

AFR/HIS 363.001
African American History
Mercer University
Spring 2015

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OFFICE HOURS: MF 9-11; TR 11-12

TR 9:25-10:40 A.M.
RYL 207

Every generation has the opportunity to write its own history, and indeed it is obliged to do so. Only in that way can it provide its contemporaries with the materials vital to understanding the present and to planning strategies for coping with the future. Only in that way can it fulfill its obligation to pass on to posterity the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of the past, which, after all, gives substance and direction for the continuity of civilization.

John Hope Franklin, "On the Evolution of Scholarship in Afro-American History," (1986)

The challenge of the paradox is that there can be no white history or black history, nor can there be an integrated history that does not begin to comprehend that slavery and freedom, white and black, are joined at the hip. . . . Our times seem to call for new myths and a revised master narrative that better inspire and reflect upon our true condition. Such a new narrative would find inspiration, for instance, in an oppressed people who defied social death as slaves and freedmen, insisting on their humanity and creating a culture despite a social consensus that they were a 'brutish sort of people.' Such a new narrative would bring slavery and the persistent oppression of race from the margins to the center, to define the limits and boundaries of the American Dream. Such a new narrative would oblige us to face the deforming mirror of truth.

Nathan Huggins, "The Deforming Mirror of Truth," (1990)

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES: This course will offer students an overview of African American history from the colonial era to the present. In the words of historian Thomas C. Holt, "our task . . . is twofold: to put black people at the center of their history and to put the black experience at the center of American history, reinterpreting that history in light of that experience." To this end, students will read major works by leading historians as well as primary documents. By the end of the course, the successful student will be able to demonstrate an understanding of:

- institutionalized slavery in America
- conditions of free blacks in antebellum America
- the roles of African Americans in the Civil War and Reconstruction
- the meaning of freedom
- the nature of black leadership in the Jim Crow era
- the roots, implications, achievements, and transformation of a modern civil rights movement/black nationalism

In addition, successful students will be able to:

- think critically
- write clearly, forcefully, and with grace
- construct and defend a strong thesis
- articulate the importance of primary documents to the field of historical inquiry
- understand the historiography of the field
- read monographs for narratives and arguments (rather than merely for detail)

REQUIRED TEXTS: The following assigned texts are on sale in the campus bookstore.

Michael Gomez, *Exchanging our Country Marks*
The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, The Gutenberg Project (<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/15399>)
Sue Peabody and Keila Grinberg, *Slavery, Freedom, and the Law in the Atlantic World*
Hannah Rosen: *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*
Martin Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents*
Isabel Wilkerson, *Warmth of Other Suns*
Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*
Glenn T. Eskew, *But For Birmingham*

You are to complete the reading for the day on which it was assigned.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance

Students should make every effort to attend class sessions. Four absences are allowed. After the fourth absence, students will lose **5 points** off their final grade for each absence (five, six, and seven). ***Eight absences will result in failing the class.*** Students who miss class in excess of the limits stipulated here because of University sponsored events must notify the professor of the anticipated class absences at least one week in advance.

Participation

Sometimes you will be in control of the class and other times I will be leading how we engage material. I think that discussion plays an important role in student learning. Often you all may read a primary document differently than me. In that case, our discussion of the texts will help us understand how historians work – in conversation with one another. Though I am not giving students a daily grade, there is a cumulative grade assigned to each of you at the end of the semester. I will try to give you a sense of your participation grade during the term, but if you are wondering please ask. The scale for Participation grading is 6-10. Showing up earns you a six (6). Listening quietly but looking distracted earns you a seven (7). Listening quietly and looking interested gives you a seven-point-five (7.5). Listening and taking notes gives you an eight (8). Listening and making notes, with an occasional good comment earns you an eight-point-five (8.5). Listening and taking notes, with several good comments gives you a nine (9). Listening well and commenting in such a way that alters the class discussion in a significant, positive way earns you appreciation from the professor and a nine-point-five (9.5). Ten (10) is at the discretion of the professor and considered rare. Doing homework for another class, or otherwise looking disinterested, and failing to bring the book to class *will* result in a zero (0).

Exams

There will be three exams. Each exam will consist of essay sections. Students will have a choice of essay topics. I will go over the format with you again as the first exam date draws near.

