

From Plantation to White House: Race Nation, and the African American Experience 512:268

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Course Description and Objectives

How did a black man become President of the United States? How did a people who were, such a short time ago, on the margins of citizenship move to the center of political power in a land where their color and ascribed status marked them as outsiders. And what does Barack Obama's election in 2008 and re-election in 2012 say about race and race relations in this country? These are just some of the questions that this course will address. But there are many more. Obama's interracial and international heritage prompts us to explore "who is black in America?" Can someone choose to be black or is blackness thrust upon one? "What does it mean to be brown in America today?" Can a person choose their race? To answer these questions students will explore America's early legal and social history. We will explore the history of intermarriage for clues that reveal how American and African American identity is, and has been, forged. It is actually Michelle Obama's heritage that takes us from American slave plantations to the White House. Her ascendancy to the position of First Lady provokes a series of interrogations about the intersection of a history of slavery, race, women, and gender in America. There is also an institutional history that must be examined. What institutions, developed along what models, sustained black people and their allies in their quest for inclusion? What institutions, developed during enslavement endured after slavery and continue to haunt black freedom today? Of course, there is always the counterfactual "what if." What if African Americans had chosen to opt out, to relocate or repatriate en masse or to repudiate American citizenship in large numbers? Why didn't they? The issue of resistance is one that emerges with enslavement and continues to the present with the Black Lives Matter Movement. And what of racism? When and how did it begin here in America; how was it sustained; what groups have been its victim and has it disappeared? What did the election of Donald Trump, and America's general swing to the right say about race in America and the African American struggle for inclusion and equality? This class will address these issues and many others by linking the American past and present in a broad interdisciplinary discussion.

Core Goals

- 1) Relate contemporary issues to historical precedents and learn how the past informs the present.
- 2) Learn about American social movements to discern their impact on contemporary American life.

- 3) Learn how race has been deployed in the United States to affect an individual's life chances.
- 4) Compare and contrast the meaning and function of race in the past and present and discern how change has occurred over time.
- 5) Learn to critically interpret historical narratives to understand the importance of who is speaking and how that affects their content.
- 6) Improve writing and critical thinking through writing discussion papers.

List of Topics

Slavery, Race and Gender in Early America

The One Drop Rule

The American Revolution and the Rise of White Democracy

The Plantation and Its Regime

African American Traditions of Resistance

The Civil War Black Reconstruction and the Rise of American Apartheid

Black Modernity

African Americans and World War II

Cold War Civil Rights

Defying State Mandated Segregation

The Ballot or the Bullet, Black Radicalism

Black Family, Nationalism, and the Problem of Patriarchy

Black is Beautiful

Black Electoral Power and Racial Retrenchment

Anti-Busing and Anti-Affirmative Action

Mass Incarceration and Police Brutality

Black Diversity and Immigration

The Obama Promise

Backlash to the Obama Presidency