Course Description: This course considers recent writings that take up philosophical issues in the context of African American history, politics, and expressive culture. We’ll examine several challenging questions that arise when we reflect philosophically on the black experience in America. Topics include what it means to be “black,” the political morality of black resistance, white supremacy, black feminism, black solidarity, assimilation and cultural authenticity, the aesthetics of black art, blacks and criminal justice, and the very idea of a distinctive African American philosophical tradition.

Prerequisites: This course is designed primarily for graduate students in philosophy and African American studies. It is recommended for only those students who have substantial background in at least one of these subjects and have some familiarity with both.

Requirements:

• Class participation (15%). This involves making regular and well-informed contributions to seminar discussion, which of course requires that you do the reading. Each meeting one student will start the discussion by raising three questions (which can take the form of objections or criticisms) about the readings.
• A 3-5 page paper that concisely and accurately summarizes an argument from the readings and clearly articulates one or (at most) two objections to that argument (20%). Due Oct. 7.
• A 5-7 page critical discussion of a philosophical problem (25%). Due Nov. 11.
• A 7-8 page critical discussion of a philosophical problem (40%). Due Dec. 9.

Required Texts (all of which are on reserve at Lamont library):

• ‘*’ indicates that the reading is available on the course website.

Schedule:

August 31: Introduction

Recommended:

September 12: Liberalism, Conservatism, and Marxism in Black

September 19: Separation, Assimilation, Self-Respect, and Protest

September 26: Race, Identity, and the Invention of the “Negro”

Recommended:

October 3: White Supremacy as Philosophical Subject

October 10: University Holiday (no class)

October 17: Black Feminist Philosophy

Recommended:

October 24: Black Solidarity

October 31: Two Traditions of Afro-Modern Political Thought

November 7: The Aesthetics and Politics of Black Art

November 14: The Aesthetics and Politics of Black Art cont’d

November 21: Prisons and Policing
November 28: Crime and Punishment