Film Review

Each student will write a review of the film *Lincoln* **OR** *Django Unchained* in light of the controversy surrounding Steven Spielberg's depiction (or, lack thereof) of African Americans' role in securing their own freedom or Quentin Tarantino's depiction of slavery. Specific guidelines will be distributed during the course of the term. The essay is due on the last day of class.

Grading: I will calculate your grade based on your performance on three scheduled exams, a final project, and class participation. The distribution, format, and grading scale follow.

Exams – 75% (25% each)

Class Participation – 15%

Film Review – 10%

The grading scale is as follows:

90-100 - A	78-79 - C+	
88-89 - B+	70-77 - C	59 and below - F
80- 87 - B	60-69 - D	

Any student receiving failing grades at any time during the course is urged to meet with the instructor.

What will I have to do to get a good grade? (Altered from Colin Harris, Professor, CCPS, Mercer)

Mercer's grading system is set up to reflect certain levels of involvement and performance. The C and C+ range of grades reflects the performance one would expect of someone in college. It means the course requirements have been met in a satisfactory way. The B and B+ grades recognize an above average level of involvement and performance in the course. This means that the student has more than met the minimum standards for the course and has shown some initiative in taking charge of her or his learning own learning experience. The A grade represents a level of seriousness and excellence in involvement and performance that is the best students can produce.

In a course such as this one, it is more difficult to measure the quality of performance than it would be in a more concrete subject area. What I can do is tell you some things I have noticed about students whose work in this course has been above average and superior. I hope these observations will be helpful to you in thinking about your own involvement.

1. Above average and excellent students attend and participate alertly in class sessions. An occasional absence is necessary; however, there is a clear difference between necessary and causal absence. Alert participation means serious involvement in our study, not necessarily just talking in class. The fact that some persons are less vocal than other does not mean that their participation is less. It may be more. Students who participate in group learning and are concerned not only for their own learning process but also for what they can contribute to their fellow learners seem to be those who do the best work. I would like for you to call or email me before an absence, if you can, or as soon as possible afterward so that we can stay caught up with the work we are doing together. On a rather sour note, more than two absences could be cause for failure in this class.

2. Above average and excellent students tend to spend six to eight hours outside of class preparing for and reflecting upon each class section. Many, of course, "get by" with less; but that is often the difference between adequate and excellent.

3. These students tend to be "active" rather than "passive" learners. This means that they engage the subject matter as partners in dialogue rather than merely as receptacles of information. The active learner asks questions of the subject and takes initiative in pursuing related lines of inquiry.

4. Above average and excellent students seem to be persons who are willing to change and grow in their understanding. They have what might be called "critical flexibility," which means that they do not remain rigidly fixed to particular patterns of thinking, nor do they change just because they encounter something new. Rather, they constantly test their thinking according to the truth they discover. They are more concerned to grow in understanding than they are to prove certain ideas right or wrong.

Statement on Disabilities

"Students requiring accommodations for a disability should inform the instructor at the close of the first class meeting or as soon as possible. The instructor will refer you to the ACCESS and Accommodation

Office to document your disability, determine eligibility for accommodations under the ADAAA/Section 504 and to request a Faculty Accommodation Form. Disability accommodations or status will not be indicated on academic transcripts. In order to receive accommodations in a class, students with sensory, learning, psychological, physical or medical disabilities must provide their instructor with a Faculty Accommodation Form to sign. Students must return the signed form to the ACCESS Coordinator. A new form must be requested each semester. Students with a history of a disability, perceived as having a disability or with a current disability who do not wish to use academic accommodations are also strongly encouraged to register with the ACCESS and Accommodation Office and request a Faculty Accommodation Form each semester. For further information, please contact Carole Burrowbridge, Director and ADA/504 Coordinator, at 301-2778 or visit the ACCESS and Accommodation Office website at <http://www.mercer.edu/disabilityservices>” * (07/13)

HONOR CODE

All of the members of this class will conduct themselves according to the guidelines of the Mercer Honor System as outlined in the *Lair*. Specifically within the context of essays, the thoughts and/or words of other people must be fully acknowledged with appropriate notes. Plagiarism, even inadvertent plagiarism, is a serious offense. If you any questions about proper citation of sources, talk to the instructor before submitting a paper. Your own work for another course may not be submitted for a grade in this course.

CELLULAR PHONE AND PAGER USE

Out of courtesy for all those participating in the learning experience, all cell phones and pagers must be turned **off** before entering any classroom, lab, or formal academic or performance event. If this becomes a problem, the teacher reserves the right to remove the phone and/or the student from the class.