



Figure 1 "The Library" (1960) by Jacob Lawrence

PHIL 226—African-American Philosophy

Professor: Corey Beckford

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Meeting Time & Location: N/A

Office hours: (book on Calendy via <https://www.coreybeckford.org/office-hours>)

Course Description:

“Development of the African-American intellectual tradition. Study of the work of such figures as Equiano, Douglass, Cooper, Blyden, DuBois, and Hurston.” This is the stated course description, so the following is additional background, questions, and themes which will structure our engagement with African-American Philosophy.

What is African American Philosophy, and why is it a distinctive area of Philosophy in general? African American Philosophy is a branch of Africana Philosophy that deals with major issues and problems for Black or African Americans living in the United States, and abroad in Western Europe. The major issues and problems stem primarily from the history of Trans-Atlantic Slavery and White Supremacy in the United States, consisting of, but not limited to, anti-Black racism, social death, economic exploitation, and political domination. Additionally, there are at least overarching three major themes of African American Philosophy: articulation of Black experience(s), resistance against anti-Blackness, and transformation of perspectives on the major issues.

To better understand how African American philosophers have wrestled with such issues, we will explore philosophical works in epistemology, metaphysics, aesthetics, politics, law, and sociology. Such a broad investigation will allow us to better understand the themes of articulation, resistance, and transformation in African American Philosophy at large. Overtime, we will come to understand how thinkers spread out across time, spanning from the 1800s to 2010s, have articulated their experiences as Black people, and resisted systems of political domination, social oppression, and existential abjection using philosophical methods of argumentation. And finally, how African American philosophers as such have continually transformed their thinking about those experiences, and their relation to not only White supremacy in the United States and Western Europe, but globally.

Learning Goals

- To develop a historical understanding of African American Philosophy.
- To critically engage the assigned readings, keeping an open mind to each author’s philosophical contributions to our discussion of African American Philosophy, and the three themes disclosed.
- Develop the habit of active, slow reading. *By active reading*, I mean frequently asking yourself how the parts of the essay or chapter are connected, support or not support the author’s argument(s), and whether something could be better stated or left out entirely. *By slow reading*, I mean carefully reading each line, paragraph, and footnote of your assigned reading.
- Actively participate in discussions with your peers.

Course Policies

- Classroom etiquette is crucial for a healthy, safe, and thriving intellectual space. To facilitate that, it is important that we all uphold the following rules and policies.

- No electronics allowed during class. That includes laptops, cellphones, gaming devices, and anything that can grant internet access. It is important that everyone respects each other's class time by not distracting each other with electronic devices.
- No interrupting your fellow classmates when they're speaking. It is important to allow everyone to articulate their thoughts. Of course, everyone should also keep in mind that a question exceeding 3-5 minutes is pushing it. Remember: everyone wants a chance to share their ideas, ask questions, and discuss the class material.
- Attendance is mandatory. Aim to attend every class and attend them on time. Although transportation in NYC is finicky, and indeed, life happens, it is still important to try to be on time to class. Five to ten minutes is fine so long as you're genuinely late, but otherwise do your best to not be late to class.
- Bullying and discrimination are not welcome in our classroom.
- Plagiarism of any kind is unacceptable and will result in an automatic zero on an assignment, and, if done more than once, a zero for the course.
- Students with Disabilities: In compliance with the American Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 4 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (Emotional, Medical, Physical, and/or Learning) consult the Office of Access/ABILITY located in room E1124 to secure necessary academic accommodations. For further information and assistance, please call (2127724857)/TTY (212-650-3250).
- Sexual Misconduct: In compliance with the CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Hunter College reaffirms the prohibition of any sexual misconduct, which includes sexual violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based harassment retaliation against students, employees, or visitors, as well as certain intimate relationships. Students who have experienced any form of sexual violence on or off campus (including CUNY-sponsored trips and events) are entitled to the rights outlined in the Bill of Rights for Hunter College. Such students are strongly encouraged to immediately report the incident by calling 911, contacting NYPD Special Victims Division Hotline (646-6107272) or their local police precinct, or contacting the College's Public Safety Office (212-772-4444). Students experiencing all other forms of sexual misconduct are also encouraged to contact the College's Title IX Campus Coordinator, Dean John

Rose(jtrose@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-650-3262) or Colleen Barry (colleen.barry@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-772-4534) and seek complimentary services through the Counseling and Wellness Services Office, Hunter East 1123. For more on the CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct, see:

<http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/la/Policy-onSexual-Misconduct-12-114with-links.pdf>

- Religious Observances: If you need to miss a class for a religious observance, please let me know.

