

AFRC 1187: TOPICS IN AFRICANA STUDIES, SPRING 2025*

The History of People of African Descent

at the University of Pennsylvania

[Fulfills Cultural Diversity in the U.S. requirement]

Mondays, 10:15am

[Rev. Dr. Chaz Howard](#)

[Daina Troy](#)

Chaplain & VP for Social Equity and Community Director, Penn Spectrum Programs

Co-Facilitator

Co-Facilitator

[Dr. Brian Peterson](#)

Director, Makuu Black Cultural Center

Consultant

Office hours by appointment.

PURPOSE

The journey and witness of the people of African descent who have studied, taught, researched, and worked at the University of Pennsylvania provides a powerful case study and window into the complex history of Blacks, not only in America but throughout the Diaspora. University communities offer rare opportunities for dialogue and experience, as well as intercultural, inter-ethnic and inter-class engagement within the Black community. This has indeed been the case at Penn. Further, the stories of the trials and triumphs of individuals on and around this campus demonstrate the amazing and absurd experience that Blacks have endured in this country.

It is the purpose of this course to provide a dialogical space where students can not only learn of but uncover and unpack collective and individual histories. Emphasis will be placed on creating a democratic classroom where all are students, and all are instructors. The course also endeavors to contribute to the current Black community at Penn, both in sharing knowledge and creating meaningful campus engagement opportunities through course projects. Lastly, this course will

be a part of a broader effort with the goal of presenting the history of Blacks at Penn as both a rich case study and principal future developmental core. Thus, students will complete the course not only having learned (and presented) a moving history, but they will gain valuable lessons in historical research and criticism, ethnographic principles, participatory action projects, and twenty-first century academic literacies.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

NOTE: The schedule below is subject to change, due to the availability of our guests on given weeks. All course topics and readings will be confirmed in the class session the week prior to give ample time for any adjustments. Additionally, there will be events and speakers outside of class time that may be relevant to the class content and/or your personal interests. We will make the class aware of these opportunities, but we understand if you have other commitments.

All the content listed below will be available online.

All readings should be done prior to each class session. All assignments listed are due at the end of the day of the class session they are listed under and should be uploaded to Canvas.

DATE	TOPIC/READINGS	Assignments
#01	Course Introduction / Stories of Inclusion, Healing, and Transformation	
JAN 15	In class, view Towards Inclusion , commissioned by Penn's James Brister Society in 2006, and afterwards answer these responses .	
#02	Philadelphia and Penn: Two Sides to Two Stories	Towards Inclusion Response
JAN 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Negro in Philadelphia, 1638–1820. Chapter 3 of The Philadelphia Negro, by W.E.B. Du Bois, 1996 (reprint) • University City celebrates a 20-year anniversary of development, revitalization — and displacement. The DP, November 16, 2017. • For the Record: Locust Walk • West Philadelphia Community History Center. Explore the site a bit. 	
#03	Early Black Penn History	Cultural Autobiography
FEB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Blacks at Penn, Then and Now.” Marvin P. Lyon, Jr. 	(Upload to Canvas Discussion Board by 1/30;

3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity Timelines, Penn Archives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timeline 1 Timeline 2 African Americans in Pennsylvania, Part 1 (Skim through, but look for one item of interest) Here's How Yale Honored Its First Black Student, USA Today, October 7, 2016 	Read and comment on minimum of five others by 2/3)
#04	Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Founding of Higher Education in America	
FEB 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Penn Says 'All Clear' As Ivies Decry Slavery Ties" The DP, November 3, 2006. "Penn Student Researchers Dig Into the University's Unaddressed Ties to the Slave Trade" The DP, January 13, 2018. "272 Slaves Were Sold to Save Georgetown. What Does It Owe Their Descendants?" The New York Times, April 16, 2016. Slavery on America's College Campuses Went Beyond Buying and Selling, Time Magazine, September 2016. Also explore the Penn and Slavery Project 	
#05	Climate, Culture, Presence, and Permanence: A Critical Race Perspective on Institution and Third Spaces	
FEB 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity Timelines, Penn Archives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timeline 3 Timeline 4 African Americans in Pennsylvania, Part 2 (Skim through) Nathan Francis Mossell Autobiography Visit, click, learn -- Africana Studies website ; African American Resource Center 	
#06	Admissions: Access, Accountability, and Social Change	

