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# FROM OUT OF THE MARGINS OF HISTORY: INFUSING AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURE INTO THE AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY SYLLABUS

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## INTRODUCTION

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I have been teaching African American History to undergraduate students for fifteen years. At the end of every semester, at least one student is frustrated that they never learned African American history during their entire K-12 experience. Some are genuinely upset, and others are even in mild shock. They were taught that African American history consisted of the following: slavery, Harriet Tubman, the Emancipation Proclamation, Dr. King, Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X (portrayed as a mad man) and all racial problems were solved at the election of Barack Obama.

Equally disturbing is the connotation that links aspects of African and African American history with negativity. For example, the African language spoken by the Khoi and the San nations in southern Africa was called "*hotteren* and *totteren*" by the Dutch and consequently the indigenous people were called "*Hottentots*." Further, the traditional African religion of Vodun (Voodoo), which the Haitians credited in part for their military victory over the French in 1804, is portrayed as devil worship. The "Doll Studies," conducted by Drs. Mamie and Kenneth Clark in the 1950s illustrated that African American children showed a preference for and attributed positive qualities to white dolls.<sup>1</sup> The Doll Studies have inspired dozens of replications that indicate a slight improvement in the Black children showing positive identification with Black dolls, but there is still much work to do in eliminating long-held stereotypes and subliminal messaging.<sup>2</sup>

This course, The African American Experience, will teach teaching the historical content, but is also designed to introduce and reinforce positive connotations of African and African American culture. Hence, aspects of African and African American culture have been infused into the actual course design. This course is an elective that attracts primarily History majors but is taken by students across disciplines.

Some of the descriptions are taken from the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa. While seldom discussed outside of the days that comprise the actual holiday, the Seven Principles are relevant throughout the year. The

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<sup>1</sup> See Clark, Kenneth B. and Mamie P. "Emotional Factors in Racial Identification and Preference in Negro Children" *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 19, No. 3, (Summer, 1950), pp. 341-350

<sup>2</sup> See Spencer, Margaret Beale. "Lessons Learned and Opportunities Ignored Since Brown v. Board of Education: Youth Development and the Myth of a Color-Blind Society" *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 37, Issue 5, (June/July, 2008) pp. 253-266.

Course Outline is based on the Black National Anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing" which is sung before most African American events and, as all other anthems, one is expected to stand while it is sung.

The historical content does not begin in 1619 when the first enslaved Africans were forced to the United States. To start African American culture at this time in history negates millennia of African history. Instead, it begins in ancient Africa, before colonization and enslavement, when African kingdoms and empires among the most advanced and prosperous in the entire world.

The course uses a seminal text, *From Slavery to Freedom* by renowned historian Dr. John Hope Franklin, as a basis for understanding key concepts. The course content also utilizes archival footage from documentaries such as "Eyes on the Prize" and autobiographies from the actual history makers.

In their written assignments, students are encouraged to use *Kuumba* (creativity) to put history into practice. For example, one assignment asks them to analyze the lyrics of a song for its historical relevance. This project, done in small groups, is designed to make history "come to life" for them as they deconstruct the meaning behind the song.

The syllabus concludes with African American wisdom in the form of proverbs that can guide a student's personal and professional life. This syllabus affirms African American culture in a society where it is often denigrated. It gives them the rare opportunity to feel empowered through their own historical experiences.

## **SYLLABUS: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE**

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### **NIA (PURPOSE) OR COURSE DESCRIPTION**

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This course will provide an inquiry into the background and development of African Americans with emphasis on their role in the cultural, political, social and economic impact on the development of their society. The course will be taught primarily in a face-to-face format. The material will be presented with lectures, group work, and discussions. This class meets twice per week.

### **COURSE GOALS/OBJECTIVES**

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Upon completion of this course, students are expected to demonstrate the following:

- knowledge of problem-solving methods employed by African Americans throughout their history.
- integrated knowledge of the major contributions of African Americans (broadly defined) during our historical period, the contributors, the masterpieces, the historical context, the criticisms and theories of literature, philosophy, religion, art and music.
- integrated knowledge of the heritage, culture, social structures and accomplishments of African American culture.
- an understanding of African American social, economic and political development, institutions, and the factors influencing social, economic and political decisions.
- knowledge and understanding of the tools used by historians in recapturing history. This includes the use of primary source material and how the methods used and the source material relate to historical accuracy, interpretation, knowledge and understanding.
- think critically and analytically on issues relating to African American history and culture.

