This graduate-level course provides an exploration of Africa and the African diaspora in the modern period. The elements of the diasporan frame of reference go back to the earliest days of the migration across the Atlantic, when Africans and Europeans each commented on the network of ties over this region — even though most of the migration was enforced by enslavement. In the intervening centuries a large body of evidence and interpretation has accumulated on slavery, slave trade, cultural survival and change among diasporan populations, anti-slavery campaigns, religious beliefs and practices, and campaigns for civil rights and national identity. With post-World War II decolonization, civil rights movements and the rise of area studies, the publications relevant to African diaspora studies increased rapidly in volume. In the 1970s and 1980s a group at Howard University, led by Joseph E. Harris, sought to formalize the framework of the African diaspora. Their approach included an emphasis on maintaining the African continent as part of the unit of analysis (rather than just consider the overseas diaspora), focusing on issues of African cultural survival in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, and tracing on pan-Africanism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the globalization-centered atmosphere of the 1990s, a flood of new publications began appearing, in which authors adopted the related but distinct frameworks of African diaspora and Black Atlantic.

For graduate students in a world history program, study of the African diaspora may yield both analytical and empirical benefits. First, studies of the African diaspora provide a relatively well-developed corpus of trans-regional and interconnected analysis. This literature
provides a platform for analysis of large regions in comparative and interactive terms. The framework of the African diaspora addresses all the main issues of world history in the past five centuries, seen through the experience of a large group of peoples defined by region and race. Second, study of the African diaspora provides an opportunity to explore the literature on Africa and the Americas, regions that are generally underemphasized in global interpretations of history. Third, it provides a framework for studying race and racialism in history. In a world where so much has been interpreted in terms of putative racial distinctions, the course takes as its framework the homeland and diaspora of black peoples. As such, it allows for analysis of how much in that history consists of additional instances of the common history of mankind, how many of the historical patterns of Africa and the diaspora are distinctive, and how much of the observed distinctiveness is because of race.

The course is set with three broad objectives:

- First, it is organized to permit a systematic overview the large literature on this major section of humanity — especially in English, but with some hints at the literature in other languages.
- Second, the course provides an opportunity to explore patterns in major social issues throughout the diaspora: oppression and resistance; family structures and gender relations; nation-building and civil rights; racial identity, racial hierarchy, and race-mixing; and industry and agriculture.
- Third, and of particular interest to the instructor, the course addresses the patterns in cultural change, and especially the development of popular culture in Africa and the diaspora.

To meet the first objective of providing a systematic overview of relevant literature, the course and its materials have been organized along five axes:

a. **Time.** The chronological development of life in Africa and the African diaspora, as organized into four periods: to 1650, 1650-1800, 1800-1950, since 1950. The course will devote two weeks to each of these periods. Trans-Atlantic slave trade had begun by 1500, 1650 was the beginning of large-scale sugar production in the Caribbean, 1800 was the liberation of Haitian slaves and the rise of a strong anti-slavery movement, and 1850 was civil rights victories and decolonization. (I avoided the temptation to mark a boundary of periods at 1900 with the colonial conquest of Africa and the peak of
racial segregation, and instead treated this moment as a midpoint in
a longer set of transformations.)
b. Place. The balance and interconnection of experience in several
regions: principally Western and Central Africa, and the diaspora in
Latin America, the Caribbean and North America; secondarily Northern
and Eastern Africa and the diaspora in the Mediterranean, the Indian
Ocean, and in Europe.
c. Theme. The balance between historical issues in society (politics,
economy, family, class, ethnicity), and issues in culture (race,
identity, tradition, modernity, material culture, expressive culture,
reflective culture, and intellectual life). The course will
alternate weeks, focusing one week on society and the next week on
culture.
d. Orientation. The historiographical and analytical balance between
two approaches: community-focused studies, analyzing the patterns
and processes within and among black communities in Africa and the
diaspora (e.g., religious traditions); and context-focused studies,
addressing the interplay of black communities with the context
adjoining or encompassing them (e.g. slavery and colonialism).
Required readings for the course are balanced between community-
focused and context-focused studies.
e. Dynamic. The analytical balance between focusing on independent
invention and cross-community connection as the source of social and
cultural change.

Course Activities and Assignments.
The course will proceed through reading and discussion.

1. A common set of required readings forms the initial basis for
discussion.

2. Each week, students will present oral reports on additional readings:
each student will report on two readings in the first half of the
course, and on one reading in the second half of the course, for a
total of three oral reports. Readings marked “Strongly
Recommended” are particularly urged as selections for oral reports.

3. For as many as five of the ten weeks, the class will have guest
speakers, who are authors of materials being discussed during the
class.
4. Written work for the course consists of two papers of about ten pages each, due October 24 and November 27. The papers are to be delivered as Word files, and will be placed on a members-only website where they will be available to the class for comment. The first paper is historiographical, and the second is interpretive — both papers focus on the ties between social realities and cultural production across the African diaspora.

