

## African-American Political Thought

Professor Flagg Taylor

PL 351B, Fall 2021

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Office Hours: Monday/Wednesday 9am-12pm and by appointment

### *Course description:*

W.E.B. DuBois described his people as “gifted with second sight in this American world...an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings.” In this course we will examine the writings of those African-Americans who have reflected most profoundly on the American regime and their place in it, from the time of the nation’s founding to the present.

### *Required Texts:*

Nicholas Buccola ed., *The Essential Douglass: Selected Writings and Speeches* (Hackett)

Howard Brotz ed., *African-American Social and Political Thought 1850-1929* (Transaction)

W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Dover)

Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (Amistad)

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (Vintage)

Readings not found in these volumes will be made available as hand-outs.

### *Course Outline:*

#### I. From Slaves to Freedmen

##### A. Frederick Douglass on Slavery, the Constitution and Emancipation

- **Tuesday, 9/14:** “The Autobiography of a Slave” (Part I of Buccola, 3-33)
- **Thursday, 9/16** “What are the Colored People Doing for Themselves” (Brotz, 203-208)  
 “An Address to the Colored People to the United States” (Brotz, 208-213)  
 “Prejudice not Natural” (Brotz, 213-215)  
 “The Nature of Slavery” (Brotz, 215-220)
- **Tuesday, 9/21:** “Change of Opinion Announced” (Buccola, 43-44)  
 “The Constitution of the United States” (hand-out)  
 “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July” (Buccola, 50-71)  
 “Speech on Dred Scott” (Brotz, 248-262) recommended

##### B. Frederick Douglass on the Challenges of Freedom

- **Thursday, 9/23:** “The Present and Future of the Colored Race in America” (Brotz, 267-77)  
 “What the Black Man Wants” (Brotz, 277-84)  
 “The Nation’s Problem” (Brotz, 311-328)  
 “The Blessings of Liberty and Education (Buccola, 350-360)

## II. Post-Reconstruction and the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

### A. Booker T. Washington

- **Tuesday, 9/28:** “The Educational Outlook in the South” (Brotz, 351-56)  
 “Atlanta Exposition Address” (Brotz, 356-59)  
 “Democracy and Education” (Brotz, 362-71)  
 “Address Delivered at Hampton Institute” (Brotz, 371-373)  
 “Letter to the Louisiana State Convention” (Brotz, 373-376)  
 “On Making Our Race Count in the Life of the Nation” (Brotz, 379-82)
- **Thursday, 9/30:** “Early Problems of Freedom” (Brotz, 382-96)  
 “Progress of the American Negro (Brotz, 396-401)  
 “The Fruits of Industrial Training” (Brotz, 406-417)
- **Tuesday, 10/5:** “The Intellectuals and the Boston Mob” (Brotz, 423-34)  
 “The Mistakes and the Future of Negro Education” (Brotz, 434-445)  
 “My View of Segregation Laws” (Brotz, 460-63)
- **Thursday, 10/7:** NO CLASS MEETING, the reading is Desmond Jagmohan,  
 “Booker T. Washington & the Politics of Deception” (hand-out)

### B. W.E.B. DuBois

- **Tuesday, 10/12:** “The Conservation of the Races” (Brotz, 483-492)  
 “The Talented Tenth” (Brotz, 518-33)
- **Thursday 10/14:** *The Souls of Black Folk* (chapters 1-3)
- **Tuesday, 10/19:** *The Souls of Black Folk* (chapters 4-6, 9)

## III. Race, Identity and the American Democracy

### A. Zora Neale Hurston

- **Thursday, 10/21:** *Dust Tracks on the Road* (chapters 1-8)
- **Tuesday, 10/26:** *Dust Tracks on the Road* (chapters 9-16)
- **Thursday, 10/28:** “Seeing the World as It Is” (in *DTR*, 247-265)

### B. Ralph Ellison

- **Tuesday, 11/2:** *Invisible Man* (through ch. 6, p. 150)
- **Thursday, 11/4:** *Invisible Man* (through ch. 14, p. 317) \*Marc Conner visit\*
- **Tuesday, 11/9:** *Invisible Man* (through ch. 20, p. 444)
- **Thursday, 11/11:** *Invisible Man* (end)

## IV. Civil Rights, Non-Violence, and Black Power (all readings in this section hand-outs)

### A. Martin Luther King, Jr.

- **Tuesday, 11/16:** “The Power of Nonviolence”  
 “The Social Organization of Nonviolence”  
 “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”

## B. Malcolm X

- **Thursday, 11/18:** “Message to the Grass Roots”  
“A Declaration of Independence”  
“The Ballot or the Bullet”

## V. Contemporary Reflections and Debates (all readings in this section hand-outs)

## A. On the Legacy of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements

- **Thursday, 11/23:** Cornel West, “The Paradox of the African American Rebellion”  
Shelby Steele, “The New Sovereignty”

**NO CLASS 11/25 THANKSGIVING BREAK**

## B. On the Question of Separatism

- **Tuesday, 11/30:** bell hooks, “On Being Black at Yale: Education as the Practice of Freedom”  
Albert Murray, “The Omni-Americans”, “Black Studies & the Aims of Education”

## C. On Racism and Anti-Racism

- **Thursday, 12/2:** Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Anti-Racist*  
John McWhorter, *Woke Racism*
- **Tuesday, 12/7:** TBA

**LAST DAY OF CLASS: Thursday, 12/9: Review****Final Exam: Wednesday, 12/15, 1:30-4:30***Course Requirements:*

1. Reading outlines/discussion questions=5%
2. Quizzes/Response papers=15% of final grade
3. 5-7 page paper=25%
4. 9-10 page paper=25%
5. final exam=30%

*Reading outlines/discussion questions:*

On the day your group is assigned to act as co-discussion leaders, you must distribute an outline of the reading with a few discussion questions to me and your fellow students.

