

HIST 171-1/ BLST 141-1 African American History Since 1900

Melanie Chambliss, Ph.D. (she/ her)

Please call me: Dr. Chambliss or Prof. Chambliss

Email: melanie.chambliss@rochester.edu

Office Location: Rush Rhees Library Room 455

The best way to communicate with me is by email. I usually respond to emails within 1-2 business days.

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:00-4:00pm and by appointment. Please email me if you plan to attend office hours.

Course Details

Meeting Place & Time:

Morey Room 504, Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:05am-12:20pm

Format:

Class will be held in person and will not be recorded.

Description:

This introductory survey explores African American history from 1865 to the present. We will examine African Americans' pursuit of freedom and justice as defined during different periods. Topics of study will include the Reconstruction era; the formation of Jim Crow segregation; the Great Migration; the Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black Feminist movements; and the Obama presidency. Students will discuss the impact of Black culture and resistance on national and international stages. By the end of the semester, students will understand key concepts and events that shaped post-emancipation Black history.

Required Materials:

W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ISBN 9780486280417

Ann Petry, *The Street*, ISBN 0358187540

Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, ISBN 0679755330

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, ISBN 9780679744726

Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*, ISBN 0679743138

Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, ISBN 1580911862

Claudine Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric*, ISBN 1555976905

Prerequisite Courses: N/A

Credit Hours: 4.0

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

Course Goals

The goals of this course are to:

- Examine Black experiences in the United States from the Civil War to the present day using an intersectional lens
- Analyze African Americans' roles in redefining freedom, citizenship, and justice as democratic principles
- Prepare students for later coursework in U.S./ Atlantic history or Black Studies

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Explain the impact of Black culture and activism on national and international politics
- Identify persisting and evolving forms of “unfreedom” and discrimination
- Compare Black intellectuals and activists' concerns and tactics in different periods and through an intersectional lens
- Evaluate and critique the context and subtext of primary sources
- Reinterpret historical texts for a public audience

Assignments and Deadlines

Attendance and Participation (10%): Every class period.

Weekly Discussion Questions (15%): Submit two discussion questions every Tuesday morning by 6 am on Blackboard.

Foundation Check-in –Quiz and Primary Source Analysis (10%) – Thursday, February 6

History Primer – Midterm (20%) – Thursday, March 6 by 11:59 pm on Blackboard

Foundation Check-in –Quiz and Primary Source Analysis (10%) – Thursday, April 10

Harlem Renaissance Exhibition assignments (15%)

Paper (10%) – Tuesday, February 25 at the start of class; bring printed copy

Exhibition text (5%) – Thursday, March 25 at the start of class; bring printed copies

History Primer – Final (20%) – Thursday, May 8 by 11:59pm on Blackboard (Final exam day)

Assignment Descriptions

Attendance and Participation (10%): Please see Course Policies below.

Weekly Discussion Questions (15%): You will submit two discussion questions each week. A good discussion question moves beyond factual queries (i.e. when or why something occurred) into more complex topics (thematic, stylistic, interpretive, for example). A good discussion question can spark debate – whether about an actor's or author's choices, the time period, the connections between current and previous texts, among other things. The goal is to practice critically engaging a primary source. You're asking deeper questions about meaning and evidence and exploring what is being documented on multiple levels (word choice, tone, topic, omissions). I will incorporate your discussion questions (whether verbatim or in combination with your peers' submissions) into my lesson plan. Be sure to include at least one reading

citation per discussion question. Please include the page number or chapter, if using a different version, as well as a full sentence quote from the text.

Foundation Check-ins – In-class Quizzes and Primary Source Analyses (10% each): As a 100-level course, this class surveys key themes, events, and figures during post-emancipation African American history. While the study of history involves more than memorizing names and dates, a clear command of these details provides a firm foundation for later coursework or personal study of African American, U.S. or Atlantic history. Learning a new sub-field, like learning a new language, requires that you understand the fundamental building blocks of that topic. Your two Foundation Check-ins will ensure that you are keeping up with class material in two low-stakes assignments that build towards your midterm and final primers. I will provide a more detailed prompt closer to the quiz dates.

History Primer – Midterm and Final (20% each): You will create two history primers that introduce readers to key points within African American history. Your goal is to select and include whatever information, images, or anecdotes that you think would be most helpful for someone who wants to better understand race. This assignment will require you to make active choices in selecting what material to include in your primer—rather than writing a chronology of everything we’ve discussed. I will provide more detailed prompts closer to the two deadlines. These prompts will outline key terms, events, and individuals that you can choose from. The midterm primer will cover material from the first half of class, and the final primer from the second half.

Harlem Renaissance Exhibition (15%): 2025 marks the 100th anniversary of the New Negro anthology’s publication. This text was one of the launching events for the so-called “Harlem Renaissance.” This assignment consists of two parts—a longer research paper and a pop-up glass case exhibition in the Rare Books and Special Collections library. We will decide as a class what themes our exhibition will explore, and you can choose research topics to support the exhibition. Then, as a class, we will select display items, write labels and introductory texts for the exhibition. I will provide more detailed prompts closer to the deadlines.