**First paper, due October 24: historiography.** What have authors assumed to be the dynamics of cultural production and change in African and diaspora communities? In particular, what have authors seen as the relationship between social conflicts and cultural output? What have they seen as the balance of African heritage and diasporic encounters in fertilizing cultural output? Your paper should be focused on a segment of literature defined in time and space for its authors and for their subject matter. The paper should address significant connections across the diaspora.

**Second paper, due November 27: interpretation.** In your opinion, how has cultural production of African and diasporan communities reflected the social preoccupations of the members of those communities? Your paper should address a defined time and space in its subject matter, and should address significant connections across the diaspora.

**Texts for Purchase.**

A. **Books.** The following texts are required reading, and have been ordered at the Northeastern bookstore:

Blakely, Allison. *Blacks in the Dutch World.*


Hountondji, Paulin. *African Philosophy.*


Walters, Ronald W. *Pan Africanism in the African Diaspora*.

B. **Reading Packet.** A packet of articles and book chapters has been prepared to accompany the course, and may be purchased at Gnomon Copy on Huntington Avenue.

[Packet tentative contents: Manning, “Navigating World History,” Chapter 13; Yai article; Hunwick and Powell; Gilroy; Lovejoy 2000; ASR 43 (2000);

C. **More Books.** In addition the following texts are strongly recommended though not required. They may be purchased through local bookstores or on-line.


Brereton, Bridget. *History of Modern Trinidad*.

Diop, Cheikh Anta. *Nations nègres et culture*.


Jahn, Jahnheinz. *Muntu, the New African Culture*.


**Background.**

For general introductions to African history and the African diaspora, see any of the following volumes; all but Curtin are on Reserve.

Conniff, Michael, and Thomas J. Davis. *Africans in the Americas*.


Huggins, Nathan. *Harlem Renaissance*.


The course begins with a discussion of the African diaspora project at Howard, and the outlines of the long tradition of thinking of Africa and the African diaspora as a unit of historical inquiry. The Cohen reading provides a review of the idea of diaspora in general.

*Required Reading:*

Cohen, Robin. *Global Diasporas in History*

Harris, Joseph E., ed. *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora* [packet]

*Optional Reading*

Curtin, Philip D. *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*

DuBois, W.E.B. *The Negro*

DuBois, W.E.B. *The World and Africa*

Johnston, H.H. *The Negro in the New World*

2. Wednesday, October 2. To 1650 - Society.

African society at the time of its expanded oceanic connections to the rest of the world; the early days of diaspora societies; and the changes brought to African political, economic, and social life by the new connections.

*Required Reading:*

Thornton, John. *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*

*Optional Reading:*

Berlin, AHR

Bowser, Frederick. *The African Slave in Colonial Peru*


Palmer, Colin. *Slaves of the White God*
Vansina, Jan. Paths in the Rainforest

An exploration of cultural production in Africa and the diaspora up to 1650, focusing especially on visual art, emphasizing the patterns and connections in the production and appreciation of cultural output.

Required Reading:

Optional Reading
Niane, D. T. Sundiata, an Epic of Old Mali

In the diaspora, the principal focus here is on slavery, resistance, and social transformation in diaspora communities. For Africa, studies of this period show the transformation of life as slavery expanded.

Required Reading:

Strongly Recommended

Optional Reading:
Craton, Michael. Testing the chains: resistance to slavery in the British West Indies
Frey, Sylvia. Water from the rock: Black resistance in a revolutionary age
Gomez, Michael.
Harms, Robert. River of Wealth, River of Sorrow
Herskovits, Melville. The Myth of the Negro Past
Hiskett, Mervyn. The Sword of Truth
James, C. L. R. The Black Jacobins: Toussaint l’ Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution. 1938.
Klein, Herbert S. African Slavery in Latin American and the Caribbean
Kulikoff, Allan. Tobacco and Slaves
Law, Robin. The Slave Coast of West Africa
Lovejoy, Paul E. Transformations in Slavery.
Mattoso, Katia M. de Queiros. To be a slave in Brazil
Wood, Peter. Black Majority: Negroes in South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion
Zilversmit, Arthur. The first emancipation: the abolition of slavery in the North.

5. Wednesday, October 23. 1650-1800 – Culture.

The cultural representations of the experiences of slavery, especially in communities of Africa and the diaspora, but also in the minds of those dominant in Atlantic communities.

FIRST PAPER DUE IN CLASS, IN WORD, FOR DOWNLOAD FROM WEB.

Required Reading:

Strongly Recommended
Jahn, Jahnheinz. Muntu, the New African Culture.

Optional Reading:
Thompson, Robert Farris. Flash of the Spirit.
Washington, Margaret. A peculiar people: slave religion and community-culture among the Gullahs


The period opened by the first great liberation of slaves and closed by the beginnings of civil rights victories was a complex mix of processes. In the first half of this period, slavery expanded as much in some areas as it contracted in others; in the second half of this period, racial segregation reached all-time peaks, and the numerous moves to build black nationhood met more defeats than victories.