## REQUIRED TEXT

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Franklin, John Hope, and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham. *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*. 9th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011.

We will also utilize online content, documentaries, podcasts and other resources as necessary.

## PEDAGOGY

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The pedagogy used for this class is primarily social constructivism. The theory behind social constructivism is that learning is a cooperative exchange between teacher and student. We all participate in the learning process; it is imperative that you come to class prepared to maintain your part of our collaboration. I will use combinations of lecturing and questioning.

In African terms, we can view the class through two of the principles of Kwanzaa: Kujichagulia (Self-determination) which relates to claiming responsibility for one's own progress in the course and Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility) which relates to building the learning community together and increasing our knowledge as a group.

## ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

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The assignments below are designed to evaluate your understanding (as opposed to rote memorization) of the assigned material. Students are expected to read/view all assignments and actively participate in class discussions (online, in person and on discussion boards)

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### EXAMS

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Questions are designed to test your understanding of the material. Students are encouraged to not only study individually but to also practice *Ubuntu* (I am because we are; we are because I am) by studying in groups. Focus on issues and concepts discussed and emphasized in lectures (in and out of class), online discussions where applicable, and reading and viewing assignments. Exams are in essay format. The questions are designed to test your ***understanding*** of the material presented—not your ability to memorize facts. In class, we will focus on understanding the concepts that will help you on the test as well as your overall understanding of the African American experience.

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### BONUS POINTS

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Throughout the semester, you will have the opportunity to earn Bonus Points which are added to your final (end-of-the-semester) grade. Enough bonus points can potentially raise your grade. You must have your Syllabus in class/in my office to qualify.

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### GRADING

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Assignment	Percentage
Midterm	20%

<b>Final</b>	20%
<b>Du Bois Paper</b>	15%
<b>Popular Culture Paper</b>	15%
<b>Ubuntu (Group) Lyrics Project</b>	15%
<b>Class Participation</b>	15%
<b>Total</b>	100%
<b>Add Bonus Points</b>	

**GRADING SCALE:**

A: (Excellent): 90-100%.

B: (Above Average) 80-89%

C: (Average) 70-79%

D: (Below Average) 60-69%

F: (Failure - Unsatisfactory) Below 60%

**ATTENDANCE**

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There is no grade for attendance; however, class participation is 15% of your grade.

**PLAGIARISM**

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Plagiarism is a very serious academic offense. In the event that plagiarism is detected in your work, you will receive a zero on the assignment and ten (10) points deducted from your final grade. Please do not take the risk. We will cover plagiarism and citing sources during the first weeks of class.

**CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT**

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Our classroom is one in which all students are free to express their analyses and perspectives without judgement. I am interested in knowing that you are thinking about history as opposed to your getting the "right" answer. I am open to adapting how our classroom operates if it will enhance your learning. Remember, this is a collaboration.

**BECOME A GRIOT!**

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A griot in the African tradition is a person whose role is to know the genealogical history of the community. How does he (and they are usually males) remember this history which goes back generations? Repetition! To that end, I will share with you the best advice I ever got in college: Review Often! Take the time to read over your notes every night. You do not have to read them to memorize—memorization will come with repetition. Work on your griot skills and I am sure you will see improvement in your comprehension and grades!

## **SOME OF MY FAVORITE RESOURCES**

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**Internet History Sourcebooks Project:** <http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/index.asp>

Virtually every topic in history is covered in this site and the content is very diverse! You will want to use it to help you get started with assignments, check facts, and find information after you have "finished" to make your project even better).

**Atlanta Black Star:** <https://atlantablackstar.com/>

This is one of my favorite websites for relevant historical news. The site reports on entertainment etc., but your focus should be on articles such as "Eight Amazing Facts You May Not Know About the Great Pyramid of Giza."

**Top Documentary Films:** <https://topdocumentaryfilms.com/>

This is an excellent source that you can use throughout your college career and beyond to increase your knowledge on an array of topics.

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

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All of the assignments will relate to aspects of African or African American culture and all of the lyrics of the Black National Anthem. The anthem was written by James Weldon Johnson in 1900 and set to music by his brother John Rosamond Johnson in 1905.

