

**AMS 211 The Africanist Presence in American Studies Fall 2008**  
**TTH 10-11:50**

(\*\* Periodic required convocation attendance. Please take note of film screening times which are schedule for out-of-class)

K. Gibel Mevorach (ARH 121 Tel. 4324) Office Hours: Wed 11-1

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***Objectives of this course:***

This course aims to sharpen skills of critical reading and thinking in order to consider the Africanist presence in American Studies. The cumulative body of material in the class will therefore highlight various approaches, interpretations, and the social and political implications of centering people of African descent and placing the idea of blackness at the center of American Studies.

***Class Format***

Classes are conducted as a roundtable discussion based on assigned readings and films. 2-3 students will be responsible for leading the discussion, introducing key topics, themes and highlighting passages from the reading for particular attention.

All students will be required to keep a weekly journal that critically engages with the assigned readings and films.

**Course Requirements**

***(1) Required Texts***

- \*\* ed. Harding, Susan. *The 'Racial' Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.
  - Susan Harding. "Preface." & "Introduction"
  - Stepan Jay Gould. "American Polygeny and Craniometry Before Darwin"
  - Nancy Leys Stepan. "Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science."
  - Gloria A. Marshall "Racial Classifications: Popular and Scientific."
  - Takaki, Ronald. *Aesculapius was a White Man.*
  - Nancy Leys Stepan and Sander Gilman. "Appropriating the Idioms of Science"
- \*\* Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967.
- \*\* Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Vintage, 1993.

\*\* other readings accessible on Project Muse, JSTOR and e-reserve

**Time Management**

- ✓ You should plan on 2.5-3 hours to prepare for each class meeting.
- ✓ Discuss the substantive ideas from the readings and other assignments with your peers – learning is a process which takes place through intellectual engagement with others.

- ✓ This course does not include any exams -- however careful reading, extensive writing and active participation in class discussion are expected and will be graded. In order to facilitate this process, students will be expected to adhere to the following requirements:
- 1. Attendance is mandatory. Absence is strongly discouraged and I will expect an email of explanation as a courtesy. Students who miss more than three classes will receive an automatic reduction in the final grade. In the event that you are ill and miss a class, you are responsible for reviewing the material covered with one of your classmates. There are several extra meetings scheduled for viewing films. These meetings are an integral part of class participation -- please note these on your calendar. If you have a conflict with another activity, please arrange to see the film in advance. (Don't wait for the last minute)

## **(2) Film Evaluation (20%).**

-- Over fall break you will see three films on your own and will write a short essay which considers them in the context of insights gained from the texts of first half of the semester.

As a class, we will see several feature films and documentaries which are related to the themes we are exploring. The objective is to critically engage with the visual and sensual representations, as well as consider the effectiveness of the film or documentary in comparison to "academic" texts whose audience is more limited. Your reflections on these films should be incorporated into your journals in the context of the relevant readings.

- 3. Reading Journal (40%) The first half of the semester you will be learning a new vocabulary, new information and new modes of analysis. Therefore, every student must keep a reading journal which notes the main points of the reading assignment and -- of equal importance - records his/her reactions in the context of the reading. As the semester proceeds, your writing will become a conversation with the text, the author and class discussions.

Before writing always ask: What did you learn? What were the main points? What is the significance of the essay? What opinions or preconceptions did you have and did they change? How?

Some of the texts present both an analysis and an argument: are the arguments persuasive? Why? Why not? Are there points of identity between your life experience and what you found in the reading? Where are the differences?

The readings are grouped according to similar themes although many of these themes (and therefore foci of essays) intersect, overlap and/or flow into one another.

The journals are to be dated, typed, and paginated. You will be expected to write at least two pages for each reading assignment. Your ideas will not be graded as "correct" or "incorrect" -- rather this is an opportunity to explore, engage with and challenge ideas.

### **FORMAT**

The format for typing your entries is as follows: Left Margin 1.5", Right Margin 1." Double spaced and standard font. Pages must be numbered sequentially and entries must be dated (the dates are for you to review the development of your thoughts at the end of the semester.)

