

# BLACK ABOLITIONIST THOUGHT

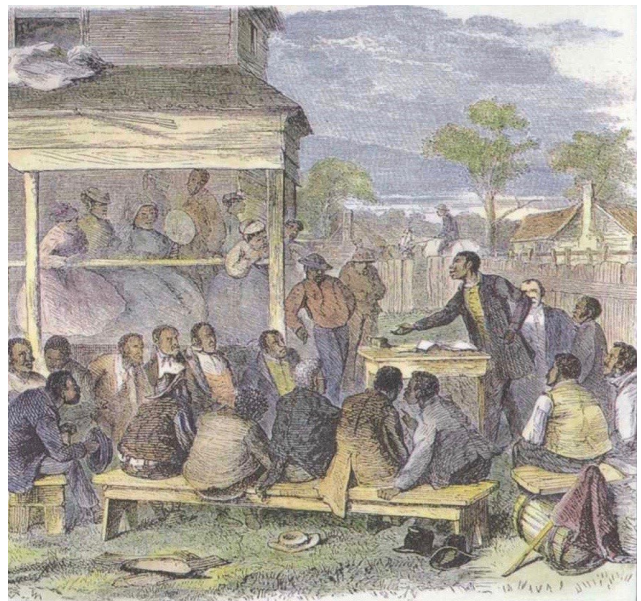
Political Science 295-04 / History 295-05

**Meeting Time:** 7:00-9:50 PM  
**Location:** Room N2112  
**Instructor:** Lucien Ferguson  
**Contact Info:** fergusonl@grinnell.edu  
**Office Hours:** Room A3212  
Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:30-5:00 PM (& by appointment)

## COURSE OVERVIEW

Prompted by the police murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Tony McDade, the 2020 George Floyd Uprisings constituted one of the largest protest movements in the history of the United States. Many protestors demanded not mere reform, but the defunding and even total abolition of policing and prisons.

What are the origins of these calls for abolition? How does the contemporary abolitionist movement relate to the interwoven histories of abolitionism and Black political thought and practice in the United States? Why, despite the abolition of slavery and Jim Crow have calls for abolition returned? How might the study of Black abolitionist thought help us better comprehend the contemporary moment?



This famous depiction of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Black political agency is from W.E.B. Du Bois' 1935 *Black Reconstruction*, a text we will read excerpts from this course.

Taking up these questions, this course examines the tradition of Black abolitionist thought in the United States. Studying the writings of key figures like David Walker, Frederick Douglass, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells, and W.E.B. Du Bois, students will explore how Black abolitionist activists theorized race, gender, law, rights, equality, resistance, freedom,

and democracy; and consider how the contemporary movement to abolish prisons and policing has roots in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century racial justice activism.

## **COURSE GOALS**

- Articulate theories, concepts, ideas, visions, and strategies central to the Black abolitionist movement's leading figures.
- Draw on the history of Black abolitionism to write persuasively about a contemporary issue for a public audience.
- Speak confidently about the history of Black abolitionism and its legacies in 19<sup>th</sup>- 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century movements for racial justice.
- Analyze primary and archival sources and link your analyses to the broader debates, concepts, and themes of the course.
- Write cogently about continuities and disjunctures relating 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>- century movements for racial justice to present-day political debates, policies, and social movements.

## **CLASSROOM RULES AND POLICIES**

1. Our classroom is a space where people of different backgrounds, abilities, genders, sexualities, races, classes, beliefs, and ages come together to learn. Students will interact with one another with respect, patience, and kindness, and commit to keeping the classroom a space that is and feels open to and safe for all.
2. Students must complete the readings for each week prior to class.
3. Students must bring a printed copy of the readings for each class. If for some reason you need help printing, email me up to 30 minutes before class and I will be happy to print the readings out for you.
4. The general classroom policy is that computers are not allowed. However, if there is a reason you believe a computer would be beneficial for you, come talk to me and I will approve their use on a case-by-case basis.
5. I will try to respond to all emails in a reasonable timeframe (within 24-48 hours). If you send an email over the weekend or late at night, do not expect an immediate response.
6. The expectation is that students turn all work in on time. However, I allow extensions on a case-by-case basis.
7. If you feel that I have overlooked something in my grading, please speak to me or submit a detailed written explanation of what has been overlooked along with the graded copy of your work.

## **ACCESSIBILITY**

We all learn in different ways. Thus, I encourage you to talk to me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs. Every possible attempt will be made to accommodate you. Please let me know if I can help you access the materials for this course and if you think there is a better way that I can assess your work for this course. There are resources available to accommodate students with disabilities and I will do all I can to support you.

Students with documented disabilities, including invisible disabilities such as chronic illness, learning disabilities, and psychiatric disabilities, are encouraged to discuss appropriate accommodations with me. You will also need to have a conversation about and provide documentation of your disability to the Coordinator for Disability Resources, located on the ground level floor of Steiner Hall ([641-269-3124](tel:641-269-3124)).

### GRADES

<b>Attendance and Participation:</b>	20%
<b>Op-Ed:</b>	15%
<b>Class Presentation:</b>	15%
<b>Oral Mid Term:</b>	25%
<b>Final Project:</b>	25% (5% presentation + 20% written project)

### ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Attendance and participation account for **20%** of the final course grade.

#### Attendance:

Attendance is foundational for this class since we have limited meeting times. Therefore, I will take attendance at the beginning of each class.

Each student is allowed one, automatically excused absence. This means you are not required to “justify” the absence or inform me before the fact.

