

PHIL 200 Africana Philosophy

T-TH 12:30 to 1:45PM, W-1-006

Professor: Dana Francisco Miranda

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Student Office Hours (Zoom):

M 1:00-2:30PM; W 1:00-2:30PM

Overview

The term Africana refers to both African and African-descended peoples who are united through shared struggles against racism and colonialism. Considered as such, Africana Philosophy refers to the thoughts and ideas produced by members of these groups—which includes Afro-Latinos, African Americans, and Luso-Africans, among others—under the disordered conditions of modernity. Due to these struggles, three important themes have come to structure Africana philosophy: freedom (What is “Freedom” given that it can be consistent with institutional slavery and colonialism?), philosophical anthropology (What is “Humanity,” or what does it mean to be human, if this term has not been extended universally?), and meta-critiques of reason (What is “Reason” given that it can function as a tool of oppression?).

Course Objectives

The primary goals of the course are to have students gain familiarity with the prominent figures and texts that comprise the Africana philosophical canon as well as learn the main arguments and terms that pertain to Africana philosophy. The course will also offer sustained insight into the social, cultural, and philosophical practices of the Africana diaspora. This will be a reading-intensive course.

Course Unit Instruction

This class is scheduled to meet for 2 ½ hours per week. Additional instructional activities for the course include attendance at various College events and associated writing activities/workshops distributed across the semester. Students will be expected to come to class prepared with critical questions they would like to raise and be prepared to listen to others. Lastly, I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus, as necessary. Therefore, students are advised to refer to the syllabus posted on Blackboard for the most updated version.

Policies

All UMass Boston policies are in effect. These include:

- **Grading Policy:** I will make every effort to provide grades and feedback within 14 days of when you have submitted the assignment. I will communicate if a change to this is necessary.
- **Policy on Academic Dishonesty:** As an academic community devoted to the discovery and dissemination of truth, the University of Massachusetts Boston insists that its students will conduct themselves honestly in all academic activities. Students are expected to refuse to engage in any activity unauthorized by university policy. Please be sure to review the Student Code of Conduct for Academic Honesty Policy and Procedures.
- Students with disabilities requesting classroom or course accommodations must complete a

multi-faceted determination process through the Office of Disability Services prior to the development and implementation of accommodations, auxiliary aids, and services. Each Accommodation Plan is individually and collaboratively developed between the student and the Lillian Semper Ross Center for Disability Services. If you have not already done so, please contact the Center to have a dialogue regarding your academic needs and the recommended accommodations, auxiliary aides, and services.

- If you are experiencing financial hardship, have difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day or do not have a safe and stable place to live, and believe this may affect your performance in this course, I would urge you to contact the Office of the Dean of Students (ODOS) or Student Support Services (SSS) for support. You may also discuss your concerns with me if you are comfortable doing so.

Some additional policies include:

- **Gender Pronouns:** All people deserve to be addressed in accordance with their identity, including correct or preferred names and self-identified gender pronouns. We will offer opportunities to share pronouns in class and ask that you not assume pronouns until they are explicitly stated. No one is required to share pronouns; if you do not, we will simply refer to you by name.
- **Email Communication:** At times I will communicate with the entire class using campus email systems, so it is essential that you regularly check your UMB email address or forward your UMB account email to your preferred email address. I encourage you to contact me via email with questions about the course, the material we cover in class, and assignments.
- **Policy on Children:** If you are a parent, you are welcome to bring your child to class. If they are interested and old enough to take part in the conversation, all the better. If they are babies, fine. If they need to breastfeed, fine. You probably have alternate arrangements, and your other professors might not have the same policy (and I respect that), but I just wanted to make my attitude about children explicit in case of preference or emergency. You are welcome here, and if you have dependents that need constant care or whose care has been interrupted, they are also welcomed.
- Everyone needs help at some point (and typically at multiple points) in their academic journey. If you or someone you know experiences academic stress, difficult life events, or feelings of anxiety or depression, we encourage you to seek support. Effective campus resources (such as Academic Support Services and Undergraduate Studies, Resources4U, the UHS Counseling Center, and the U-ACCESS Food Pantry) are here to help.
- No one will be asked to speak for a group (whether class, race, sexual orientation, age, religion, creed, disability, gender, or geography).

Assignments

Discussion Board (30%): For every week indicated as “Assignment Due,” students must comment on classroom readings. Students must add at minimum one question, observation, or provocation before class begins or choose to comment at least once on another student’s response. Students will be assigned to one of two groups (“Beacon” and “Harbor”). A Google Doc link will appear on our Blackboard homepage directing students to the proper document. Please note that students will have access to both documents, however, they are required to only participate in their respective group. Students will receive new group assignments mid-semester so that they may converse more

fully with their class. Lastly, students have the option of forgoing 1 week of the Discussion Board. This may be used anytime during the semester.