Each week, come prepared to discuss the assignments below. Bring your questions, analyses, challenges, etc., and get engaged in the discussion. You do not always have to be "right" because sometimes there is no "right" answer. I want to see that you are thinking about the material.

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### **WEEK ONE: ANCIENT AFRICAN CIVILIZATIONS**

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*"True to our God, true to our native land"*

***Ancient African Nations***

**NEVER** begin the history of a people at the point of their conquest. The study of African American people should begin in Africa.

Watch "The Truth About Ancient Africa" at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bN\\_gZi4hnY4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bN_gZi4hnY4)

*"Lest our feet stray from the places, oh God, where we met Thee"*

***Africa and International Commerce***

Read Chapter 1—An Ancient Land and People, Early Commercial Networks, African Slavery

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### **WEEK TWO: AFRICANS IN AMERICA BEFORE COLUMBUS; THE START OF THE SLAVE TRADE**

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*"Let it resound loud as the rolling sea"*

***Africans in America before Columbus***

Watch Dr. Ivan van Sertima's lecture on "They Came before Columbus" at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkOXblaVRPY> or search for it on youtube.com. (46:37 in length.)

*"Lest our hearts drunk with the wine of the world we forget Thee"*

***African Empires***

Read Chapter 1—The Great Empires, Other States

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**WEEK THREE: THE MIDDLE PASSAGE AND ENSLAVEMENT IN AMERICA**

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*"We have come over a way that with tears has been watered"*

***The Middle Passage***

Watch The African Slave Trade in Two Minutes at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKo-Xxfywk> and Read Chapter 2— The Middle Passage, Slave Societies in the Americas

*"Felt in the days when hope unborn had died"*

***The Terrorism of Enslavement in America***

Read Chapter 2—Finding New Lands and Labor, Trading in Slaves

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**WEEK FOUR: ABOLITION, THE CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION**

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*"Lift Every Voice and Sing 'til Earth and Heaven Ring"*

***The Early Black Press***

Watch "The Black Press: Soldiers Without Swords" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wo8Pvr7TyP4>

*"Shadowed beneath Thy hand, may we forever stand"*

***W. E. B. Du Bois and Reconstruction***

Read "Behold the Land" PPs 231-247 and "The United States and the Negro" from Black Titan by W. E. B. Du Bois, 258-267.

W. E. B. Du Bois wrote: "The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery." Write a 1–2-page paper on the relevance of "standing in this shadow" of the early years of Reconstruction. Due at the end of this week.

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**WEEK FIVE: SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT**

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*"Ring with the harmonies of liberty"*

***W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington***

Read Bauerlein, Mark. "Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois: The Origins of a Bitter Intellectual Battle" *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, No. 46 (Winter, 2004-2005), pp. 106-114

**MIDTERM EXAM**

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**WEEK SIX: SELF-RELIANCE—ESTABLISHING COLLEGES AND INDEPENDENT CITIES**

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*"Come to the place for which our fathers sighed"*

***Economic Self-Reliance in Independent Towns...and Their Destruction***

Read "Allensworth: California's first African-American Community" at <https://www.historynet.com/allensworth-californias-black-community/> and watch "Terror in Tulsa: The Rise and Fall of Black Wall Street" <https://www.historynet.com/allensworth-californias-black-community/>

*"Thou who hast by Thy might, led us into the light"*  
**Establishing Historically Black Colleges and Universities**

Watch the documentary on the history and legacy of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs): "Tell Them We are Rising" at <https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/tell-them-we-are-rising/>

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**WEEK SEVEN: CREATING SELF-HELP ORGANIZATIONS**

*Keep us forever in Thy path, we pray"*

**Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)**

Read Dagnini, Jérémie Kroubo "Marcus Garvey: A Controversial Figure in the History of Pan-Africanism" *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.2, no.3, March 2008 pp. 198-208.

*"Out of the gloomy past still now we stand at last"*

**The National Trade and Professional School for Women and Girls (founded by Nannie Helen Burroughs)**

Read Nannie Helen Burroughs 1883-1961 at <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/burroughs-nannie-helen-1883-1961/>

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**WEEK EIGHT: THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT**

*"We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered"*

**The Legacy of the Civil Rights Movement and the Tragic Murders That Marked It**

Watch selected excerpts from the "Eyes on the Prize" documentary focusing on the murders of Medgar Evers, James Meredith, and Emmitt Till

*"Let us march on 'til victory is won."*

**The Montgomery Bus Boycott**

Read "The Bus Protest Begins" in Gray, Fred D. *Bus Ride to Justice* Montgomery: NewSouth Books, 2013.

