“BLUES & THE ABSTRACT TRUTH:”
Studies in Paradigms of Black History/Knowledge & Preliminary Critiques of White Supremacy
Summer 2008

Instructor: Kelvin J. Monroe
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Required Manuscripts:
- Quintard Taylor; *From Timbuktu to Katrina: Readings in African American History, vol.1*
- Quintard Taylor; *From Timbuktu to Katrina: Readings in African American History, vol.2*
- Aimé Césaire; *Discourse on Colonialism*
- Jamaica Kincaid; *A Small Place*
- Frantz Fanon; *Black Skin, White Masks*
- Gayl Jones; *Corregidora*

Disclaimer: My language is foul, not vulgar. However, I do not curse for the sake of cursing. Besides, we are here for some knowledge acquisition, not to be entertained by my foul mouth. We are adults and I will treat you as such. I will not curse at anyone, nor have I ever cursed at anyone. If this knowledge makes you uncomfortable, then get over it, get over yourself and welcome yourself to this process we called growth, which produces change, which is ushered in by conflict—often with one’s self and one’s assumptions.

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Course Synopsis

With regards to knowing and understanding history, Roman Politician, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC – 43 BC), said that “[t]o be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to always remain a child.” Cicero, understood that knowledge of history is simultaneously a knowledge of self; more, it is a thorough knowledge of self that enables people to develop into conscious human beings. Still, once we begin to move in the direction of obtaining that consciousness thru the study of history, Psychologist, Dr. Amos N. Wilson cautions us by asserting that any “study of history cannot be a mere celebration
of those who struggled on our behalf.” Rather, Wilson suggests, “[w]e must be instructed by history and should transform history into a concrete reality,” a concrete reality that enables a kind of growth rooted in the vestiges of struggle of and for humanity.

In this class this semester, we examine history from an array of points of contention: historical documents, creative non-fiction, anti-colonial writings, psychiatric diagnosis of white supremacy, fiction, and film. Through engaging these rigorous and, albeit, enlightening texts we shall engage in a historical rediscovery as well as posit some preliminary critiques of white supremacy: a structural phenomena, a historiographic discursive formation, an ideology, that ultimately seeks to deny self knowledge through subtle interlocking systems of power. This will be our concern this semester. Dr. Wilson concludes:

Moreover, the Eurocentric social order, which the Eurocentric historiographic and behavioral science establishments legitimate and support, is essentially a “social machine” which manufactures a consciousness and behavioral orientation in Afrikan peoples designed to serve the purposes of White supremacy. (Wilson 4)

To reiterate, in this class we will

[b]egan an exploration [into] the working mechanisms of the machine and the Means by which it is to be dismantled. (Wilson 4)

This task (and consequently, this class) depends on each of us to attend everyday, and ready to tackle the formidable struggle against this “machine” for the purposes of understanding the world in which we exist, and how to negotiate daily, this world of ideological subterfuge. Let’s make it do what it do baby…

Evaluation Criteria

There is no final examination for this class.

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<th>5 Written Responses.</th>
<th>50 pts ea.</th>
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<td>3 in –class Exam</td>
<td>100 pts ea.</td>
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More On Evaluation Policies

There will be no acceptance of late papers.

Class participation is vital. It demonstrates that you are reading and arriving to class prepared for lively discussion.

No emailing papers. I will only take hard copies of your written assignments. I will accept assignments printed on recycled paper, colored paper, or however you hard-copy it.
It is suggested that you should set aside at least two – four hours outside of class, to get the real benefit of the subject matter. This is especially true of a summer six-week session where 1 day is equivalent to 1 week of a 15 week semester course. This brings us to...

...Attendance
You will have three absences at your discretion. After you miss three classes, one letter grade will be deducted from your final mark. I understand that situations and circumstances come up. However, recovering from hangovers and weed‐highs, do not count. Do not bullshit yourself nor me. Come to class. Its easier; plus, my classes slap in a major way.

Other Business
I reserve the right to give unannounced evaluations if I feel that there is a lack of commitment to the materials and reading.

Accommodations
Reasonable accommodations are available for students who have a documented disability. Please notify me about this documentation during the first week of class.

Academic Dishonesty
Do your own work. Plagiarism will not tolerated and will be dealt with swiftly and firmly. If you use some else’s thoughts or words, use proper citation (see MLA citation guidelines, which I will give each of you). Further, to use or borrow someone else’s thoughts and ideas do not invalidate your own original thoughts and ideas. It shows that you are consulting others to further and deepen your own thoughts and ideas. This is no different than someone giving you credit for something that you did that affected their life in one way or another. Any form of cheating will result in automatic failing for the semester—no exceptions. I will cover proper forms of citation in class so that we are on the same page. Consult WAC 504-25-010 through WAC 504-25-015 for further explanation regarding academic dishonesty.
**Tentative Class Schedule**

**Week One**
- **Introductions**: to each other, to concepts, terminology, and syllabus.
- **Handouts**: excerpt from Michel–Rolph Trouillot’s *Silencing the Past: Power and Production of History*; Dr. Amos Wilson’s *The Falsification of the Afrikan Consciousness*; John Henrik Clarke, *Christopher Columbus and The African Holocaust*.
- **Exam #1 (100pts)** — Wilson, and excerpts from Taylor and outside video. **Friday, May 9th**.
- **Written Response #1 (50pts)**: due on Wilson’s reading, **Thursday, May 8th**.
- **Film**: *Slavery and The Making of America*, vols. 1 – 4. on reserve

**Week Two**
- **Handouts**: excerpts from Vijay Prashad’s *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World*; David N. Lawyer’s “The Domestic Colonial Model.”
- **Reading**: Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse of Colonialism*
- **Written Response #2 (50pts)**: Summarize Lawyer’s reading & respond to videos. **Wednesday, May 14th**.
- **Exam #2 (100 pts)**—on Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism*, **Thursday, May 15th**.
- **Films**: *Tools of Exploitation*, Ali Mazrui; *Ghosts of Rwanda; Lumumba*—on reserve

**Week Three**
- **Written Response #3 (50pts)**: on Baldwin’s readings, due **Wednesday, May 21st**.
- **Exam #3 (100pts)**—On Taylor and Baldwin. **Friday, May 23rd**.
- **Film**: *Black Power, White Backlash*; on reserve

**Week Four**
- **Reading**: Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place*
- **Written Response #4 (50pts)** — Summarize *A Small Place* in the context of videos, due **Thursday, May 29th**.
- **Films**: *Profit and Nothing But* by Raoul Peck; *Deadly Embrace: Nicaragua, The World Bank and International Monetary Fund; Life and Debt* by Stephanie Black; on reserve

**Week Five**
- **Reading**: Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*
- **Written Response #5 (50pts)** — Summarize and respond to Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* and the film *Good Fences*, due **Friday, June 6th**.
- **Film**: *Good Fences (In Class Viewings)*
Week Six

- **Reading:** Gayl Jones’ *Corregidora*
- **Film:** *Assault at West Point: The Court Marshall of Johnson Whitaker*
- **Have a good summer!!! Best of luck to you wherever you go and in whatever you do…**

**X-tra Credit Opportunities**

*(10pts)* You can receive 10pts extra credit for submitting one of your papers from this class into your Junior Writing Portfolio.

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The greatest weapon of the oppressor is the MIND of the oppressed . . .

—Steve Biko