The journal entries count toward your final grade but will not receive individual grades. Journal entries are due in my mail box in the academic support office in Carnegie by 4:30 p.m. on Fridays. (automatic extension until Tues 8:40)

- 4. Leading Discussions (20%) For most classes, 2-3 students will be responsible for discussing the main argument(s) of an article (or chapter): how and why the reading is significant to the key themes or topics under discussion? How are issues linked to previous readings and class discussions? Each member of the group will come with a written 5 min. comment/ary (1-2 pp). Questions you pose to the class should be presented with tentative answers that you have considered in advance.
- 5. Class Discussions (20%): The readings and films provide the main material for class discussion. Therefore you should come to class with notes from your reading and always be prepared to comment on the texts. Sometimes, there are different interpretations and understandings of the texts. It is appropriate for there to be differences of opinion -- the readings provide a common ground of reference. This furthers our own understanding of the topic. You may refer to material from other classes where relevant, and should always be prepared to provide a reference (author, title and, where possible, a page number).

Critical thinking and exchanging ideas depends on listening carefully to another person's perspective and responding respectfully. This does not mean that disagreement is not productive -- being challenged by another perspective enables you to sharpen and refine your ideas or points. Therefore, the focus should be specifically on what and why there are points of agreement or disagreement -- how is one interpretation different and in what ways should it be valued as more or less persuasive? Personal experience is important, but you may draw on it as an additional resource -- not a substitute -- for information or evidence from the texts we will be reading. In other words, your arguments need to be situated within the context of the readings. These may be supplemented with outside sources.

You should keep a hard-back folder for your written material (journal entries and documentary assignment) which will be submitted at the end of the semester (do not reprint!) in a stamped, self-addressed envelope to be submitted by Thurs 10 Dec at 4:30 pm - there are NO extensions to this deadline!

WEEK 1a.

**Thurs 28 Aug**

- First Meeting
- Introductions Stereotypes, Myths

PLEASE NOTE FOR ALL ASSIGNED READING: (Bring outline of reading to class with highlighted passages to discuss)

(NOTE: These are important reading assignments – read once, then read again taking notes)

**WEEKEND MARATHON**

FILM - Africans in America America's journey through slavery Boston, MA: WGBH Educational Foundation; c2000

Listen Rm DVD Af815a v.1; Listen Rm DVD Af815a v.2 Listen Rm DVD Af815a v.1 c.2

☞ **SAT 30 Aug 10:30 am-1:30 pm - Parts 1&2 in the AV Center**

☞ **SUN 31 Aug 12-3 p.m. - Parts 3&4 in the AV Center**

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▶ **WEEK 1b.** The Science of Race and the Contradictions of Equality

**Tues: 2 September**

- ed. Harding -- Gould, "American Polygeny and Craniometry Before Darwin"
- Documentary: *The Life and Times of Sarah Bartmann*

**Thurs 4 September**

- ed Harding -- Marshall, "Racial Classifications..."
- Takaki, Ronald. Aesculapius was a White Man."
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- **WEEK 2** Institutionalizing The American Racial Binary

**Tues 9 September**

- ed. Harding --"Nancy Leys Stepan. "Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science."
- ed, Harding -- Stepan and Gilman, "Appropriating the Idioms..."

**Thurs 11 September**

{Academic Search Premier} Katya Gibel Azoulay, "Reflections on 'Race' and the Biologization of Difference." *Patterns of Prejudice*, 40, 4-5 (2006), 353-380.

**WEEK 3**

**Tues 16 September**

- . [JSTOR] Sidney Kaplan. "The Miscegenation Issue in the Election of 1864." *Journal of Negro History* 34, (July 1949), 274-343
- (Lexis Nexis): A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr. and Barbara K. Kopytoff. "Racial Purity and Interracial Sex in the Law of Colonial and Antebellum Virginia." *Georgetown Law Journal* 77 (August, 1989).

**Thurs 18 September (class will run 15 min longer to accommodate film)**

Film in Class Race Power of an Illusion Part 2

Transcripts are available on line at California Newsreel

[http://www.pbs.org/race/000\\_General/000\\_00-Home.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm)

<http://www.newsreel.org/films/race.htm>

- Browse Science Background Readings at pbs.org. Race Power of an Illusion:
- [http://www.pbs.org/race/000\\_General/000\\_00-Home.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm)

**WEEK 4**

**Tues 23 September**

Race: *Power of an Illusion Part 3* - Transcripts are available on line at California Newsreel

[http://www.pbs.org/race/000\\_General/000\\_00-Home.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm)

<http://www.newsreel.org/films/race.htm>

- (E-reserve) Barbara Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology..." New Left Review "Barbara Fields Presentation" In: Background Readings – article appears under "History" section on *pbs.org Race: Power of an Illusion* – {E-reserves} Kobena Mercer, "Black Hair/Style Politics" *New Formations* 3 (1987), 33.54.

