

CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

HIST 509-02 • Spring 2018

Instructor

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Office Hours: Mondays 1:15 p.m. until 2:15 p.m. (and also by appointment), and via Remind Mon.-Sat., 9:00 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Meetings

Except for university holidays and other occasions either noted on the syllabus or announced in class, the course meets Wednesdays from 7:00 p.m. until 9:50 p.m. in Humanities 226.



Course Description and Objectives

The course is dedicated to exploring selected issues in black culture, politics, and community in contemporary America since the climax of the civil rights movement. American conservatism in the aftermath of the Second Reconstruction will form a constant backdrop to our work, but our primary obligation will be to focus on issues in the recent past with an eye toward evaluating the course and consequence of African American history in the recent past. The essential question of the seminar is as follows: Given the aims and exigencies of the modern civil rights movement, how have African Americans fared in American life over the last several decades? There are other ways of asking the same question: What are the predicaments of blackness in contemporary America? What are its prospects? How does historical narrative and analysis help us to ask and to respond to such questions? Because this is a history class, we will complicate these inquiries in particular ways—accounting for gender, class, region, ethnicity, and generational differences within black America; taking long-term, middle-term, and short-term historical views; evaluating the question from political, social, and cultural vantages. Always, however, we will return to basic questions revolving around the states of black America, and to the larger problem of thinking historically about the recent past.

As a seminar, the course is explicitly concerned with introducing participants to the cultures and practices of the historical profession. So throughout the semester we will use our subject matter as a base for critiquing, exploring, even mastering selected conventions, assumptions, and/or traditions of the profession. Seminar participants will do ample work with primary source material, vigorously exercise their writing skills, and contribute to the creation of a civil but relentlessly probing community of discussion and inquiry.

Assessment and Assignments

Final course grades will be determined as follows:

30% depends on timely completion of and performance on a series of short papers

20% depends on overall contribution to seminar discussion and performance on two in-class preparations (quizzes and short assignments to check reading, announced and otherwise, may also figure into this portion of the grade)

30% depends on timely completion of and performance on a seminar research project (and its several constituent parts)

20% depends on the creation of an annotated companion bibliography of 10-15 items further exploring issues raised in at least three of the semester's readings.

Members of the seminar will write six short papers (one of 2-3 pages in length, and five of 5-7 pages in length) relating to the week's reading. The entire seminar is required to submit papers on Jan. 17 and Jan. 24. Subsequently, you may choose the additional meeting dates on which you will turn in a short paper. In general, these essays should briefly summarize the scope and content and larger argument of the week's reading, while attending in greater detail to a point in the assignment about which you are especially concerned. The papers are due before the beginning of class and must be submitted to the course page on Canvas.

The following policy applies to the short essays and to most written work in the seminar: Work submitted up to two days late will be accepted, but will be graded without comment. Work submitted more than two days late will be accepted, but with the additional penalty of being given a failing grade of 50%

The late policy described above does not apply to any extra credit work, class presentation, or to the final project. Extra credit work submitted after the deadline will not be accepted. Your completed final project must be submitted by the deadline.

Students may submit up to two short essays beyond the five required (and may choose to have the grade on any of these additional short essays replace the grade earned on an already submitted essay).

Members of the seminar are required to lead at least one discussion over the course of the semester. This obligation consists of preparing an oral presentation during which the presenter will frame the day's discussion by 1) laying out the arguments and themes explicit in the week's reading, and by 2) enumerating the problems for discussion both explicit and emergent in the author's construction of argument and treatment of various





themes. Initially, the discussant will direct her questions and comments to the member of the seminar appointed to serve as the day's respondent. The respondent will have a go at each and every question raised by the discussant. The respondent's responsibility is to address the questions raised by the discussant in such ways as to help facilitate and clarify conversation around the seminar table. Discussants and respondents are encouraged to work together to prepare for

their assigned class. Over the course of the semester, each member of the seminar will serve as a discussant and as a respondent.

The seminar project consists of creating a biographical research project of twenty pages explicating and analyzing how an issue or major question pertinent to the seminar has played out in the life of an African American from the twenty first and late twentieth century (roughly 1970s to the present). Further details on the scope and requirements of the research project will be posted on Canvas.

One last word on assignments: Students who do not complete and submit all of the course assignments will receive a failing grade in the course.

