

PHIL 279: African American Philosophy

Fall 2016

Mondays 2:00-4:00, Emerson 106

Professor Tommie Shelby

Office Hours: Mondays 5:00-6:00, Wednesdays 1:30-2:30

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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):

- Bernard R. Boxill, *Blacks and Social Justice*, rev. ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992).
- Charles W. Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).
- Tommie Shelby, *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).
- Naomi Zack, *White Privilege and Black Rights: The Injustice of U.S. Police Racial Profiling and Homicide* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015).

- Paul C. Taylor, *Black Is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics* (Malden: Wiley, 2016).
- Tommie Shelby, *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016).
- '*' indicates that the reading is available on the course website.

Schedule:

August 31: Introduction

- Lucius Outlaw and Michael D. Roth, "Is There a Distinctive African-American Philosophy?" *Academic Questions* (Spring 1997): 29-45.*
- Paul C. Taylor, "A Future for Africana (Post-)Analytic Philosophy," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 108 (2009): 501-517.*
- Chike Jeffers, "A Westian Vision of the Role of Black Philosophy," *The Black Scholar* 43 (2013): 24-31.
- Kristie Dotson, "Radical Love: Black Philosophy as Deliberate Acts of Inheritance," *The Black Scholar* 43 (2013): 38-45.*
- Charles W. Mills, "An Illuminating Blackness," *The Black Scholar* 43 (2013): 32-37.*

Recommended:

- Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1982), pp. 11-24.
- Lewis R. Gordon, "Africana Philosophy and Philosophy in Black," *The Black Scholar* 43 (2013): 46-51.*

September 12: Liberalism, Conservatism, and Marxism in Black

- Boxill, *Blacks and Social Justice*, Introduction, chaps. 1-3.

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

- Boxill, *Blacks and Social Justice*, chaps. 8-10.

September 26: Race, Identity, and the Invention of the "Negro"

- W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races."*
- Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), chap. 2.*
- Lucius T. Outlaw, "Conserve Races? In Defense of W.E.B. Du Bois," from *Critical Theory in the Interests of Black Folks* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 139-162.*

Recommended:

- Paul C. Taylor, "Appiah's Uncompleted Argument: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Reality of Race," *Social Theory and Practice* 26 (2000): 103-128.

- Chike Jeffers, "The Cultural Theory of Race: Yet Another Look at Du Bois's 'The Conservation of Races,'" *Ethics* 123.3 (2013): 403-426.

October 3: White Supremacy as Philosophical Subject

- Charles W. Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), chaps. 4-7.

October 10: University Holiday (no class)

October 17: Black Feminist Philosophy

- Patricia Hill Collins, "Black Feminist Epistemology," from *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2000), 251-272.*
- Patricia Hill Collins, "Some Groups Matter: Intersectionality, Situated Standpoints, and Black Feminist Thought," from *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 201-228.*

Recommended:

- Kristie Dotson, "Inheriting Patricia Hill Collins's Black Feminist Epistemology," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38.13 (2015): 2322-2328.
- Kristie Dotson, "Word to the Wise: Notes on a Black Feminist Metaphilosophy," *Philosophy Compass* 11 (2016): 69-74.

October 24: Black Solidarity

- Tommie Shelby, *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2005), Introduction, chaps. 2, 4, and 6.

October 31: Two Traditions of Afro-Modern Political Thought

- Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), Introduction, chaps. 1, 4, and 6.

November 7: The Aesthetics and Politics of Black Art

- Paul C. Taylor, *Black Is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics* (Malden: Wiley, 2016), chaps. 1-3.

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

- Paul C. Taylor, *Black Is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics* (Malden: Wiley, 2016), chaps. 4-6, and Conclusion.

November 21: Prisons and Policing

- Angela Y. Davis, *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*, ed. Joy James (Malden: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 39-107.*

- Naomi Zack, *White Privilege and Black Rights: The Injustice of U.S. Police Racial Profiling and Homicide* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015), chaps. 2-3.

November 28: Crime and Punishment

- Tommie Shelby, *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2016), Introduction and chaps. 7-8.