**Thurs 25 September**

Documentary *Ida B. Wells: A Passion for Justice*

Create a quiz and bring 2 copies to class:

4 questions based on Mercer article and Fields' presentation – the questions should be based on what you think are essential points that you would want your peers to remember if they read the material. At least 3 of the 5 questions should be based exclusively on M and F; the other 2 questions can require reference to other materials.

**WEEK 5**

**Tues 30 September – No Class/ Rosh HaShana**

**Thurs 2 October**

Bring *typed* outline of Higgenbotham and Welke articles

development of arguments in each article [RECOMMENDATION: read assignments in listed order] (identify key focus points)

☞ (Lexis Nexis) Plessy v. Ferguson, No. 210, SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES, 163 U.S. 537; 16 S. Ct. 1138; 41 L. Ed. 256; 1896 U.S. LEXIS 3390, Argued April 13, 1896., May 18, 1896

★ (E-reserve) A. Leon Higgenbotham, Jr. "The Supreme Court's Legitimization of Racism..."

★ (Lexis Nexis) Barbara Y. Welke, "Beyond Plessy: Space, Status, and Race in the Era of Jim Crow." *Utah Law Review* (2000)

- ☞ (As you read Justice Harlan's dissent, please underline his comments on the Chinese so you can return to it when we watch *Mississippi Triangle* Tues 11 Nov)

**For 14 Oct** Write 2 page comments to be read in class: drawing on the differing perspectives of Fields, Higgenbotham and Welke comment on the relationship between racial status and privilege. This requires a careful reading of Plessy v Ferguson (1896) decision with particular attention to Justice Harlan's dissent: consider the labor involved in institutionalizing a particular kind of whiteness (white Anglo-Saxon Protestants) as the standard against which *Americanness* would be defined and measured

- **WEEK 6** History and Erasures

**Tues 7 Oct**

(E-reserve) John Edward Philips, "The African Heritage of White America"  
(EBSCO) Why does country music sound white? Race and the voice of nostalgia. By: Mann, Geoff. *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, Jan2008, Vol. 31 Issue 1, p73-100  
In Class Documentary: *Rhythm, Country & Blues*

**Thurs 9 Oct No Class/Yom Kippur**

**Recommended documentaries: On reserve in AV:**

West Indians and their descendants in Cuba) My footsteps in Baraguá [videorecording] / Mundo Latino presenta; a documentary film by the "Imágenes del Caribe" Filmmakers; production, Chester King ... [et al/]; script and directed [by] Gloria Rolando  
Mexico's often-overlooked African populations La raíz olvidada [videorecording] = The forgotten roots / realizacin, Rafael Rebollar; giun, Antonio Noyola, Beatriz Garca; Producciones Trabuco S.C

☞ **WEEK 7**

**Tues 14 October**

- (E-reserve) Michel Rolph-Trouillot, "An Unthinkable History."
- (Project Muse) Darrell R. Meadows, "Engineering Exile: Social Networks and the French Atlantic Community, 1789-1809." *French Historical Studies* 23, 1, (Winter 2000), pp. 67-102.
- Bring a map of Haiti and the territories encompassing the Louisiana Purchase to class and answer the following questions: what territories were included in the "Louisiana Purchase?" when did it take place? Who were the parties in this transaction (seller/buyer)? Why was it sold?
- ▶ In Class Documentary: *Afroargentines* / Filmimagem Producciones, Lagartija Muda Producciones presentan un documental de Jorge Fortes, Diego Ceballos.
- ▶ **Thurs 16 October -- NO CLASS**

## FALL BREAK

### OVER FALL BREAK:

#### Assignment due: at the beginning of class on Tues 4 November

You are responsible for seeing the three (3) films listed below on your own (or with classmates) and submitting a 5-6 page essay on what you learn from each documentary and the feature film as well as how they compliment each other (specifically addressing the following: what common questions and themes are raised in the documentaries? Where and in what ways do they differ? How do these documentaries resonate with Spike Lee's Bamboozled?). What connections can you make with the assigned readings so far?