Grades and Related Policies

Grading Scale and Standards:

A: 100-93	C: 76-73
A-: 92-90	C-: 72-70
B+: 89-87	D+: 69-67
B: 86-83	D: 66-63
B-: 82-80	D-: 62-60
C+: 79-77	F: 59-0

Late/ Make-up Work Policy

Discussion questions cannot be submitted once the assignment closes. However, you can miss two weeks without penalty. Other late assignments (foundation check-ins, primers, research

paper, and exhibition materials) that have not been previously approved/ scheduled will automatically be docked a fraction of a grade for every day late (from A to A- to B+, etc) down to a C grade as your highest possible grade. Late work will not be accepted once assignment has been returned to the class.

Academic Honesty

All work must be completed in accordance with the University of Rochester's Academic Honesty Policy. We will discuss best citation practices for each assignment, but when in doubt, please ask me or err on the side of caution and cite!

Course Schedule

**Week One: Course Introduction ///
Emancipation and Reconstruction
Tuesday, January 21 and Thursday, January 23**

Reading: Begin reading Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, pgs. v-45 (Forethought; Chs. 1-4)

**Week Two: The Nadir and the "New Negro"
Tuesday, January 28 and Thursday, January 30**

Reading: Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, pgs. 47-165 (Chs. 5-14; After-thought)

**Week Three: The "Harlem" Renaissance - I
Tuesday, February 4 and Thursday, February 6**

Reading: Locke, ed. [The New Negro](#) anthology, pgs. 3 -227.

(Review table of contents; skim all essays but read some in depth – in particular Locke's essays and some piece from each genre; pay attention to anthology's style and types of stories/ details)

- **Assignment:** Check-in Quiz and Primary Source Analysis #1 due **Thursday, February 6** by 11:59pm on Blackboard
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**Week Four: The "Harlem" Renaissance - II
Tuesday, February 11 and Thursday, February 13**

Reading: Locke, ed. [The New Negro](#) anthology, pgs. 228-414.

(Review table of contents; skim all essays but read some in depth – in particular Schomburg's, Locke's and McDougald's essays; pay attention to anthology's style and types of stories/ details)

-- **Field Trip:** Thursday, February 13 – Rare Books and Special Collections visit--

Week Five: The Chicago Renaissance and a New Class Politics
Tuesday, February 18 and Thursday, February 20

Reading: Ann Petry, *The Street*, pgs. 1-95.

Week Six: Exhibition Planning
Tuesday, February 25 and Thursday, February 27

No reading quiz but continue reading Petry, *The Street*, pgs. 96-197.

- **Assignment:** Harlem Renaissance paper due Tuesday, February 25 at the start of class

--**Class Exercise:** Peer review of papers on Tuesday, February 25--

Week Seven: Victory at Home and Victory Abroad
Tuesday, March 4 and Thursday, March 6

Reading: Petry, *The Street*, pgs. 198-279.

- **Assignment:** History Primer – Midterm due **Thursday, March 6** at 11:59pm on Blackboard
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Week Eight: Spring Break/ Midterm
Tuesday, March 11 and Thursday, March 13

No class. Work on your History primer. Finish Petry, *The Street*, pgs. 280-374.

Week Nine: The Long Civil Rights Movement
Tuesday, March 18 and Thursday, March 20

Reading: Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Week Ten: The Modern Civil Rights Movement - I
Tuesday, March 25 and Thursday, March 27

Reading: James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*.

- **Assignment:** Exhibition text due Thursday, March 25 at the start of class
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Week Eleven: The Modern Civil Rights Movement - II
Tuesday, April 1 and Thursday, April 3

Reading: Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*, pgs. 2-97.

--Class Exercise: Exhibition text/ design workshop on Thursday, April 3--

Week Twelve: The Black Power Movement
Tuesday, April 8 and Thursday, April 10

Reading: Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*, pgs. 98-185.

- **Assignment:** Check-in Quiz and Primary Source Analysis #2 due **Thursday, April 10** by 11:59pm on Blackboard
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Week Thirteen: The Black Feminist Movement
Tuesday, April 15 and Thursday, April 17

Reading: Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, pgs. 13-109.

--Class Exercise: Exhibition Mounting in Special Collections on Thursday, April 17--

Week Fourteen: The Politicization of Black Poverty
Tuesday, April 22 and Thursday, April 24

Reading: Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, pgs. 110-190.

Week Fifteen: Black Lives Matter in the Obama Era
Tuesday, April 29 and Thursday, May 1

Reading: Rankine, *Citizen*.

Final Exam Day
Thursday, May 8

- **Assignment:** History Primer - Final due **Thursday, May 8** at 11:59pm on Blackboard

Course Policies

Attendance Policy: You are expected to attend class. There are no excused absences in the course. However, you may miss two classes without penalty. Any additional absence will decrease your attendance and participation grade by a fraction of a letter grade (A to A-, A- to B+ etc). Attendance will be taken during the first few minutes of class. If you miss this window, remember to check in with me at the end of class, and you will be marked late. Accommodations will be made for religious holidays. Please email me prior to your absence.

Participation Policy: Participation is expected and encouraged. Please complete assignments to be prepared for class discussion. Your participation grade will be based around your attendance. For example, if you miss three classes, an A- would be the highest attendance and participation grade you could earn, but if you participate regularly, that could be a high A- (like a 92). Or if you never participate in class, the grade could be in the B+ range or lower. In other words, I cannot account for participation in a class you did not attend, so your attendance sets the max for that grade. Please be aware that regularly arriving late, leaving class early, and/or not participating in our discussions will all negatively impact your attendance/ participation grade.

Disclaimer: This syllabus is intended to introduce topics that may be covered during the semester and will be followed as closely as possible. However, I reserve the right to modify content and requirements as course needs arise.