

History 405.01 – The Meaning of Freedom: African American Activism,  
1830-1950

Dr. Charles W. McKinney

Spring 2007, 417 Clough Hall  
MWF 1:00 – 1:50  
Office Hours: 2.30 – 4.00 Mondays  
and Wednesdays and by appointment

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### Course Overview

This course is a survey of African American activism in the United States from 1830 to the middle of the twentieth century. During the semester, we will cover a range of issues and topics, many of which will challenge traditional notions of what constitutes “activism”. The course is primarily structured chronologically, which means that we will cover several dominant themes of African American history, such as resistance to slavery, life in the Jim Crow South, racial violence, black institution building, cultural responses to oppression, and the beginning years of the civil rights movement. Throughout the course, we will use primary documents, books, movies, oral histories, music and websites to further illumine the themes, people and events that make up the content of the course. In our explorations, it is important to remember at least two points: first, that there has *always been* a movement for black self-determination, participation and recognition in American society, in short, a civil rights movement; and second, that the record of African American sources must be read with this in mind.

Here are few questions that will guide our explorations:

- How might we define African American activism? How do the meanings of freedom, equality and self-determination change over time?
- Can we identify common elements or consistent themes in African Americans’ experiences from the 1830’s to the 1960’s?
- How do gender, generation, status, region and other factors inform and differentiate African Americans’ experiences?
- How did the differences among African Americans play out in their demands for freedom? For equality? For civil rights?
- What are the similarities and differences between pre-“civil rights” activism and “civil rights” activism? In what substantive ways are the two connected?
- How is African American activism portrayed in the public realm?

### Course Requirements

*Books:*

- Eddie Glaude, *Exodus! Religion, Race and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America (Exodus)*
- Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920 (Betrayed)*
- Jacqueline Jones Royster, ed., *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900 (Horrors)*
- Charles Payne, Adam Green, eds., *Time Longer than Rope: A Century of African American Activism, 1850-1950 (Time)*
- Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955 (Eyes)*
- William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, NC and the Black Struggle for Freedom (Civilities)*

*Reaction Papers - 30% of final grade:*

Students will submit **three** 4 – 5 page reaction papers that will be due on designated class periods. The main point of the papers is to provide a critical reaction to the readings covered in a particular unit. Using the exploration questions on page one as a guide, discuss and evaluate the

major themes that arise in the readings, and assess them accordingly. While a (very) short synopsis of the readings can make its way into the papers, they will ultimately be graded based on the *conclusions* you draw about the readings themselves, and the ways in which they help/do not help us understand a given topic or theme.

*In-class participation/discussion day/research presentation - 30% of final grade*

Students will be responsible for leading at least **one in-class discussion**. As discussion leaders, students will need to come prepared to give their initial critical observations about the readings, generate 3-4 discussion questions and facilitate the dialogue that the class engages in. Students are encouraged to use whatever additional content they may deem appropriate for their presentation. The use of websites, music, short film clips, artifacts—any and everything is fair game (within reason) if it can be used to stimulate a vibrant discussion about the materials covered and the issues that they raise. How long should this take? Long enough to cover all of the bases in regards to the readings for that day – certainly less than thirty minutes. Feel free to talk with me about your turn leading class.

As for **class participation**, I expect you to attend every class meeting, to arrive on time and to come ready, having done the assigned reading and/or written assignment. Since there will be a very high premium on class discussion, it is imperative that everyone comes to class ready to contribute with comments, questions and insights. Remember though, class participation is not a contest. The people who talk the most do not necessarily “win.” What really counts is your ability and willingness to bring something valuable to the discussion that your colleagues and I can build upon in our efforts to bring some clarity to the issues that we are discussing. Of course, this level of participation will require full reading of assigned work. Also, to ensure the best possible experience for all of us, let’s refrain from using inappropriate language, or any other activity that may make our classroom less than open and engaging.

At the end of the semester, students will give a ten minute **presentation** designed to be an overview of the findings contained in your final paper. I will give you more information on this presentation as we approach the end of the semester.

*Bibliographical Essay and Thesis Statement – 20% of final grade*

Students will submit a bibliographical essay that discusses 10 – 12 scholarly books and articles. This exercise will provide you with a solid grounding in the literature related to your topic, and will enable you to craft a firm, coherent thesis statement as well. Your essay and thesis statement are due on **Friday, March 9**.

*Research paper – 20% of final grade*

Students will submit a 15-20 page paper on a topic approved by the professor. The paper is due on **Friday, April 13**.

***Please Note: Assignment Due Dates Are Fixed.***

*Please do not hesitate to come by my office to discuss any of these requirements.*

*Honor Code:*

**All work turned in for this course is to be completed in accordance with the Rhodes College Honor Code. To demonstrate your commitment to the Code, each student must write “pledged” and sign his/her name on every assignment. If you have questions about plagiarism you should talk to me directly.**

**Policies**

*Note on written work:*

All written work must be composed on a computer, be double-spaced and in 10 or 12 point font. Have your name, the assignment name (and number if necessary), date, course name and email address on each document you turn in. Make sure your pages are **numbered**. Make sure your assignments are stapled. *I will not accept unstapled papers!* The papers that you submit should

reflect your best efforts. Students who feel that they need assistance with written assignments should feel free to contact me so that we can discuss whatever challenges you may be facing.

Attendance:

Students will be allowed three unexcused absences. *All other absences after the third one must be excused. Each unexcused absence after the third one will cost you 5% of your **final** grade. If you miss three weeks worth of classes, you can be dropped from the class or flunked.* Valid excuses for missing class include but are not limited to religious observances, college-sanctioned academic or athletic travel, personal illness or injury, family illness or injury or bereavement. Excuses after the allotted three should be accompanied by a note from the Dean's office. Needless to say, infrequent class attendance will negatively impact your class participation grade.