All films are on reserve in Burling Library

- *Midnight Ramble*
- *Color Adjustment*
- *Bamboozled (Spike Lee)*

#### ☞ **WEEK 8** Racial Identities (Fanon: outline points of chapter)

##### **Tues 28 October**

*Franz Fanon BSWM: Intro-Chpt 5*

##### **Thurs 30 October**

BSWM:

☞ In Class Documentary *Fanon BSWM:*

#### **WEEK 9**

##### **Tues 4 November**

*Fanon BSWM* Chapt 7-8

##### **Thurs 6 November**

Re-read *Introduction to BSWM* carefully.

Bring to class a 2 (typed) page discussion on the relationship between Fanon's Introduction and Conclusion. The second half of your discussion should include comments on how Fanon's insights may be applied to current social interactions at Grinnell College and the USA in general (alternatively, if you think the insights are limited by significant differences in time and place, then use this as your focus).

#### **WEEK 10** The Africanist Presence in the Anglo-American Mind and Body

##### **Tues 11 November**

Film *Mississippi Triangle*

{Project Muse} Nathan Grant, "Delta Scalene: A Passage Through Mississippi Triangle." *Black American Literature Forum*. Vol. 25, No. 2, Black Film Issue (Summer, 1991), pp. 409-416

JOURNAL ENTRY DUE IN CLASS ON Thurs (13 Nov) – A reflective paper focused on Mississippi Triangle and Grant article (that is: engage your thoughts with Grant's discussion – this is not an opinion paper! It is a critical engagement with the issues in the film and should be informed by the material of the semester up to this point.)

**Thurs 13 November**

- Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*

**WEEK 11**

**Tues 18 November**

Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*

**Thurs 20 November**

- Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*

**WEEK 12** \*\* Your set of journal entries for KINDRED is due *in class on Thursday 4 Dec* – entries will cover your reflections on reading novel, class discussion, discussion questions 285-287 and supplementary articles.

**Tues 25 November**

(Read all) Octavia Butler, *Kindred*

**Thurs 27 November NO CLASS -- THANKSGIVING**

**WEEK 13 -**

**Tues 2 December**

Butler, *Kindred*

Bring responses to Discussion Questions pp. 285-287 (these will not be turned in – instead be prepared to offer an oral presentation of your responses)

{Project Muse} Rowell, Charles H. "An Interview with Octavia E. Butler"

Callaloo - Volume 20, Number 1, Winter 1997, pp. 47-66.

{Project Muse} Angelyn Mitchell, "Not Enough of the Past: Feminist Revisions of Slavery in Octavia E. Butler's 'Kindred.'" MELUS, Vol. 26, No. 3, Confronting Exiles. (Autumn, 2001), pp. 51-75. {Project Muse} Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, "Families of Orphans: Relation and Disrelation in Octavia Butler's Kindred." College English, Vol. 55, No. 2. (Feb., 1993), pp. 135-157.

**Thurs 4 December**

W.E.B. Du Bois in Four Voices

You are responsible for taking careful notes during the documentary including the historical events through which Du Bois lived.

- ✓ Reminder: Your final journal entry is due Fri 12 December: it comprises a 7-8 page evaluation of what you have learned throughout the semester. Your discussion should include comments on the links between the various texts covered this semester and the documentary about W.E.B. Du Bois. Part of this discussion, therefore, should focus on whether, how and why the problem of the color line has persisted and/or changed.

**WEEK 14**

**Tues 9 December**

- *Strange Fruit* –
- {Project Muse} Dora Appel, “On Looking: Lynching Photographs and Legacies of Lynching after 9/11.” *American Quarterly* 55, 3 (2003), 457-478.
- Guest

**Thurs 11 December – LAST MEETING**

☞ Read <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/race/Ombdir15.html>

☞ In class Stuart Hall (video-lecture), “*Race: the Floating Signifier*”

Take careful notes during this lecture and submit them (typed).

Write 2-3 pages that comment on the five most significant insights you gained from watching this documentary: how do these insights provide new or broader perspectives to your cumulative academic (learning) education? What is the relevance of presenting this lecture, by a British sociologist of Jamaican background, as closure for a course titled “The Africanist Presence in American Studies.”

Your folder of journal entries and the two documentary assignments (Du Bois & Hall) must be submitted in the box outside my office door in a **stamped, self-addressed envelope Monday 15 December by 5 pm** – there are **NO extensions to this deadline!**