

## **RACE AND THE AMERICAN STORY**

AFROAM 390M

Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course is a collaboration between three institutions:

- Arizona State University: The Center for Political Thought and Leadership
- University of Massachusetts, Amherst: W.E.B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies
- University of Missouri: Kinder Institute on Constitutional Democracy and the Department of Black Studies

Building upon the evolving discussions of race and racism in our society, this course aims to serve as a model for improving diversity education on campuses across the country and contribute to a more informed and thoughtful national culture. This course consists of readings that tell the story of the confrontation between American political principles and the practice of racial injustice throughout our history. We will trace the ways that discourse on race has morphed in the United States and we will consider the ramifications of these ideas on the endurance of racism in our society. Students will read and discuss the Declaration of Independence, the slavery clauses in the Constitution, the poetry of Phillis Wheatley, the speeches of Frederick Douglass, Anna Julia Cooper, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King, Jr., among others. They will achieve a greater understanding of how diversity relates to humanity, and will learn to dialogue productively and civilly with others who may not share their background or opinions.

The course will be taught on three campuses, and there will be a common Race and the American Story website where students of all sections will interact with each other and with members of the public. On March 20-21, 2020, students and faculty will attend our annual Race and the American Story symposium in Memphis TN. Annette Gordon-Reed and Peter Onuf will be our keynote speakers.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

Articles on Moodle as assigned on the class schedule.

Annette Gordon-Reed and Peter Onuf, *Most Blessed of Patriarchs: Thomas Jefferson and the Empire of the Imagination* (2017)

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this class, students should be able to

- Explain the history of Race in America by referencing the various positions and perspectives of iconic writers, and orators
- Discuss the context of history and culture that has produced the construction of race in the United States

- Connect the historical documents and ideas to contemporary discourse in the US and current events
- Explore the parallels between the history of race in America and the history of race at UMass

This is a General Education course, meeting the designations AT (arts) and DU (Diversity: United States). As such, the course is designed to provoke comparison and critical acuity, provide participatory experiences such as projects, performances, and attendance at plays, concerts, galleries, etc., and encourage verbal expression through writing exercises. The purpose of the Diversity requirement is to: “broaden students’ exposure to ways of thinking about how to understand diverse perspectives and more effectively interact with people from different cultures and backgrounds.”

### **CLASS ASSIGNMENTS**

- **Class Participation:** The effectiveness of this class leans heavily on class participation. Part of this grade will be based on discussion contributions, providing significant quotes from the readings, showing that you are able to answer critical questions posed by the instructor, and being a relevant and consistent contributor to the class. (10%)
- **Moodle Discussion Board:** Each week, students will enter their reflections on the readings on a Moodle Discussion Board. These should be reflective/stream-of-consciousness entries that will be shared in class and will be compiled into a class journal at the end of the semester. (15%)
- **Film Nominations:** Nominate a film for “Best Depiction of Race and the American Story.” Write a 1 page critique of the film, including justification for your nomination. We will present these nominations in class. Be prepared to show some clips from your film choice. (15%) – Feb 15
- **Music Playlist:** Each student will compile an annotated music playlist that reflects the theme of Race and the American Story. Given our discussions and readings on race in this class, compile a list of ten (10) music tracks that are reflective of the nuanced constructions of race in America. Your song choices can be pulled from any genre of music and from any era. Under each track, write a brief paragraph that explains why the track is on your list. Elaborate briefly on how each song relates to the theme of our class this semester. (20%) – March 29  
Use this format:

*EXAMPLE:*

	<b>Artist</b>	<b>Song</b>	<b>Album</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Genre</b>
1.	Curtis Mayfield & the Impressions	“This is My Country”	<i>This is My Country</i>	1968	Soul

This song reflects the history of the United States in a way that is inclusive of the experiences of African-Americans. The lyrics touch on the fact that African-Americans were brought to the United States as slaves and helped build this country. The song is a direct response to those who have suggested that African-Americans leave the country. We discussed the idea of repatriation and “colonization” that some founding fathers like Thomas Jefferson were fond of. This song is a valid response to that idea that any citizen who questions the reality of racial oppression in the USA must leave the country. Curtis Mayfield and the Impressions are presenting a song of empowerment for Black people in the civil rights era (1968) but this song also stands true to every era of the American story, including the responses to contemporary activists like Colin Kaepernick.

- **Final paper**

To Be Determined by the professor  
(40%)

- **Extra Credit**

Reflection paper or blog entry for the RAS website on the RAS Symposium for those who attend. The success of the symposium rests on the participation of all our students. The program of the symposium gives space for engagement and reflection. We look forward to seeing interaction between our students across the different campuses and to hearing how the discussions impacted students’ learning on race in American history.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

### Week 1

Introduction: Reflections on Race in America  
“Ten Things You Should Know About Race” handout

### Week 2

Declaration of Independence; Slavery paragraph from Jefferson’s Draft; U.S. Constitution— Preamble and Slavery Clauses (I.2, I.9, IV.2); Federalist 54 (on 3/5ths clause); Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, selections from Queries 14 and 18

### Week 3

Phillis Wheatley, “On Being Brought from Africa to America;” “To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth”; “February 14, 1776 Letter to Obour Tanner,” “March 11, 1774 Letter to Reverend Samson Occum”

### Week 4

Alexis de Tocqueville, excerpts from Democracy in America chapter on “The Three Races”  
\*Film Nomination Due\*

### Week 5

Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I A Woman?"; Frances Harper, "Bury Me in a Free Land"; "We are all Bound Up Together"

### Week 6

Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"; Excerpt from "The Last Flogging" (Chapter 17 of *My Bondage and My Freedom*); Excerpt from "Our Composite Nationality;" "Prejudice Not Natural", "Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln"

### Week 7

Dred Scott v. Sandford (excerpts from Justice Taney's Opinion); Abraham Lincoln, "Speech on the Dred Scott Decision"; Stephen A. Douglas, "Speech at Springfield, Illinois"

### Week 8

*Most Blessed of Patriarchs*

\*Music Playlist Due\*

### Week 9

Ida B. Wells Barnett, "Lynch Law in All Its Phases"

Anna Julia Cooper "Has America a Race Problem: If So, How Can It Best Be Solved?"

## **SYMPOSIUM**

### Week 10

Booker T. Washington, "Atlanta Exposition Address"; Booker T. Washington, "My View of Segregation Laws"; Booker T. Washington, "The Fruits of Industrial Training"

W.E.B. Du Bois, "Declaration of Principles of the Niagara Movement"; Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, "The Forethought," Chapter I, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings"

### Week 11

Zora Neale Hurston. "How It Feels to be Colored Me." Malcolm X, "Message to Grassroots"; Malcolm X, "A Declaration of Independence"; Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet"; Malcolm X, "At the Audubon"

Debate between Hubert Humphrey and Strom Thurman on the Civil Rights Act (1964)

### Week 12

Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Power of Non-Violence"; MLK, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"; MLK, Jr., "I Have a Dream"; MLK, Jr., "I See the Promised Land"

### Week 13

Barack Obama, "A More Perfect Union"; Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope*, Chapter 7 ("Race")//

\*Final Paper Due\*

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**OTHER REQUIREMENTS & CLASSROOM POLICIES:**