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**WEEK NINE: THE ERA OF BLACK POWER**

*"Facing the rising sun of our new day begun"*

**The Black Power Movement**

Watch Black Power Mixtape at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O\\_dCL2F571Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_dCL2F571Q)

*"Thou who has brought us thus far on the way"*

**The Lasting Legacy of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense**

Watch Episode 9 "Power!" of "Eyes on the Prize" and read "Huey: Getting the Party Started" from Seale, Bobby. *Seize the Time* New York: Random House, 1970

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**POPULAR CULTURE PAPERS DUE**

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**WEEK TEN: LANDMARK LEGISLATION**

*"Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod"*

***Plessy v. Ferguson and Brown v. Board of Education***

Watch the following documentary showing several perspectives of the Brown v. Board of Education at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Xo7sgn93do> and read Chapter 8—*In a Culture of Racism, Education*

*"God of our weary years, God of our silent tears"*

***The Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act***

Read "The Civil Rights Act of 1964: A Long Struggle For Freedom" at <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/epilogue.html> and "Voting Rights Act Beyond the Headlines" at [civilrightsteaching.org/voting-rights/voting-rights-act-beyond-headlines](http://civilrightsteaching.org/voting-rights/voting-rights-act-beyond-headlines)

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**WEEK ELEVEN: CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY**

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*"Let Our Rejoicing Rise High as the Listening Skies"*

***The 2008 Election and the Age of Barack Obama***

Read and watch "The Obama Legacy: From Hope and Change to Achievements and Setbacks" at <https://www.pbs.org/weta/washingtonweek/episode/obama-legacy-hope-and-change-achievements-and-setbacks> and watch the Podcast Extra "[Obama as a Role Model for Black Children.](http://www.pbs.org/weta/washingtonweek/episode/obama-legacy-hope-and-change-achievements-and-setbacks)"

*"Sing a song full of hope that the present has brought us"*

***Black Lives Matter and the Future of the Movement***

Read Khan-Cullors, Patrisse and Asha Bandele *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir*" New York: St. Martin's Press, 2018

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**WEEK TWELVE**

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Ubuntu (Group) Projects

History Is Everywhere!

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**WEEK THIRTEEN**

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**FINAL EXAM**

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**ASSIGNMENTS**

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**CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING POPULAR CULTURE OPTIONS**

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**POPULAR CULTURE PAPER OPTION 1**

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*"Sing a song full of faith that the dark past has taught us"*

In various aspects of life including history, popular culture, music, advertising..., the connotation of the color black as negative is omnipresent. Discuss one example of this being manifest in today's culture and write a 2-3 page on this phenomenon. Include at least one reference to a topic we have discussed in class. Due Week 9.



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**POPULAR CULTURE PAPER OPTION 2**


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***"Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast"***

In various aspects of life including history, popular culture, music, advertising..., the connotation of the color white as positive is omnipresent. Discuss one example of this being manifest in today's culture and write a 2-3 page on this phenomenon. Include at least one reference to a topic we have discussed in class. Due Week 9.

All papers should be double-spaced using a 12-point font and one-inch margins on all sides.

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**"YET WITH A STEADY BEAT, HAVE NOT OUR WEARY FEET": UBUNTU (GROUP)  
PROJECT: LYRICS PROJECT—DUE WEEK 12**


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Choose lyrics from a song of your group's choice and relate the lyrics to a specific event in history. Use the *Kuumba* (creativity) of all of your group members. Example: Excerpt from Stevie Wonder's "Cash in Your Face:"

*You just could not know how long we tried  
To see how this building looks inside.  
This must be a lucky day for me  
Because the sign says there's a vacancy.*

*Look I know you came a long way,  
But you made it just too late  
So we had to give it to somebody else.*

*Well I talked to you on the phone less than fifteen minutes ago  
And you told me it was cool.  
I graduated from Howard U.  
My job is paying good money too.  
And if you look on my resume, you'll find they all wanted me to stay.*

Using these lyrics, you could discuss housing discrimination faced by African Americans. Go far beyond "it was hard for us to find housing..." Discuss the history of the problem (as far back as necessary), how housing discrimination manifest itself in different parts of the country, provide examples, discuss how African Americans overcame said discrimination by building independent neighborhoods and cities, etc.