FEB 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Penn Compact 2022 • Penn diversity snapshot • Thompson, Derek. 2013. “How America's Top Colleges Reflect (and Massively Distort) the Country's Racial Evolution.” The Atlantic. • OPTIONAL: Chang, Mitchell J. 2005. “Reconsidering the Diversity Rationale.” Liberal Education, Winter 2005. <p>OPTIONAL: Massey, Douglas, Margarita Mooney, Kimberly C. Torres, and Camille Z. Charles. 2007. “Black Immigrants and Black Natives Attending Selective Colleges and Universities in the United States.” American Journal of Education 113:243-271</p>	
#07	Phenomenal Women: Past, Present, and Future	
MAR 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women at Penn: Timeline of Pioneers and Achievements • Women of Color at Penn • Helen O. Dickens - Bio Archived Papers (Skim) • Lani Guinier Redefines Diversity, Re-evaluates Merit (New York Times, 2015) • Dorothy Roberts, Penn's 14th PIK Professor <p>OPTIONAL: Knocking Down Doors: The Trailblazing Life of Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, Lia B. Epperson. 1998</p>	
	SPRING BREAK	
#08	How Does It Feel To Be A Credit To Your Race: Identity, Influence, and Impact Among Penn's Black Alumni	
MAR 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who Really Invented the 'Talented Tenth'? • The Talented Tenth Memorial Address, W.E.B. Du Bois (1948) • The Pennsylvania Gazette (Look around) • Penn Alumni website (Look around) 	

	Career Services Networking and Mentoring (Look around)	
#09	Blacks in the Ivory Tower: Opportunity, Discord, Activism, and Permanence at the Nation's First University	
MAR 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chaps 1-3 from Black Students in the Ivory Tower: African American Student Activism at the University of Pennsylvania, 1967-1990, by Wayne Glasker, 2002. • The Daily Pennsylvanian, October 31, 1968. (Front page and "On the Plantation" page 2 • SKIM: Minority Permanence at the University of Pennsylvania: A Retrospective Analysis (1993) 	
#10	UMOJA Means Unity	
MAR 31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "What Every Black Student at Penn Should Know," Rasool Berry, 1999 • "Guess Who's (Not) Coming to Dinner" The DP, January 30, 2013. 	
#11	Makuu: Reflecting on 25 Years	
APR 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrating 25 Years of Cultural Excellence • Makuu at 20 	
#12	Uncovering New History / Sharing Your Perspectives	
APR 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A class conversation on Historical Dig Findings, Responses, and Further Questions to Explore 	
#13	A Cultural Legacy of Achievement: Arts, Athletics, Activities, and Altruism at Penn	
APR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African American Arts Alliance: A Proud Penn Tradition (Penn Today, 2016) 	

21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Origins of Penn Athletics (2005). • Penn Basketball: John Wideman and the 1963 City Champions (read through all of the Contents sections, right hand side). 	
#14	Making Black History Conclusion	
APR 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final groups / students will present final projects 	

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

*Syllabus will be updated by the first day of classes, Wednesday, January 15th

1. Students will be expected to attend class each week, on time and prepared to participate in class discussions after completing all assigned readings. 25 points max.

- Towards Inclusion. Students will view this short film on Penn's diversity and inclusion efforts and submit responses to questions. 5 points max.

2. Cultural Autobiography. Students will write a brief autobiographical snapshot paying particular attention to the ways that their cultural background, experiences, and perceptions have helped to shape their present identities and interests. The purpose of this exercise is for students to locate themselves in the story that we will be narrating over the course of the semester. 3-4 pages, double-spaced. 10 points max for paper, 5 points max for comments (1 point each, commenting on 5 classmate's papers).

3. CHOOSE ONE:

- - Historical Dig. Students will explore an aspect of Penn's Black History, uncovering a new topic or shedding additional light on previous work. While not required, utilizing the Penn Archives is highly recommended for this assignment. 4-5 pages, double-spaced. 30 points max.
 - Response Paper. Students will be given a set of possible questions two weeks prior to the due date. They will select three of the questions and write a thoughtful 1-2 page, double-spaced response for each. 10 points max per question, 30 points max total.

4. Making Black History Project. This project involves exploring a facet of life at Penn linked to Black culture, diversity, and/or social justice, and developing a proposal to enhance that facet, thereby improving campus life (or beyond). This year's projects will concentrate on three existing

Penn institutions: Asé Saturday Academy, UMOJA, or Makuu Black Cultural Center. This project can also build on the historical dig project above, doing an even deeper dive on discovering the Black history of Penn.

Proposals are submitted early in the semester to allow time for project piloting or implementation, with a final report at the end of the semester. Projects can be done individually or in groups of up to 3. A course facilitator or teaching assistant will serve as a point person, providing guidance throughout the process. Additionally, the class itself will function as a workshop to provide historical grounding, critical feedback, and suggestions for collaboration within and outside of the class. Final submissions can be mixed media (i.e., video is welcome), but a written portion must also be included (length to be adjusted by project, and could also include public-facing content such as an op-ed, historical photo essay on Instagram,), in addition to a final presentation / conversation / workshop. Typical papers are 4-6 pages, double-spaced. 25 points max (presentation / discussion 5 points, paper / deliverables 20 points).

FINAL GRADES

99-100 = A+ 87-89 = B+ 77-79 = C+ 66-69 = D 65 & below = F

94-98 = A 83-86 = B 73-76 = C

90-93 = A- 80 - 82 = B- 70-72 = C-