Required Reading:

Strongly Recommended
Brereton, Bridget. History of Modern Trinidad

Optional Reading:
ASAC. Pan-Africanism Reconsidered.
Bittle, William E. The Longest Way Home.
Blackett. Building an Antislavery Wall.
Casely Hayford, J. E. The Truth about the West African Land Question

Curtin, Philip D. Two Jamaicas: the role of ideas in a tropical colony, 1830–1868


De Graft Johnson. Toward Nationhood in West Africa.


Esedebe, P. Olisanwuch. Pan-Africanism


Hargreaves, John D. Sir Samuel Lewis.


Harris, Joseph. African-American Reactions to the War in Ethiopia, 1936–1941.


Hine, Darlene Clark, and Jacqueline McLeod, eds. Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora.

Holt, Thomas. The problem of freedom: race, labor, and politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938

Hooker, James R. Black Revolutionary: George Padmore's path from communism to pan-Africanism


Johnson, G. Wesley. The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal.

Kimble, George H. T. A Political History of Ghana.
Langley, J. Ayodele. Pan Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa, 1900-1945
Lovejoy, Paul E. and Robin Law. Baga...
Makonnen, Ras. Pan-Africanism from Within
Manning, Patrick. Slavery, Colonialism and Economic Growth in Dahomey.
Oxaal, Ivar. Black intellectuals and the dilemmas of race and class in Trinidad
Oxaal, Ivar. Race and revolutionary consciousness; a documentary interpretation of the
Padmore, George. Pan-Africanism or Communism?
Weisbord, Burton. Ebony Kinship.
Wilks, Ivor. Asante in the Nineteenth Century
7. **Wednesday, November 6. 1800-1950 – Culture.**

As the ideology of racism developed to contest the growing pressures to dismantle the system of slavery, African culture became a target for opprobrium from the increasingly hegemonic cultures of empire. The cultural production of Africa and the diaspora continued to express the ancestral culture and its evolution, and also its encounters with Europeans and native Americans. Especially in the diaspora, but also in Africa, this era saw the development of popular arts, in many media, that eventually came to be adopted by a much wider range of communities.

Debates over identity, reflected in the changing names that black people gave to their communities, included efforts to define the nature of freedom, citizenship, nationhood, race, color, ethnicity, and cultural group.

**Required Reading:**

**Strongly Recommended**

**Optional Reading:**
Barrett, Leonard. *The Rastafarians*
Césaire, Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism.*
Curtin, Philip D. *The Image of Africa.*
Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man.*
Hughes, Langston. The Big Sea. 1963.
Meier, August. Negro Thought in America.


Decolonization and civil rights movements, accompanied by expanded education, brought major improvements in the social conditions and the respect accorded to many people of Africa and the diaspora. Connections among regions of the African diaspora expanded dramatically. Yet there remained wars of national liberation against recalcitrant regimes, dictatorships on every continent, and emerging struggles between newly
powerful black elites and peasants, workers, and students. The increased recognition of black people by the global powers was balanced by the expansion of neocolonialism and controlling international organizations, as new techniques developed for politico-economic marginalization of the nations dominated by black people, and social marginalization of black people within powerful nations.

*Required Reading:*

*Strongly Recommended*
Fanon, Frantz. Wretched of the Earth. 1961.

*Optional Reading:*
Cabral, Amilcar. Revolution in Guinea
Carmichael, Stokely. Stokely Speaks
Cooper, Frederick. Decolonization and African Society: The labor question in French and British Africa. 1996.
Foner, Philip. The Black Panthers Speak.
Haley, Alex. The Autobiography of Malcolm X.
Lomax, Louis E. When the Word is Given ... 1963.
Mandela, Nelson. No Easy Walk to Freedom
Morgenthau, Ruth Schachter. Political Parties in French-Speaking West Africa
Nkrumah, Kwame. Africa Must Unite
Nyerere, Julius. Freedom and socialism.
1970 Black power revolt in Trinidad
Seale, Bobby. Siege the Time.
Silberman, Charles. Crisis in Black and White.

In this era, several formulations of popular culture — as developed within black communities throughout Africa and the diaspora —
became widespread and almost hegemonic in their influence. These forms include highlife, jazz and swing, Afro-Cuban music and dance, soukous, samba, Motown, films, plays, novels and poetry in several languages and regions, and of course music videos. Our task is to link these forms and their wide acceptance to the broader history of the African diaspora.

*Required Reading:*
Hountondji, Paulin. *African Philosophy.*

*Strongly Recommended*

*Optional Reading:*
10. November 27. No class — Thanksgiving Holiday.

SECOND PAPER TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE INSTRUCTOR, IN WORD, FOR DOWNLOAD FROM WEB.


Racism and slavery have not yet ended, but they are now overlaid with other sorts of inequality. Most black people are now literate citizens of recognized nations, though many of their nations are held virtually in receivership by the World Bank and the IMF.

Identities for the future seem indeterminate, as the categories of race and ethnicity are increasingly questioned and complicated. At the conclusion of this course, we may consider what impact will arise from the heritage of the African Diaspora, to influence those who are within it and those who are influenced by it.

Required Reading:
To be selected.

Optional Reading:
To be selected.