

# PHIL-532: Intro to Black Radical Thought

Georgetown University 2019

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**Lecture:** M 2:30-5:00

**Office Hours:** M 12:30-2:30 Instructor's Office New North Hall

*“And so no one need be discouraged because these waves of human forces to the radical movement come and go. They all leave their imprint. The radical imprint, they all leave something behind, and the next great movement like this one that comes, simply steps into the footsteps of those who have gone, and carry it further until the emancipation comes. It is a lesson of history. We do not accomplish all in one day, or one generation. It goes on to the other generations...”* – Lucy Parsons, “I’ll Be Damned If I Go Back To Work Under Those Conditions!”, May Day 1930.

## 1. Course Summary: What this course is about

Intro to Black Radical Thought will (try to) be a class about what it sounds like: an introduction to Black radical thought. It will attempt only to survey some basic themes in Black thought that recur in the contexts of daily life, historical moments of pitched and overt struggle, and the nebulous in-between. It will not attempt to be an introduction into the intellectual history of Black studies or of related disciplines, nor of canonical thinkers who were Black and radical, or of canonical texts by those who were Black and radical, though some of the authors and texts on the syllabus might well qualify as such.

## 2. Course Requirements

*Class Participation: 20%*

*In Class Presentation: 20%*

*Midterm Essay: 30%*

*Final Essay: 30%*

### 2.1 Class/Section Participation

20% of your grade for this course is determined by class participation: attending some combination of class, section, and office hours, and contributing to these spaces while you are there in ways that contribute to rather than detract from the experience of those you share the rooms with. Some students will feel more comfortable contributing thoughts or asking questions in one forum over another, which is fine. A passing grade for the course will simply require students to be active participants in some form or other. Active participation may involve asking question, weighing in with an interpretation of what some author is claiming, or sharing one’s own point of view, insofar as it may helpfully inform the discussion at hand. It also involves being a thoughtful and engaged listener.

A good rule of thumb if you want a participation grade of a B or higher: Don’t miss class, and don’t disappear on me and/or your TAs: in-class contributions, participation in section, attendance at office hours, or (worst case scenario) emails explaining why you couldn’t do any of the aforementioned are ways to check in.

## **2.2 In Class Presentations**

The tentative schedule below indicates which readings are eligible for presentations. Each student will be expected to present on at least one book or article during the semester. Your presentation should include a brief reconstruction of the book or article's major themes and/or arguments: this step is especially important for books, as I will only make a portion of each book required reading for each week. Your presentation should also engage critically with these major themes, incorporation outside texts, thoughts, facts, and content from the course and from the discussions we have along the way.

## **2.3 Grading**

### **Paper deadlines:**

If you need an extension on any assignment, please ask *before* the due date. In general, I will be willing to give a 48-hour grace period (no questions asked). If you are still having trouble completing the assignment after that, you must set up an appointment to go over your ideas and set a schedule for finishing the paper. Unless an extension is granted in advance, assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a grade (A- to a B+, B+ to a B, etc.) for each day they are late.

### **Appealing a grade:**

You can appeal any grade that you feel does not accurately represent the work you have done. All appeals for re-evaluation must be made in writing, no more than two weeks after your paper is returned, and no sooner than 48 hours after you receive your grade. Requests must provide a compelling argument for raising the grade, but an agreement to re-evaluate a paper is no guarantee of a better grade, and it can result in lower grades if there are more serious problems that were missed on the first reading.

### **The honor code:**

The Georgetown University Honor pledge requires you to be honest in your academic endeavors and to hold yourself to the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life. I expect you to be familiar with the letter and the spirit of this pledge; and, I will enforce the Honor Code by reporting any and all suspected cases of academic dishonesty.

