

PHIL 4014/5204: Black Abolitionist Thought

Spring 2021

Note: All times listed in this syllabus are US Eastern/Blacksburg

Live Meeting Time: R 5pm-7pm

Instructor: Philip Yaure

Email: philipyaure@vt.edu

Office Hours: R 2:00pm-4:00pm, or by appointment (Zoom)

This seminar will explore key themes in the tradition of Black abolitionist thought, with a focus on the United States. Through close reading of historical texts and secondary literature we will address questions including: In what sense is there a tradition of Black abolitionist thought? What is the relationship between abolitionism and other strands of Black political thought, in the US and elsewhere? What is the relationship between abolitionism and other traditions in political thought (e.g., republicanism)? Is abolition an exclusively negative stance (i.e., that we should abolish oppressive institutions)? What positive conceptions of emancipated social and political life do our thinkers develop and defend?

Course Objectives

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

1. Identify and reconstruct theoretical claims and arguments from academic political texts.
2. Compare, contrast, and critically evaluate authors' philosophical claims and arguments.
3. Connect political debates among abolitionists in the 19th century to contemporary political issues.
4. Articulate contrasting conceptions of emancipation, political membership, and political community through the tradition of Black abolitionist thought in the US.

Course Structure

Before Thursday live session: complete readings, watch mini-lecture, post to discussion board

Thursday live session: student presentation, class discussion

Live sessions will be divided into two parts with a brief break.

Communication with Instructor

After live class sessions: The instructor is available to talk about course-related issues after live Zoom class sessions. You are welcome to ask questions about course content or logistics during this time. Please note that we will be in the same Zoom meeting for class with other students (so everyone will be able to hear/see one another).

(Virtual) Office Hours: The instructor is available for individual meetings via Zoom R 2:00-4:00pm, or by appointment. A sign-up sheet for Thursday office hours will be posted to the introduction page to each week's module. You may also email the instructor to set-up an appointment at different time; please do so at least 24 hours before you are requesting to meet.

Email: If you are unable to speak with the instructor after live class sessions or during office hours, you may contact me via email. I will respond within 24 hours of your email (typically faster during the week). If you do not receive a response within 24 hours, please send a follow-up.

Required Texts

All required books are available at University Bookstore or online (links included). All other readings will be available through Canvas and/or the VT Library website.

- Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (ISBN: 978-0-252-01410-9)
<https://www.press.uillinois.edu/books/catalog/88dhs4wy9780252014109.html>
- Martin Delany (ed. Robert Levine), *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader* (ISBN: 978-0-8078-5431-0)
<https://bookshop.org/books/martin-r-delany-a-documentary-reader/9780807854310>
- Maria Stewart (ed. Marilyn Richardson), *Maria W. Stewart: America's First Black Woman Political Writer* (ISBN: 9780253204462)
<https://bookshop.org/books/maria-w-stewart-america-s-first-black-woman-political-writer-essays-and-speeches/9780253204462>
- David Walker, *David Walker's Appeal* (ISBN: 9780809015818)
https://www.amazon.com/David-Walkers-Appeal-Particular-Expressly/dp/0809015811/ref=sr_1_2?crid=3JCA8CEZDHZAV&dchild=1&keywords=david+walker%27s+appeal&qid=1611038258&prefix=david+walker%27s+appeal%2Caps%2C259&sr=8-2
- Angela Davis, *Abolition Democracy* (ISBN: 9781583226957)
https://www.amazon.com/Abolition-Democracy-Beyond-Prisons-Torture/dp/1583226958/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=abolition+democracy&qid=1611038334&sr=8-1

Course Requirements

1. Presentation (10%)
2. Discussion Posts (15%)
3. Term Paper (75%) PHIL 4014: MAX 3000 words; PHIL 5204: MAX 5000 words
Paper Proposal (10%)
Outline (15%)
Final Version (50%)

Presentation: Each student will give one 10-minute presentation during the semester. Presentations will be on a primary source from the antebellum part of the course (weeks 3-10). Presentations will examine a core concept from the presentation sign-up list. Presenters will identify 2-3 key claims about the core concept from the reading, provide passage as evidence for/illustrations of these claims, and pose 2-3 questions for class discussion. Presenters will provide a **2 page** (strict—no more, no less!) handout with their presentation. **Draft handouts are due to instructor 24 hours before class.** (If necessary, multiple students may present on the same reading, addressing different concepts.)

Discussion Posts: Each week, students will complete a discussion post on the week's reading. You may respond to any part of the reading, but you must quote and engage with a passage from the reading. You may respond (constructively!) to a classmate's post, as long as you bring new material from the reading to the discussion. Treat these posts as free writing, but as free writing that can help you work toward your term paper. **Discussion posts are due 1 hour before class (Thursdays 4pm).** The instructor will periodically comment on discussion posts and incorporate posts into live sessions.

Term Paper: Students will complete a term paper that rigorously and critically analyzes a key concept, claim, or argument from one course reading. Your paper must have a thesis; it cannot be only expository. It is not sufficient to argue “Author thinks X.” You must be able to explain why it matters that “Author thinks X.” For example, it may be unclear whether the author thinks X or Y, and you show she in fact thinks X. Or you might criticize the author’s claim that x, or defend the author’s claim that x from criticism.

We will work towards full term papers in 3 stages. The instructor will provide feedback at each stage. (You may, and I encourage you to, submit these stages EARLY for more feedback.)