Participation (10%): Attendance is mandatory. I understand that emergencies arise, so each student is allowed two absences. Each absence beyond the allotted two will result in a point deduction. However, in the case of illness, I do ask that students stay home as coming into class sick only risks spreading infections. Please contact me as soon as possible regarding any absences. In addition, to receive a respectable grade in this category one must not only show up, but also participate. This will primarily reflect a) Preparation for posing questions in the discussion period of class and b) Engaged listening and discussion contributions during this period; will be boosted by c) Participation and question-posing during the (ideally interactive) lecture segment. If you are at any point unsure how you are doing in participation and want to know, email me and we can begin a conversation. Students who are extremely weary of speaking in class can receive alternative assignments in lieu of in-class participation but must meet with me in the first two weeks of the semester (or within one week of enrolling if not enrolled during this period) to make arrangements.

Short Paper (20%): One essay submission of 700-750 words responding to prompts provided in advance. The paper will be due on the Friday of Week 7 (March 11, 2022). The short essay must be handed in electronically by midnight. Rubric:

- 5 points: Essay addresses all aspects of the question and does so in a thoughtful way, incorporating key insights from texts and class discussions, and suggests a reasonable, though possibly somewhat open-ended, answer.
- 4 points: Essay addresses the question adequately but struggles to reconcile different positions, either through internal inconsistencies (e.g., the essay defends a contradictory position) or through failing to grapple with central dimensions of the material.
- 3 points: Essay addresses the question but doesn't demonstrate any commitment to rigor or critical thought or fails to relate the question to material from the reading(s) and/or class discussions.
- 2 points: Essay is substantial but does not address the prompt.
- 1 point: Essay fails to address the prompt and lacks substance or coherence.

Essays that are late but no more than 48 hours late will be docked 1 point. Essays that are more than 48 hours late will be docked 2 points. Essays that are not turned in by the end of the semester will receive no credit. Essays receiving a grade of 3 or lower can be rewritten and submitted for re-grading.

Term Paper (30%): For the final paper, students must meet with me in person or must have digital approval on two conditions; for group papers, all members of the group must be present at this meeting together unless extraordinary circumstances dictate otherwise, and for undertaking a project not listed below. Failure to receive approval will result in a failing grade. Term papers must be handed in electronically by midnight May 16, 2022. My policy is to deduct ten points for each day late. You may choose from any of these options:

- Position paper: Write a paper defending a philosophical position related to topics discussed in class or in the assigned readings. Solo: 1000 words. Group of 2: 1500 words.
- Research paper: Either a) Read 1-2 outside works and critically examine the reading or its relation to one or more of the required readings for the course, or b) Read and criticize a full

book from which one of the required readings is drawn, or c) Propose a research project of your own, subject to instructor approval. Solo: 1000 words. Group of 2: 1500 words.

All essays must be double-spaced. My preferred font is either in Times New Roman or Garamond, however, students may generally select the font that is most aesthetically pleasing for them.

Assessments (10%): Students will complete mid-semester and end-of-class self-assessments so that we may better focus on qualitative and not quantitative evaluations. You will be reflecting carefully on your own work and the work of your peers. If this process causes more anxiety than it alleviates, see me at any point to confer about tips for self-evaluations. Please know that if an assignment does not feel productive, we can find ways to modify, remix, or repurpose the instructions.

Mid-semester assessments must be completed by midnight on March 12, 2022. Final assessments must be completed by midnight on May 18, 2022, after your final paper is turned in.

Guidance on Late Work

Missing a deadline is a stressful experience. Sometimes it's just the result of an acute situation, but sometimes it's the result of something more persistent—struggling with the material, life circumstances, or one's mental state—and the source of trouble is not always obvious from the inside. Students in these situations often blame themselves and as a result incur late penalties. Students sometimes even fail classes because they get paralyzed and ultimately never submit the assignment. If you are in this situation, I can help. If you are going to miss a deadline:

1. Email me as soon as possible so that we can construct a plan to get you back on track.
2. Students may also submit missing work until the end of the semester to receive partial credit.

Required Texts

There are no required texts for this course; all readings will be provided online.

Schedule

Week 1:

Jan. 25: Introductions. What is this course and who's in it?