## **2.3 Class Conduct**

In this class I hope we can come to respect two things: the truth, and each other. There's a connection between these: we all know things, and so we all have things to learn from each other. But we can only acquire and build on each other's knowledge collaboratively – saying what we think others want to hear is not genuine contribution to discussion, and neither is the lack of *voiced* dissent equivalent to genuine consensus. Respect for each other, for knowledge, and for learning requires that we articulate our own views, opinions, misgivings, and questions with courage and respect, and that we contribute

The we will be discussing in this class may generate contentious claims, spirited discussions, vehement disagreements, and trenchant criticisms. This is at least part of what doing

philosophy is all about – most importantly, it’s part of what it is to live with other people as full people rather than as objects of management. I promise you all to do my best to raise philosophical issues and to start philosophical discussions in ways that are as sensitive as possible to the variety of viewpoints and opinions that we are sure to find among the members of this class. My part, as instructor, is not the same as yours – but you all have a necessary part nevertheless and I ask you all to do yours as well.

### 3. Tentative Schedule

All readings will be made accessible. On the weeks where a book is assigned rather than an article or articles, you will only be required to read an excerpt, though it is highly suggested and encouraged that you read the books in their entirety whenever your schedule allows. The one exception is for presenters: unless otherwise communicated, those presenting on a book will be required to read it in its entirety.

#### Part I:

- **Week 1**  
No Reading/Class
- **Week 2**  
SNOW DAY
- **Week 3**  
No Class
- **Week 4**  
Adolph Reed Jr., “What Materialist Black Political History Actually Looks Like”
- **Week 5**  
Presentations: *Violence Over the Land* by Ned Blackhawk; *Decolonizing Universalism: A Transnational Feminist Ethic* by Serene Khader; *The Construction of Human Kinds* Ron Mallon
- **Week 6**  
Presentations: *Capitalism and Slavery* - Eric Williams; *A History of Pan African Revolt* by CLR James
- **Week 7**  
*Black Marxism* - Cedric Robinson
- **Week 8**  
*Black Marxism* – Cedric Robinson (cont’d)

**MIDTERM DUE: March 14<sup>th</sup> 11:59 PM**

#### Part II:

- **Week 9**  
*The Racial Contract* – Charles Mills
- **Week 10**  
*My Bondage and My Freedom* Frederick Douglass
- **Week 11**

“National Liberation and Culture” Amilcar Cabral

- **Week 12**  
Presentations: “Double Jeopardy”, Frances M. Beal; “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” Kimberlé Crenshaw, Tommy J. Curry, *The Man-Not*
- **Week 13**  
*The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison
- **Week 14**  
[Class Suggestions]
- **Week 15**  
[Class Suggestions]

FINAL PAPER DUE

#### 4. Resources

##### Accessibility and diversity:

One finds a great deal of diversity in teaching and learning styles in a modern university. These styles may not always mesh in ways that are conducive to the success and wellbeing of everyone in a course. But there are often ways of improving things. I am happy to discuss the structure of this course, and to work with the learning styles people have to the best of my abilities. So please feel free to talk to me in office hours. I sincerely think that every student is entitled to a meaningful and stimulating classroom experience! Disabled students and students on record with the university as requiring particular accommodations, please let me know that this is the case, in confidence, during the first few weeks of the semester—and please take advantage of services provided by the university. Finally, please let me know if you learn during the semester that something would make the classroom accessible.

##### Sexual misconduct:

As a faculty member and an educator, it is my responsibility to help create a safe learning environment on our campus. Georgetown University and its faculty are committed to supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, including relationship violence and sexual assault. And university policy requires all faculty members to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University’s response to sexual misconduct. But Georgetown also has a number of fully confidential professional resources who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct. These resources include: [Jen Schweer](mailto:Jen.Schweer@georgetown.edu) (202.687.0323) Associate Director of Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention; [Erica Shirley](mailto:Erica.Shirley@georgetown.edu) (202.687.6985) Trauma Specialist (CAPS). More information about campus resources and reporting sexual misconduct can be found at <http://sexualassault.georgetown.edu>.