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**EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITIES**


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**ORIGINAL VOTER REGISTRATION CARD** (3 bonus points): It is *imperative* that you register to vote and exercise that hard-won right. To earn points on this assignment, present your *original* voter registration **card**. If you will not turn 18 before Election Day, you may present a completed application and a photo ID. If you are from outside of the U.S., proof of registration from your country is acceptable. You should apply for your card during the first week of school as some municipalities can take weeks to respond and follow-up may be required on your part. Due Week 12.

**HISTORY IS EVERYWHERE!** (Up to 5 Bonus Points) Use some of your break to visit a history museum or historic site. The site can be local, state, county or national and can include library exhibits, historic markers, battle sites... Bring pamphlets, photos, free souvenirs, etc. of your visit (purchases are not required) and present

your experience to the class. Be sure to provide some historical background during your presentations. Due Week 12.

## PRESENTATIONS

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**ASSIGNMENT:** Watch this video (and others if necessary) for excellent presentation tips: <https://www.youtube.com/WATCH?V=S5C1SUSCPAE>

**STAY WOKE!!!!!!!!!!** Presentations are graded on the following:

- **Whether you are audible**--Everyone must be able to hear you; we are taking notes.
- **Overall presentation**--be sure to rehearse!
- **Knowledge of the material**--Automatic zero for simply reading.
- **Effectiveness in responding to audience questions**--knowing your material will make this very easy.

Presentations do not have to be memorized, notes (any form) are highly recommended. There are no minimum or maximum time limits; just do an outstanding job. You are encouraged to use any of the resources in the classroom and you are welcome to bring materials to show, circulate and/or distribute.

## LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING

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Words: James Weldon Johnson

Music: John Rosamond Johnson

Lift every voice and sing, till earth and heaven ring,  
 Ring with the harmonies of liberty;  
 Let our rejoicing rise, high as the listening skies,  
 Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.  
 Sing a song full of faith that the dark past has taught us,  
 Sing a song full of hope that the present has brought us;  
 Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,  
 Let us march on till victory won.

Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod,  
 Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;  
 Yet with a steady beat, have not our weary feet,  
 Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?  
 We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,  
 We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered;  
 Out from the gloomy past, till now we stand at last  
 Where the white gleam of our star is cast.

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,  
 Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;  
 Thou who hast by Thy might, led us into the light,  
 Keep us forever in the path, we pray.  
 Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,  
 Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee.

Shadowed beneath Thy hand, may we forever stand,  
True to our God, true to our native land.

### **THE 42 DIVINE PRINCIPLES OF MA'AT**

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*The 42 Divine Principles of Ma'at* came from the Ancient Egyptian goddess Ma'at who maintained truth and avoided chaos. The 42 Divine Principles include declarations of what one has not done as opposed to what one should not do. Throughout the semester, use the declarations below (and others you may create yourself) to be sure that you are making the progress you desire.

I have printed my syllabus and refer to it often.  
I am prepared for class.  
I am completing all of the reading and viewing assignments.  
I completed/am planning to complete an Extra Credit project.  
I take notes in class.  
I came/am going to my professor's office if I am struggling or have questions.  
I review my notes often.  
I am giving this course 100% of my effort.

### **AFRICAN PROVERBS THAT CAN GUIDE YOUR LIFE**

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"Those who are absent are always wrong."  
"Little by little grow the bananas."  
"There are no shortcuts to the top of the palm tree."  
"Once you carry your own water, you will learn the value of every drop."  
"Don't think there are no crocodiles just because the water's calm."  
"The chameleon looks in all directions before moving."  
"Only a fool tests the depth of a river with both feet."  
"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."  
"The sun does not forget a village just because it is small."  
"If you escaped from the lion's den, why go back for your hat?"  
"Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors."  
"A patient man will eat ripe fruit."  
"An army of sheep led by a lion can defeat an army of lions led by sheep."  
"One who loves you, loves you with your dirt."  
"To get lost is to learn the way."

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