-American Philosophy

- 2/17 Pragmatism, Cornel West, and prophetic pragmatism. *Readings*: "What's the Use of Calling Du Bois a Pragmatist?" (handout); Leonard Harris on pragmatism (handout); C. West, *Prophesy, Deliverance!* (introduction)
- 2/22 Discussion with Doug Ficek recapitulating part I and on prophetic pragmatism. *Reading*: West, *Prophesy* (first half)
- 2/24 Cornel West continued through conclusion. *Readings*: *Prophesy!* (second half) and "Nihilism in the Black Community" (handout)
- 3/1 African-American analytical philosophy and the problem of "race." *Readings*: articles by Pittman, Appiah, and Lott in Pittman's *African-American Perspectives on Philosophy*; Appiah, "The Illusion of Race" (handout). *Recommended*: Paul Taylor, *Race*.
- 3/3 African-American analytical philosophy and the problem of race continued—Naomi Zack's philosophy of mixed race and racelessness. *Reading*: Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race*.
- 3/8 and 3/10 Spring recess
- 3/15 African-American analytical philosophy continued—problems of race, xenophobia, respect, and social justice. *Readings*: Zack's *Race and Mixed-Race* and the rest of articles in Pittman's *African-American Perspectives* and Doug Ficek's "Rawls, Race, and Reparations" (handout)
- 3/17 African-American analytical philosophical critique of white normativity: Charles Mills. *Reading*: Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*.

- 3/22 African-American critical theory—importance of social diagnostics of African-American life, Lucius T. Outlaw. *Reading*: Outlaw, *On Race and Philosophy*.
- 3/24 African-American poststructuralism—epistemic conditions of African-American life. *Readings*: Outlaw, *On Race and Philosophy*; C. West, “Genealogy of Modern Racism” (from *Prophesy!*); George Yancy, “A Foucauldian (Genealogical) Reading of Whiteness” (handout); Sylvia Wynter “On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of *Des tre*: Black Studies Toward the Human Project” (handout)
- 3/29 Postmodernism and African-American feminist thought—hooks and Collins. *Readings*: “Black Postmodernism” (bell hooks/Gloria Watkins) and Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (entirety).
- 3/31 Black feminist thought continued. *Readings*: Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*; Jacquelyn Grant, “Womanist Theology”(handout); and Joy James, selection from *Transcending the Talented Tenth* (handout).
- 4/5 African-American queer studies and concluding discussions of gender, sex, and sexuality. *Reading*: David Fryer, “African-American Queer Studies” (handout).
- 4/7–8 Africana Philosophy Conference (attend opening session, evening plenary discussion on Africana philosophy, and at least one of the other sessions, although attending most of the conference is encouraged since themes and arguments in this course will be discussed throughout).
- 4/12 African-American existentialism—introduction. *Readings*: Gordon, *Existential Africana*, chap. 1; Paget Henry, “African Existentialism” and “Rastafarianism and Dread” (handouts) and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “The Cry of the Self and the Call from the Other” (handout). *Recommended*: Gordon (ed.), *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*. Also: re-read *Black Skin, White Masks*.
- 4/14 Doug Ficek will lead discussion of Lewis Gordon’s existential philosophy. *Reading*: Gordon, *Existential Africana*.
- 4/19 African-American phenomenology. *Reading*: Gordon, *Existential Africana*, chap. 4.
- 4/21 Doug Ficek will lead concluding discussion of Gordon and recapitulation of Part II.
- 4/26 Post-Europeanism and post-continentalism in African-American philosophy. *Readings*: Kenneth Knies, “The Idea of Post-European Science: An Essay on Phenomenology and Africana Studies” and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Toward a Critique of Continental Reason: Africana Studies and the Decolonization of Imperial Cartographies in the Americas” (handouts).
- 4/28 Concluding discussion and assignment of take-home examination.