

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

Dr. Charles W. McKinney

Fall 2009, 410 Rhodes Tower  
W 2.00-4.30  
Office Hours: T 1.30-3.30, W 10-12  
and by appointment

e: mckinneyc@rhodes.edu  
p: 901/843-3525  
o: 303 Clough Hall  
CRN: 10253

### 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, 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:*

- Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North (Protest)*
- Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920 (Emancipation)*
- 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)*

### Book Review and Presentation – 20% of final grade

Each student in the class will be responsible for reading a book outside the course syllabus and writing a substantive book review. Students will then be asked to present the key themes or ideas of that book to the class on the day when that book appears on the syllabus. Book reviews should be approximately 5 pages long and should analyze the author’s argument in light of the issues we are discussing in class.

In-class participation/blogging - 40% of final grade

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.

I reserve the right to call on any member of the class so that they might contribute to our discussion. I recommend bringing questions that you have about reading assignments or about the previous class meeting if what we discussed is not entirely clear to you. I also recommend bringing a list of comments that you wish to make during class discussion so that you will be ready to contribute. *If you are someone who has difficulty speaking in class for whatever reason, please speak to me about alternative ways of participating.*

At the end of class, I will ask one student to write a summary of our class discussion and e-mail it to me. I will then post the summary to a **blog** I have created for this class. You should subscribe to this blog and read the discussion summaries that I post; this will be especially useful if you must miss class. If you have any comments to add, please respond to the blog entry online so that everyone can read your further thoughts. This is a particularly good way for those of you who do not feel comfortable speaking in class to get your ideas on the table and earn your participation grade. I hope that the blog will allow all of us to continue our classroom discussion. **This activity counts as a portion of your class participation grade.**

In addition, I may occasionally post blog comments relating to further issues in the reading that I want to bring to your attention.

Bibliographical Essay– 20% of final grade

Students will complete a bibliographical essay that analyzes the themes and connections between the readings in the first half of the course. The essay will make a particular interpretive claim about how these readings fit together and then explore that argument in a sustained discussion of each reading. **In the essay, you must read one additional book from outside the course syllabus and incorporate it into your paper, making sure to indicate why it should be included and how it relates to the themes of the course reading.** This essay should be 10-12 pages and is due on **October 14.**

Research paper – 20% of final grade

You will write a research paper that will be approximately 15-20 pages in length. You may select any topic related to African American Activism that is of interest to you. Your research should be based upon at least some primary (i.e., original) documents. All topics must be approved by me. Toward this end, you will submit a one-to-two paragraph summary of your topic, along with a list of at least four sources from which you will begin your research (no encyclopedia or Internet sources at this stage). Your book review essay can come in quite handy for this. The summary and source list is due **November 4.** The research paper is due on **December 9.**

**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**

### Attendance:

Because of the limited number of class meetings, class attendance and participation is **essential**. More than two absences will result in being dropped from the course or in an “F” for the final course grade.

### 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.**

### 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**

### September

9/2

#### Identity as Activism; Culture as Protest

- *Protest*, chaps. 1-3
- “African American Voices” (Public folder)

9/9

#### Respectability and Social Thought

- *Protest*, chaps. 4-5
- Maria Stewart article (public folder)
- David Walker’s *Appeal* (Preamble, Articles 1, 4) @ <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/abolitn/walkerhp.html>

**Book Review:** Eddie Glaude, *Exodus! Religion, Race and Nation in Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Black America*

9/16

#### Resistance in Slavery

- *Rope*, chap. 1
- Levine, “Slave Culture” (public folder)
- F. Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” @ <http://www.alexanderstreet4.com/cgi-bin/asp/bltc/getdoc.pl?projects/artfla/databases/asp/bltc/fulltext/IMAGE/.124>
- Grant, “Day to Day Resistance” (Public Folder)

**Book Review:** Peter Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance*

9/23

#### The Civil War Era

- *Protest*, chaps. 6-Epilogue

- Hahn, “The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom” chap. 2 (Public Folder)
- *Rope*, chap. 4

**Book Review:** James Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the triumph of antislavery politics*

9/30 Reconstruction: Building Freedom from the Ground Up

- *Rope*, chaps 2-3
- *Emancipation*, chaps. 1-2
- Anderson, “The Education of Blacks”
- W.E.B. DuBois, “Reconstruction and Its Benefits”  
Vol. 15, No. 4 (Jul., 1910), pp. 781-799 @  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/1836959.pdf>

**Book Review:** Eric Foner, *Forever Free*

October

10/7 Lynching

- *Horrors*, all
- Litwack, *Trouble in Mind* (Public Folder)

**Bibliographical Essay Due**

10/14 Racial Terrorism and the Response to it

- *Emancipation*, chaps. 3-5
- The Exodusters (Public Folder)
- Cha-Jua, “A Warlike Demonstration” (Public Folder)

**Book Review:** W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South*

16-20 **Fall Break**

10/21 Worlds at War: Black Initiative during the WWI Era

- *Emancipation*, chaps 6-conclusion
- Jacob Lawrence, “The Great Migration Series” @  
<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/history/odonnell/w1010/edit/migration/migration.html>
- Letters from Migrants @ <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5332/>
- Marcus Garvey biography (Public Folder)

**Book Review:** W.E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks*

10/28 The Rise of a “Thoroughly Untrustworthy” Generation: The New Negro

- *Rope*, Intro to part 2, chaps. 5-6
- Carl Holliday, “The Young Southerner and the Negro”, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 8, (1909), 17-31. (Public Folder)
- Locke, “The New Negro” (Public Folder)
- McKay, “If We Must Die” @ <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5130/>

- Poetry from *The New Negro* @ <http://www.alexanderstreet4.com/cgi-bin/asp/bltc/getvolume.pl?S8098> (pages 129-145)

**Book Review:** Aaron Douglas, *Aaron Douglass: African American Modernist*

November

11/4 Black Workers and the Rise of Civil Rights Unionism

- *Rope*, chaps. 8-10
- A. Philip Randolph, “Speech and Power” (Public Folder)

**Book Review:** Michael Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*

**Research Paper Summary and preliminary book list due**

11/11 Religion and Culture

- *Rope*, chap. 16
- Nelson, “The Christian Way in Race Relations” (Public Folder)
- Howard Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, chaps 1-6, Black Thought and Culture @ <http://www.alexanderstreet4.com/cgi-bin/asp/bltc/documentidx.pl?allauthorids=per0020536>
- Angela Davis, “Strange Fruit” (Public Folder)

**Book Review:** Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), *Blues People*

11/18 World War II: Building the Foundations of a Movement

- *Rope*, Introduction to Part 3, chaps. 12-14
- Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom* (Public Folder)

**Book Review:** Jennifer Brooks, *Defining the Peace: World War II Veterans, Race, and the Remaking of Southern political tradition*

11/24 – 30 **Thanksgiving Break**

December

12/2 Civil Rights during the Cold War

- Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, all

**Book Review:** Brenda Gayle Plummer, ed., *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1988*

12/9 The Impact of Brown

- Timothy Tyson, “Dynamite and the Silent South” (Public Folder)
- Christina Greene, Laurie Green, “From the Grassroots to the Supreme Court” (Public Folder)

**Research Paper Due**