- Students called to active duty: Please let me know if your active military service interferes with your class attendance and performance.

Assignments

Four quizzes: 25%

Participation: 10%

In-class Midterm: 30%

In-class Final Exam: 35%

Information regarding the structure of the three quizzes, in-class midterm, and final can be found on Blackboard under the folder labeled “Assignment Instructions”. There you can also find instructions regarding Awards and the Easter Egg System.

Schedule

Check the folder labelled “readings” on Blackboard for all readings

Class Date	Author	Reading	Assignments, Quizzes, and Exams
08/28/2023	Course mechanics; syllabus; discussion	First day of classes; no assigned reading.	
08/31/2023	David Walker	Walker’s Appeal (1830), Article II, and Article IV	Return signed syllabus
09/07/2023	Frederick Douglass	“‘It Moves,’ or the Philosophy of Reform” (1883)	
09/11/2023	Frederick Douglass	Lessons of the Hour (1894)	
09/14/2023	Anna Julia Cooper	A Voice from the South (1892), Has America a Race Problem; If so, how can it best be solved?	

09/18/2023	Anna Julia Cooper	A Voice from the South, The Negro as Presented in American Literature	1 st Quiz
09/21/2023	Anna Julia Cooper	A Voice from the South, What Are We Worth?	
09/28/2023	Booker T. Washington	Up From Slavery (1901), Chapter 1, A Slave Among Slaves; Chapter 11, Making Their Beds Before They Could Lie on Them; Chapter 16, Europe;	
10/02/2023	W.E.B Dubois	The Conservation of Races (1897)	

10/05/2023	W.E.B Dubois	Criteria of Negro Art (1926) Optional: Worlds of Color (1925)	2 nd Quiz
10/10/2023 [Tuesday with a Monday Schedule]	W.E.B Dubois	My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom (1944)	
10/12/2023	William H. Ferris	The Philosophical Treatise of William H. Ferris: Selected Readings from The African abroad or, His Evolution in Western Civilization (2016), Chapter 10, The Key Solution of the Race Question	

10/16/2023	William H. Ferris	Chapter 9, Reason why the Term "Negro Saxon, " or Colored, Better Characterizes the Colored People of Mixed Descent in America than the term "Negro"	
10/19/2023	Alain Locke	Race Contacts and Interracial Relations: Lectures on the Theory and Practice of Race (1916), chapter 1: The Theoretical and Scientific Conceptions of Race Who and What Is "Negro"? (unpublished);	
10/23/2023	Alain Locke	Race Contacts, chapter 2, The Political and Practical Conceptions of Race;	Mid-term

		Values and Imperatives (1935);	
10/26/2023	Alain Locke	Race Contacts, chapter 5, Racial Progress and Racial Adjustment; Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace (1944);	

10/30/2023	Harold Cruse	The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (1967), Role of the Negro Intellectual—Survey of the Dialogue Deferred; + Postscript on Black Power—The Dialogue Between Shadow and Substance	
11/02/2023	Harold Cruse	Plural but not equal: a critical study of Blacks and minorities and America's plural society (1987)—chapter 1	
11/06/2023	Martin Luther King, Jr.	Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community? (1968), chapter 1, Where Are We?	
11/09/2023	Martin Luther King, Jr.	Chaos or Community?, chapter 5, Where Are We Going?	
11/13/2023	Martin Luther King, Jr.	Chaos or Community?, chapter 6, The World House	3 rd Quiz
11/16/2023	Bill E. Lawson Optional: Richard A. Jones	The aporia of hope: King and Bell on the ending of racism (2012)	
	Martin Luther King Jr.'s agape and world house (2012)		

11/20/2023	Kathryn Sophia Belle	Martin Luther King Jr. and Frantz Fanon: reflections on the politics and ethics of violence and nonviolence (2012)	
11/27/2023	Charles W. Mills	Black Trash (2001)	
11/30/2023	Charles W. Mills	White Ignorance (2017)	4 th Quiz
12/04/2023	Derrick Bell	Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma (1980)	
12/07/2023	Derrick Bell	Space Traders (1992)	
12/11/2023	Toni Morrison	Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (1992), Black Matters	
Final exam date: TBA			Final Exam

*Please sign here to acknowledge that you have read the above course policies x