Attendance and Communication

As this is a history course built largely around close reading and intense discussion, your perfect attendance is critically important to all of us in our striving to meet the stated course objectives and to our meeting our own personal objectives for the course as well. If you are not here, you cannot easily receive and process the insights of your colleagues, nor can you contribute to the building of the kind of intellectual community—through discussion, questioning, and debate—that is vital to the work of a history seminar. The following attendance policy is in place for this course: Students enrolled in the course may miss up to one class with no penalty and with no questions asked. Students who miss additional days of class will be penalized 1/3 of a grade point on their final grade for each additional day missed. In general, written documentation from a physician or university official is required to excuse an absence. Please note, however, that such documentation will not be automatically accepted (acceptance, rather, is at the discretion of the instructor).

Assignment details and returned work will be uploaded to Canvas. So it is important for you to check that site frequently. Brief communications concerning the course (reminders, change of venue, et cetera) will be sent via [Remind](#) (which you can set to receive class



messages via your preferred email address, via text message, or through the mobile Remind app). You can find the Remind instructions by [following this link](#).

Books and Readings

The books listed below form the course's core reading. Please obtain copies from the university bookstore or from your retailer of choice. Copies are also on reserve at Fondren library.

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah*. Anchor, 2014.

Baradaran, Mehrsa. *The Color of Money: Black Banks and the*

Racial Wealth Gap. Belknap Press, 2017.

Fortner, Michael Javen. *Black Silent Majority: The Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Politics of Punishment*. Harvard University Press, 2015.

Highsmith, Andrew R. *Demolition Means Progress: Flint, Michigan, and the Fate of the American Metropolis*. University Of Chicago Press, 2016.

Lowery, Wesley. *They Can't Kill Us All: The Story of the Struggle for Black Lives*. Back Bay Books, 2017.

McGuire, Danielle L. *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement From Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*. Vintage, 2011.

Obama, Barack. *Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*. Broadway Books, 2004.

Pattillo, Mary. *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City*. University Of Chicago Press, 2008.

Some Critical Information

Disability Support Services

Students with a documented disability and in need of academic or other adjustments should speak with me during the first two weeks of class (all communication will remain confidential). Students with disabilities should also contact the office of Disabled Student Services in Allen Center room 111 (phone 737-5841, e-mail adarice@rice.edu).

Rice University Honor Code

I expect that members of the course will re-familiarize themselves with the responsibilities and privileges of the [university's honor system](#). I expect that members of the course will assiduously follow the dictates of the honor system. I expect that members of the course will raise with me any questions concerning how the system applies to their work in the class. The pledge is required on all written work submitted in the course.

Wellness



Take care of yourself. As a student, you may experience a range of challenges that can interfere with learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, substance use, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may diminish your academic performance and/or reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. Mental health services are available on campus, and treatment does work: <<https://wellbeing.rice.edu/counseling-center/contact-us>>.

Support is always available (24/7) from the Rice Counseling Center: (713) 348-3311. If you have a concern about yourself or a classmate [Talk to Someone](#).

Course Calendar

On Our Present Predicament

Jan. 10: Getting Our Acts Together

Jan. 17: Class Cancelled

Jan. 24 *Fire This Time* | **D. Byrd R. Jones**

Out of the Civil Rights Movement



Jan. 31: *At the Dark End of the Street* | **D. Crosley and Geer R. Hamsa**

Striations: Political Economy and Community in Contemporary Black America

Feb. 14: *Demolition Means Progress* | **D. Rooney R. Geer**

200 Words and 2 Minutes of Project Prospects

Feb. 21: *Black Silent Majority* | **D. Hamsa and Iverson R. Crosely**

Feb. 28: *The Color of Money* | **D. Sharma R. Murrel**
Project Paragraph 1

Mar. 7 *Black on the Block* **D. Murrel R. Rooney**

Black Now

Mar. 21: *Dreams from My Father* | **D. Wright and Corbett R. Sharma**
Project Paragraph 2

Mar. 28: *Americanah* | **D. Kale . R. Iverson**

Apr. 4: *They Can't Kill Us All* | **D. Jones R. Corbett and Wright**

On Research and Writing

Apr. 11: Workshops and presentations
Two Pages and Five Items (bibliography)

Apr. 18:	Workshops and presentations Two More Pages and Five More Items (bibliography)
May 2:	Final Projects Due

Changes

The syllabus may change. Changes to the syllabus will be announced in class and posted on the relevant section of Canvas.