Paper/test grades:

As a general rule, grades are not negotiable. However, I will gladly discuss the grade on any assignment 24 hours after the work is turned in.

Late Papers:

Papers are due at the beginning of class. Papers that are one day late will be penalized one letter grade. "My computer crashed the morning the paper was due", or "the printer was out of toner" are not valid excuses for a late paper; rather, they are a testament to poor time management on your part. **Papers over one day late will receive an F.** However, please note that you must turn in all of the assigned work in order to pass the class.

Learning Differences:

I am strongly committed to accommodating students with disabilities, and ask your cooperation in making sure that I'm aware of any such accommodation you might need. For more information, please contact Student Disability Services to alert them of any needs you may have.

Additional Information:

- Please turn off all cell phones, pagers, games, and any other object that can beep, buzz, ring or vibrate. These devices are extremely disruptive when they go off in the middle of class
- ***I reserve the right to amend this syllabus as necessary***

**Class Schedule**

**January**

W	10	Introduction to the course; review the syllabus. Define African American Activism
F	12	African American Life up to 1830
M	15	<b>NO CLASS – Martin Luther King, Jr. (Morehouse, class of 1948) Day</b>
W	17	African American Life up to 1830, Part II
F	19	The Sacred World of the Slaves READING: Levine article (folder); Rope, intro to part one <b>REACTION PAPER #1 DUE</b>
M	22	The Sacred World of the Slaves, Part II
W	24	An Appeal to the Nation READING: David Walker's <i>Appeal</i> (Preamble, Articles 1, 4) @ <a href="http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/abolitn/walkerhp.html">http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/abolitn/walkerhp.html</a>

- F 26 The Black Church and the Origins of Organized Protest  
READING: *Exodus* chaps. 1 – 2
- M 29 “Chosen-ness”  
READING: *Exodus*, chap. 4
- W 31 Violence as Activism?  
READING: Nat Turner Article (folder)

## **February**

- F 2 The Many Faces of Resistance  
READING: Grant, “Day to Day Resistance” (folder); Dorothy Porter, “The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies, 1828-1846”, *Journal of Negro Education*, vol. 5, no. 4 (October 1936) (JSTOR)
- M 5 The Politics of Respectability  
READING: Maria Stewart article (folder)
- W 7 The Emergence of the Convention Movement  
READING: *Exodus*, chaps. 6 – 7
- F 9 Democracy on Trial  
READING: *Exodus*, chap. 8; F. Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” @ [http://douglassarchives.org/doug\\_a10.htm](http://douglassarchives.org/doug_a10.htm); *Dred Scott* Supreme Court decision @ <http://toptags.com/aama/docs/dscott.htm>  
**REACTION PAPER #2 DUE**
- M 12 Who Freed the Slaves?  
READING: *Free At Last* (folder)
- W 14 Building Freedom From the Ground Up  
READING: *Rope*, chap. 2
- F 16 Democracy in Peril  
READING: *Betrayed*, chaps. 1 – 2
- M 19 Racial Terror and Self – Defense  
READING: *Betrayed*, chap. 3; *Horrors*, 1 – 45
- W 21 Education for Liberation/Anchoring the Community: The Black Church  
READING: Anderson, “The Education of Blacks” (folder); *Rope*, chap.  
3
- F 23 Alternate Battlefields: History, Memory and Mutual Aid  
READING: *Betrayed*, chaps. 4 – 5  
**REACTION PAPER #3 DUE**
- M 26 Lynching and the African American Response to it  
READING: *Horrors*, 50 – 157
- W 28 Migration  
READING: *Betrayed*, chap. 6; letters from migrants @ <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5332/>

Times is getting harder: Blues of the Great Migration:  
<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5333/>

### **March**

- F 2 "Up You Mighty Race!" Marcus Garvey and the New Negro  
READING: Garvey bio (folder); Garvey, "Back to Africa" @  
<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5124>
- M 5 The Impact of World War II  
READING: *Betrayed*, chap. 7; *Rope*, chap. 5
- W 7 Social Change and the Arts  
READING: Angela Davis article on "Strange Fruit" (folder)
- F 9 Democracy Dipped in Blood  
READING: *Betrayed*, chaps. 8 – 9, conclusion  
**THESIS AND BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY DUE**

### **SPRING BREAK**

- M 19 Shifting Strategies  
READING: Bates Article (folder)
- W 21 Labor and Activism  
READING: *Rope*, part two introduction, chaps. 7 – 8
- F 23 The World at War  
READING: Listen to interviews with Joseph Small and/or Lowell Steaward @ <http://www.studsterkel.org/gwar.php>  
Read definition of "Final Solution"; view animated maps of Auschwitz, The Holocaust, and World War Two @  
<http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/maps/>
- M 26 Beyond Civil Rights: Local and (Inter)national Perspectives  
READING: *Eyes*, chaps. 1 – 3
- W 28 Reds, Whites and Blacks: Anticommunism and the "Negro Problem"  
READING: *Eyes*, chap. 4
- F 30 **NO CLASS**

### **April**

- M 2 The Impact of *Brown*  
READING: to be announced
- W 4 Building a Movement in the "Moderate" South  
READING: *Civilities*, chaps. 1 – 2

### **EASTER BREAK**

- M 9 Movie: "February One"
- W 11 The Birth of a Social Revolution  
READING: *Civilities*, chaps. 3 – 5

F	13	<b>RESEARCH PAPER DUE</b>
M	16	Presentations
W	18	Presentations
F	20	Presentations
M	23	Presentations
W	25	Presentations
F	27	<b>URCAS</b>