Jan. 27: Theory as Liberatory Practice by bell hooks + The Uses of Anger by Audre Lorde

Recommended Reading: How to Write About Africa by Binyavanga Wainaina

Week 2:

Feb. 1: "Africana philosophy in context," An Introduction to Africana Philosophy by Lewis Gordon

Feb. 3: African, African American, Africana Philosophy by Lucius Outlaw

Recommended Reading: Contemporary Africana Philosophy by Paul Taylor + Africana Philosophy as Prolegomenon to Any Future American Philosophy by Amir Jaima

Assignment Due

Week 3:

Feb. 8: 1492: A New World View by Sylvia Wynter

Feb. 10: “Colonialism: A Philosophical Profile,” How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa by Olúfémí Táíwò

Recommended Reading: Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism by Enrique Dussel

Assignment Due

Freedom

Week 4:

Feb. 15 + Feb. 17: Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World by David Walker

Recommended Reading: An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America by Henry Highland Garnet + Notes on the State of Virginia, Query XVIII: Manners by Thomas Jefferson

Assignment Due

Week 5:

Feb. 22: The Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves by Angela Davis

Feb. 24: The Womb of Western Theory: Trauma, Time Theft, and the Captive Maternal by Joy James

Recommended Reading: Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book by Hortense Spillers + Unnamed by Porsha Olayiwola

Assignment Due

Week 6:

Mar. 1: National Liberation and Culture + Identity and Dignity in the National Liberation Struggle by Amílcar Cabral

Mar. 3: The Lived Experience of the Black Man by Frantz Fanon + On the Issue of Roles by Toni Cade Bambara

Recommended Reading: Primer For Blacks by Gwendolyn Brooks

Assignment Due

Philosophical Anthropology

Week 7:

Mar. 8: The Conservation of the Races by W.E.B. Du Bois

Mar. 10: “But What Are You *Really*?: The Metaphysics of Race,” Blackness Visible by Charles Mills

Recommended Reading: “What Race-Thinking Is,” Race: A Philosophical Introduction by Paul Taylor

No Assignment: Short Paper + Mid-Semester Assessment Due

Spring Break (Mar. 13 - Mar. 20)

Week 8:

Mar. 22: The Racism is Permanent Thesis: Courageous Revelation or Unconscious Denial of Genocide by Derrick Bell

Mar. 24: The Mothership Connection by Paul Youngquist

Recommended Reading: “The White Space” by Elijah Anderson

Assignment Due

Week 9:

Mar. 29: The Akan Concept of a Person by Kwame Gyekye

Mar. 31: Ubuntu and Its Socio-Moral Significance by Mluleki Munyaka and Mokgethi Motlhabi
Recommended Reading: Transition by Akwaeke Emezi + My Gender Is Black by Hari Ziyad
Assignment Due

Week 10:

Apr. 5: Theorizing Progressive Black Masculinities by Athena Mutua

Apr. 7: Latinegras: Desired Women—Undesirable Mothers, Daughters, Sisters, and Wives by Marta Cruz-Janzen

Recommended Reading: Your Lips: Mapping Afro-Boricua Feminist Becomings by Yomaira Figueroa + Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics by Kimberlé Crenshaw

Assignment Due

The Meta-Critique of Reason

Week 11:

Apr. 12: Of Our Spiritual Strivings by W.E.B. Du Bois + Legitimacy from Modernity's Underside: Potentiated Double Consciousness by Jane Anna Gordon

Apr. 14: Thinking/creating Africa by Souleymane Bachir Diagne + The struggle for reason in Africa by Mogobe Ramose

Recommended Reading: Smadditizin' by Charles Mills

Assignment Due

Week 12:

Apr. 19: The New Negro by Alain Locke + The Black Arts Movement by Larry Neal

Apr. 21: Black Aesthetics, Black Value by Lewis Gordon + Rhodes Must Fall by Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni

Recommended Reading: Bolekaja Aesthetics by Athi Mongezeleli Joja

Assignment Due

Week 13:

Apr. 26: "What Are We Worth?" A Voice From the South by Anna Julia Cooper

Apr. 28: In the Name of Beauty by Tressie McMillan Cottom

Recommended Reading: Hey Girl, Am I More than My Hair?: African American Women and Their Struggles with Beauty, Body Image, and Hair by Tracey Owens Patton

Assignment Due

Week 14:

May 3: How is this Paper Philosophy? By Kristie Dotson

May 5: "Believe It or Not" or the Ku Klux Klan and American Philosophy Exposed by Leonard Harris

Recommended Reading: The University and the Undercommons by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney

Week 15:

May 10: Class Review + Term Paper Workshop

Remember: Term Paper and Final Self-Assessment due next week.