1. Paper Proposal: Students will produce an extended abstract, ~500 words, outlining their thesis, main argument, and key textual evidence. **PHIL 5204 students must also identify 3 pieces of secondary literature their paper will address. Due Monday 4.5**

2. Outline: Students will produce a *detailed* outline of their paper. Your outline should, at a minimum, cover the main point of each paragraph of your paper. (I won’t hold you to this specific outline in your final version of course, but the goal is to produce an outline that you can fill in as your final draft.) **Due Monday 4.26**

3. Final Paper: Students will produce a final paper. PHIL 4014: MAX 3000 words (no outside resources—class secondary sources OK as needed), PHIL 5204: MAX 5000 words (including at least 3 secondary resources).

*Late discussion posts and term paper stages will be accepted with no penalty if a valid excuse is communicated to instructor before deadline. If no valid excuse is provided, term paper stages will be docked one point (e.g. from 13/15 to 12/15) per day; **discussion posts will not be accepted late without a valid excuse.***

Informal Expectation—Attendance and Participation: Philosophy is done best in good company. Students will come to class prepared to discuss the assigned texts. While it is expected that students will come to class ready to raise questions/issues of interest to them, it is even more important to constructively engage with the questions/comments of your peers. We are each other’s best resources in this course. Attendance is expected at all live class sessions. If you are unable to attend a live class session (e.g. due to medical or family emergency), contact the instructor in advance.

Statement on Academic Integrity

Students enrolled in this course are responsible for abiding by the Graduate Honor Code. A student who has doubts about how the Honor Code applies to any assignment is responsible for obtaining specific guidance from the course instructor before submitting the assignment for evaluation. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the University community from the requirements and expectations of the Honor Code. Academic integrity expectations are the same for online classes as they are for in person classes. All university policies and procedures apply in any Virginia Tech academic environment.

For additional information about the Honor Code, please visit:
<https://graduateschool.vt.edu/academics/expectations/graduate-honor-system.html>

Wellness Statement

By participating in this class, all students agree to abide by Virginia Tech Wellness principles. While all formal class activities are remote, please be sure to abide by these principles in any interactions outside of class. For more information: <https://ready.vt.edu/health.html#tips>

Statement on Accessibility

I am committed to making this course as accessible as possible. If you require a disability-related accommodation in order to fully participate in this course, please contact Services for Students with Disabilities (<https://ssd.vt.edu/>) so that such accommodation may be arranged. I'm happy to assist where I can.

In addition, we will be navigating the challenge of doing philosophy together remotely during a pandemic. As your instructor, I will be flexible and responsive to circumstances/problems as they come up to ensure that everyone gets as much out of the course as possible. In return, I ask that you communicate promptly and clearly about anything you need to fully participate in the course. The better our communication, the more proactive I can be in helping ensure that this is an accessible and productive learning environment.

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1 – Preliminaries (Live Session 1.21)

Boxill, “Two Traditions of African American Political Philosophy”

Gooding-Williams, “History of African American Political Thought and Antiracist Critical Theory”

Week 2- Freedom as Non-Domination (Live Session 1.28)

Pettit, *On the People's Terms* (selections)

Rogers, “Race, Domination, and Republicanism”

Week 3– Walker (Live Session 2.4)

Walker, *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*

Rogers, “David Walker and the Political Power of the Appeal”

Week 4 – Stewart (Live Session 2.11)

Stewart, “Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, the Sure Foundation on which We Must Build”; “An Address Delivered to the African Masonic Hall”

Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*, Intro

Week 5 – Truth (Live Session 2.18)

Truth, “Ain't I a Woman?”

Truth, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (selections)

Threadcraft, *Intimate Justice*, Ch 1-2

Week 6 – NO CLASS (2.25)

Week 7 – Addresses to Slaves of the United States (Live Session 3.4)
Gerrit Smith, “Address to the Slaves of the United States” (1842)
Henry Highland Garnet, “An Address to the Slaves of the United States” (1843)
Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, ch. 8 & 10

Week 8 – Douglass (Live Session 3.11)
Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Ch 1-20
Boxill, “The Fight with Covey”
Alfaro, “Black Masculinity Achieves Nothing without Restorative Care: An Intersectional Rearticulation of Frederick Douglass”

Week 9 – Douglass (Live Session 3.18)
Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Ch 21-25 + Appendices
Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” (full version)
Gooding-Williams, “Douglass’s Declarations of Independence and Practices of Politics”

Week 10 – Delany (Live Session 3.25)
Delany, Letters to Douglass: July 14, November 30, and December 18, 1848
Delany, *The Condition, Emigration, Elevation, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*

Week 11– Delany (Live Session 4.1)
Delany, “Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent”
Adeleke, *Without Regard to Race: The Other Martin Robinson Delany*, Intro + ch 1-4

Monday 4.5: Paper Proposal due

Week 12 – Wells & Du Bois (Live Session 4.8)
Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction* (selections)
Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*

Week 13 – Gilmore (Live Session 4.15)
Gilmore, *Golden Gulag* (selections)

Week 14 – Davis (Live Session 4.22)
Davis, *Abolition Democracy*

Monday 4.26: Outline due

Week 15 – Perspectives on Police Abolition (Live Session 4.29)
Ferguson Police Report (selections)
Gooding-Williams, “Ideology, Social Practices, and Anti-Black Concepts”
Taiwo, “Power over the Police”

Monday 5.10: Final Papers due