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History 215: Afro-American History syllabus

Eastern Washington University. Africana Studies Program

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EASTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
BLACK STUDIES/HISTORY 215
INSTRUCTOR. JOHN A HARDIN

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Afro-American History I, 5 credit hours. (crosslisted History 215). The course is an examination of the Black experience from African civilizations in the fourth century A.D through slavery to the end of U.S Reconstruction. This course satisfies a List B General University Requirement for Social Studies. Prerequisite: Basic English Skills-English 100

COURSE GOALS.

- 1 To provide the student with a broad historical overview of Black people from fourth century A.D. Africa to the end of the Reconstruction era in the U.S.
- 2 To develop a basic understanding of the major historical problems in Black history
- 3 To create a deeper appreciation for the contributions of Black history to world civilization

COURSE OBJECTIVES.

- 1 Each student will be expected to demonstrate a working understanding of central concepts and philosophies found in the study of Black history
- 2 Each student will be expected to read assigned materials and submit no less than four concise reaction papers relative to the assigned materials in Black history.
3. Each student will be expected to use basic English skills (minimum: English 100) in completing the four required reaction papers.

EVALUATION CRITERIA.

In a departure from most courses, there will be no examinations in this course. Final grades will be determined by four reaction papers on assigned materials. These materials consist of scholarly articles found in the

University Library Each reaction paper will count as 25% of the grade with each paper receiving a maximum of 100 points. The total number of points (400) will be divided by four. This number will be compared to the attached scale to determine the final grade

Attendance in class is required. Students are allowed five absences during the term. Any additional absences will reduce the total points earned by ten (10) per day Past experience has shown that class attendance and discussion will improve the quality of the reaction papers. The student can also use the required reference text and other resources in preparing his/her papers

Reaction papers will be due according to the attached schedule. Papers received after the due date will lose ten (10) points for every day late.

Reaction papers must examine the following: 1. what did the assigned material describe and/or discuss and 2 provide an informed analysis of the main issues in the assigned material. The minimum length for the reaction papers is two (2) pages typed double space.

REQUIRED REFERENCE TEXT.

John Hope Franklin. From Slavery to Freedom. Sixth Edition. Alfred Knopf Publishers., (available at the campus bookstore or used copies from former students) Note. articles will not be assigned from this text but it will be helpful in writing the reaction papers.

EXTRA CREDIT.

Students wanting to complete extra credit may submit one additional reaction paper with a maximum value of thirty (30) points This credit will be added to other points already earned This is optional and should not be necessary for students making good progress in the course This paper is due one calendar week before the last day of class.

REACTION PAPER DUE DATES.

First paper due Friday of second week of classes

Second paper due Friday of fourth week of classes

Third paper due Friday of eighth week of classes

Fourth paper due: Scheduled final exam period

The first reaction paper topic is:

"Outside of fulfilling a General University Requirement, why is it necessary to study Black history?" Do not give me what you think I want to read but rather your own thoughts and perspectives on the importance of Black history

ARTICLES FOR REACTION PAPERS FOR BLST/HIST 215:

Blassingame, John. "The Slave Family," in The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South (Oxford, 1972), pp. 77-103.

Giddings, Paula. "Casting of the Die: Morality, Slavery and Resistance," in When and Where I Enter (Bantam, 1984), pp 33-55

Gutman, Herbert G. " Send Me Some of the Children s Hair," in The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925 (Vintage, 1976) pp 3-44.

James, C.L.R. " The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery: Some Interpretations of Their Significance in the Development of the United States and the Western World" in Amistad I edited by John A williams and Charles F. Harris (Vintage Books, 1970), pp 119-164.

Levesque, George A and Baumgarten, Nikola A " A Monstrous Inconsistency, Slavery Ideology and Politics in the Age of the American Revolution" Contribution In Black Studies 8 (1986-1987), pp. 20-34.

Owens, Leslie Howard. "The Logic of Resistance," in This Species of Property (Oxford, 1976), pp. 70-105

Yansane, Aguibou. "Cultural, Political and Economic Universals in West Africa," in African Culture: The Rhythms of Unity edited by Molefi K. Asante and Kariamuwelsh Asante (Greenwood Press, 1985), pp 39-68

These books are located at the JFK Library reserve desk Other materials may be assigned for reaction papers during the term Under no circumstances will I accept papers on articles that I have not approved in advance.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the course, feel free to discuss them with me. My office is in Room 107, Monroe Hall, phone number

359-2205 or from Spokane 458-6276. Hours: 12:30 P.M. to 2:00 P.M.
Monday through Friday

SAMPLE REACTION PAPER

Leon F Litwack " Trouble in Mind The Bicentennial and the Afro-American Experience, " Journal of American History 74(September 1987) 2 315-337

Leon Litwack discussed how the Bicentennial of the U.S Constitution was viewed by Blacks. To put this celebration in context, he analyzed how Blacks in 1887 perceived the Centennial of the Consitution.

He argued that African-Americans then saw those events "as a white people s affair This perception was particularly real since Blacks were lynched disfranchised and deprived of their constitutional rights under the guise of the "rule of law One hundred years later, the president and members of Congress told the the American people the Constitution brought everyone "freedom and opportunity." This rhetoric effectively excluded three centuries of slavery and segregation which were regularly protected on constitutional grounds.

Thus, the Constitution s Centennial in 1887 became an indirect celebration of the legal tradition of white oppression of Blacks and other persons of color. Using nineteenth century examples, Litwack described the resentment of common Black folk toward a legal system that overtly oppressed them.

Litwack s citations also suggested that this resentment was not isolated nor repressed Blacks fought against the legal structure both in and out of court. Those who achieved minor legal victories used them as precedents for larger ones. Those who used extralegal means were either imprisoned or were lynched by mobs under the proterction of local law enforcement officials. Again, white man's law reigned triumphant.

By the twentieth century, African-American scholar/activists such as W E. B. DuBois and M L King publicly challenged these conditions. To these persons, the Constitution applied to all citizens and not to whites only. Their protests, coupled with two decades of civil rights protests in the 1950s and 1960s led to the ultimate downfall of legal or de jure segregation.

Yet, the United States all but ignored these individuals who forced the government to live up to the Constitution's ideal of "liberty for all." In the celebrations and speeches, slave rebels, abolitionists and civil rights activists were hardly mentioned as part of the Constitution's history.

This essay underscored the narrow vision of American political traditions. Rhetoric coming from this tradition painted a picture of proud colonials fighting British tyranny but said little of British actions perpetrated by slaveholders in the name of law. Thus, the article asked the reader to remember the Blacks and whites who fought to make the constitution live up to its promises of justice and freedom for all.

The only flaw in the article was the absence of suggestions of how we should remember these unsung protectors of the Constitution's moral vision. In the hoopla over the Constitution's Bicentennial, few took time out to mention these persons or even consider their role. This weakness in the article is a minor one and does not detract from his central thesis. Overall, his analysis was lucid and compelled the reader to rethink how great--or not so great--the Constitution has served the U. S. in the last two hundred years.

GRADING SCALE

% of Points Earned

**Corresponding
Final Grade Point**

100	-----	40
99	-----	40
98	-----	39
97	-----	39
96	-----	38
95	-----	38
94	-----	37
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