Syllabus

GOVT 461

Interpreting Race and Racism: Du Bois

Spring, 2008

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Course description

W.E.B Du Bois is a major thinker in the American political thought tradition and he has had a towering influence upon the study of race and racism in the United States. However, students of political theory rarely take the time to appreciate the entire sweep of his life’s work; they typically stop short at a quick reading of the *Souls of Black Folk* and the famous metaphors of the “color line” and the African-American’s double consciousness and veiled insightfulness. In this 2008 version of the course, we will discuss writing selections taken from every period of his scholarly progression, including the early historical sociology and lyrical commentaries on white supremacy; the political writings aimed at institution building, tactical maneuvering with and against white and black leaders alike, and the cultivation of a black elite; samples of his fiction, creation writing, and autobiographical iterations; and his socialist critiques of American militarism and imperialism during the Cold War. In the middle of the Du Bois sessions, we will turn to Ida B. Wells-Barnett’s pamphlets to enhance our understanding of racial antagonisms at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At the end of the course, we will briefly examine the work of two senior figures in the American politics field, Rogers Smith and Michael Dawson, and we will bring their writing into conversation with that of Du Bois.

The course is designed primarily for senior undergraduates. Ideally, students will have some background in African American studies and/or American political thought. Students with concerns about their preparation should contact the instructor directly.
Course Evaluation

Presentation and Discussant's Response -- For every class, one person will be responsible for making a presentation on the required reading, and one person will act as the discussant. The presenter will make his/her paper (approximately 8-10 pages long; double-spaced) available to me and to other members of the seminar at least 24 hours before the class meeting. (We will distribute the papers via the students' e-mail addresses, using Word attachments. Please do not forward computer viruses to your colleagues, and please prepare your own computer for an onslaught of the latest viruses. We have not had any spectacular crashes for a few semesters, so it seems that if we place our faith in the professional services of the CIT people, we will all come out of the course with more or less intact systems. Just do your part by running the latest virus protection programs throughout the course, and try to avoid communicating with the class from unprotected computers. Many thanks! ) At a minimum, the presentation will deal with the assigned reading; presenters are strongly advised to consult the recommended reading list as well. The discussant will then prepare his/her remarks. Ideally, presentations will last 25-35 minutes, and responses 15 minutes. Presentations and responses should be as jargon-free as possible, with all terms clearly defined. They should feature substantial close readings of selected passages from the assigned readings. (Please see my web page for detailed memos on political theory essay writing and seminar presentation strategies.) The questions on the final examination will refer exclusively to the required reading.

Auditors are expected to complete the required readings and to attend every session of the course. An S/U option is available, but students wishing to take the course for an S/U grade are urged to keep a sharp eye out for the College enrollment deadlines; in my experience, these have been set in stone.

Course Requirements

25 % written version of short paper critically discussing the readings for one week, prior to spring break, circulated to the class before the class meeting (undergraduates must sign up to give a presentation during one of the meetings prior to spring break)

15 % oral presentation of short paper in class
20% response to another student’s presentation, and class participation throughout the semester

40% final examination (on required course readings assigned throughout the semester, two hour and closed book format): to be held during exam period

Additional Requirements

1. Cut rule: if you are significantly late or miss class altogether on more than two occasions, you will probably be asked to drop the course, out of fairness to your colleagues.

2. A grade of "F" in any one assignment will result in a grade of "F" for the course.

3. For more guidance on delivering an oral presentation to the class and on writing political theory essays, please see the relevant memos posted on my website: http://falcon.arts.cornell.edu/ams3

Course Texts

Required


*Recommended*


Film.


**Course Schedule**

21 January

1. Introduction
28 January

2. Conservation of the Races.

Lewis Reader, “Introduction.”

Dawson, Black Visions, chs. 1 and 7.

Lewis Reader, pp. 17-27.

4 February


Lewis Reader, pp. 28-95.

Handout: additional pages from Souls.

(11 February: class cancelled)

18 February

4. Reflections; Social Science.

25 February

5. On Lynchings.

Introduction by Patricia Hill Collins, then entire text by Wells-Barnett.

3 March

6. Institutions; Women’s Rights.


10 March

7. Race and Class; Leadership and Institution-Building.


(spring break)

24 March

8. White Supremacy; the Arts; Labor; Separatist Solutions.

Handout: further selections from *Souls.*

31 March
9. Radical Thought.

Lewis Reader, pp. 575-633.

7 April

Lewis Reader, pp. 637-92.

14 April
11. War and Peace; the Cold War.

Lewis Reader, pp. 695-800.

21 April
12. Multiple Traditions?

Rogers Smith, “Beyond Tocqueville.”

28 April

Dawson, Behind the Mule.