*Response Papers:*

These are short 1-2 papers where you lay out the argument of the assigned text or analyze and elaborate on a portion of that text. You must complete 4 of these over the course of the semester—no more than one on a single thinker.

*Essays:*

These are formal essays where you are expected to have an identifiable thesis with arguments to support it. They should demonstrate a command of the text at hand, and a thoughtfulness about

the claims made therein. I will hand out topics approximately two weeks before the essays are due. These are not research papers and you are not required to read any secondary literature. I want you to engage these authors directly.

*Final Exam:*

This will be a comprehensive, essay exam taken during the exam period.

*General Expectations:*

**You are expected to read the assignments carefully and reflectively, remaining open to the possibility that what you are reading is right.** Your first duty as an attentive reader is to understand what is being said. This means grasping the argument of the author—identifying central claims and seeing how these claims are supported. When you encounter something you strongly disagree with, make sure you first understand the argument. You are expected to give reasons for your opinions.

You will be attentive in class and always display the demeanor of one who is interested in the material and respectful of others. You will take your share of responsibility for the quality of class time, coming prepared to discuss the assignments thoughtfully.

Students must respect the right to free speech of everyone in our community of scholars and learners. That right is sacrosanct in this class and is possessed by faculty and students alike. With the aim of advancing and deepening everyone's understanding of the issues addressed in the course, students are urged to speak their minds, explore ideas and arguments, play devil's advocate, and engage in civil but robust discussions. There is no thought or language policing. We expect students to do business in the proper currency of intellectual discourse—a currency consisting of reasons, evidence, and arguments—but no ideas or positions are out of bounds.

**Note on terminology.** In his application essay for Yale, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. wrote “My grandfather was colored, my father was Negro, and I am black,” summarizing a tangled history of group identity, naming, and labeling. In this class you will come across a variety of terms African Americans have historically used, or in some cases, explicitly chosen, to talk about themselves and their communities, including: Afro-American, Anglo-African, negro, colored, Negro, Negro-American, black, Black, black American, African-American [with or without hyphen], people of color, POC, and BIPOC, all of which were (and some of which are) respectable terms in their time and place. In our discussions and writing, we will use the terms appropriate to our current historical moment. \*In some of our texts, you will also come across racist slurs and hateful words, which we will obviously not be using in class discussions.

**No laptops are permitted in class unless you have a medical problem that prevents you from taking notes by hand.**

*Attendance:*

After two absences, each subsequent absence will bring your final grade down by five points.

Co-discussion Leader Schedule

**Tuesday, Sept. 21**

“What to the Slave is the Fourth of July” (Buccola, 50-71)  
TEAM SHIRLEY

**Thursday, Sept. 23**

“The Nation’s Problem” (Brotz, 311-328)  
TEAM BRITTA

**Tuesday, Sept. 28**

“Democracy and Education” (Brotz, 362-71)  
TEAM JEFF

**Thursday, Sept. 30**

“The Fruits of Industrial Training” (Brotz, 406-417)  
TEAM TROY

**Tuesday, Oct. 5**

“The Intellectuals and the Boston Mob” (Brotz, 423-34)  
TEAM ABED

**Tuesday, Oct. 12**

“The Talented Tenth” (Brotz, 518-33)  
TEAM PIERCE

**Thursday, Oct. 14**

*The Souls of Black Folk* (ch. 3)  
TEAM SHIRLEY

**Tuesday, Oct. 19**

*The Souls of Black Folk* (ch. 6)  
TEAM BRITTA

**Thursday, Oct. 21**

*Dust Tracks on the Road* (chapters 1-8)  
TEAM JEFF

**Tuesday, Oct. 26**

*Dust Tracks on the Road* (chapters 9-16)  
TEAM TROY

**Thursday, Oct. 28**

“Seeing the World as It Is” (in *DTR*, 247-265)  
TEAM ABED

**Tuesday, Nov. 2**

“The World and the Jug”  
TEAM SHIRLEY

“The Little Man at Chehaw Station”

TEAM PIERCE

**Thursday, Nov. 4**

*Juneteenth*

TEAM BRITTA

**Tuesday, Nov. 9**

*Juneteenth*

TEAM ABED

**Thursday, Nov. 11**

*Juneteenth*

TEAM PIERCE

**Tuesday, Nov. 16**

“Letter from a Birmingham Jail”

TEAM JEFF

**Thursday, Nov. 18**

“The Ballot or the Bullet”

TEAM TROY