Since we only meet once per week, unexcused absences will affect your overall grade in the course. If you experience a protracted illness or personal/family emergency that causes you to miss one or more sessions you should contact [Academic Advising](#), which will coordinate with me to determine possible extensions or accommodations for missed work.

For this course, *attentiveness* is also part of attendance. Getting to class is the first step, but to receive full credit for attendance you also need to arrive well-rested, having read the text, and ready to contribute to the discussion. Following along in the text, actively listening to others, and taking notes during lectures and discussion are aspects of attentiveness I will look for to determine this component of your grade.

### **Participation:**

It is also essential that participate in every class session (remember, we spend a long time together each week!). But participation is not the same as vocalization, you need to be an *active contributor*. To do so, you must ask earnest, critical questions, genuinely respond to classmates, ask for clarification or identify difficult passages, terms, and ideas, make connections to previous class sessions, provide examples to shed light on the discussion, and explain the real-life relevance of a topic we are discussing.

Sometimes, however, it is also important to make space for others to contribute. While we often assume everyone shares the same ability to participate, each of us comes to the table with different levels of comfort, urgency, and readiness. The purpose of participation is to make an inclusive, engaging, and thoughtful environment in which we can all learn from each other.

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

### **Assignment #1: Op-Ed (February 18 by 5:00 PM)**

Students will write a 700–900-word op-ed that applies historical arguments or concepts to a contemporary political or social issue. These pieces should be persuasive in nature, seeking to use historical analysis to make a clear claim about a present issue, conflict, or policy of your choice. It must be obvious to the reader which issue or policy your op-ed addresses. You must engage and cite at least **2 of the assigned texts**. These works must be properly cited using the citation style of your choice.

Note: your op-ed does not necessarily have to be about Black political thought, abolitionism, or civil rights directly—for example, you may want to think about how some element in the course relates to another realm, such as food justice, housing, or US politics broadly—but you must draw on two assigned works and make a clear argument about the relationship between them and your argument. On Blackboard, you will find some examples of strong models of this type of writing to help guide you further, as well as a grading rubric.

### **Assignment #2: Class Presentation**

Typically, each class will have two student presentations, which means each student will present once during the semester.

Your presentation will be **15-20 minutes** (but you can go a bit longer if you need to) and have two components:

#### **Dialectical Focus:**

1. Identify a general theme, idea, word, or concept that is important in the text you are presenting on. This could be a word (e.g., race, gender, law, rights, equality, resistance,

freedom, democracy, etc.) or a phrase (e.g., “[H]owever long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact”—Frederick Douglass, *Narrative*, p. 78).

2. Identify an issue at stake in the text with respect to #1. This will be a question, or a sentence using the word “whether.”
3. Identify a key example, story, negation, and/or argument the author uses to mediate the theme (i.e., to develop, specify, or otherwise change their audience’s thinking about it). How does this mediating device affect the issue at hand? Focus on a specific passage. Write one to three sentences that locate and motivate your dialectical focus.

### Reading Note:

1. Identify a key passage (typically, a 1-3 paragraph section of the text) that you did not deal with in detail in your Dialectical Focus.
2. Write a piece of exploratory writing that is, perhaps, longer than a journal entry but shorter and less structured than a formal essay. Approximately one page. These are preliminary and personal thoughts shared with a friendly but scholarly audience. This writing includes:
  - a. A close, scholarly explication—What does the passage say (or seem to say), exactly?
  - b. A first-person, “internal” narration or meditation describing your thoughts as you explored the reading. What made you choose this particular passage? How does it connect (or fail to connect) with the dialectical focus, other readings, and/or your own experience? What further comments or questions do you have?
3. Note: It doesn’t matter whether your note reaches a definite “conclusion” (though of course it might). But it should try to capture your thinking in a more or less coherent and focused way.

You must **cite** all references to the text that you make in your presentation with specific page numbers.

You must email me your final presentation (the Dialectical Focus + Reading note) by **11:59 PM the night before you present**. I will print our copies for the class.

### Assignment #3: Oral Mid-Term (April 4)

Our midterm examination is scheduled for the week after Spring Break. This will be an oral examination, and each student will be allotted a ~15-minute timeslot. Before Spring Break, I will provide you with detailed instructions, the exam questions, and a grading rubric I will use to evaluate your responses. I do this de-emphasize the element of surprise and to push you to do in-depth thinking around the essential themes, histories, and concepts of the course.

In a sense, this is an *ongoing assignment* for which you prepare by attending class and taking careful notes on the key points from my lectures and from one another's presentations. We will hold a review session before the examination to go over the guidelines and your questions. I advise you to come to the review session having already formulated initial answers to the questions.

#### **Assignment #4: Final Research Project (Exam Week)**

The final assignment for this course will require students to write a research project using archival research. During the course, you will learn how to work with archives—both the many online archives of Black abolitionist thought and history, and, physically, at the [Grinnell College Special Collections and Archives](#). In preparation, if students are interested, we can plan a class visit to Grinnell's archives.

For their Final Project, students will select from the options below to delve more deeply into a topic, figure, organization, or problem related to the history of abolitionism and/or African American life in the United States.

Given the availability of resources at Grinnell, many students may wish to focus on local Grinnell or Iowa history, but this is not required. For all projects, students must engage and cite **at minimum 5 primary, archival sources**. These sources may all be from the same collection, so long as they are distinct documents/materials. In addition, students must cite **at minimum 2 secondary sources**.

Although the type of prose and approach you use will vary, all final projects will be graded based on the quality and originality of the arguments, effective use of evidence (whether primary or secondary sources), depth of analysis, and the clarity of the presentation. Closer to the date, I will provide a grading rubric.

On the final day of the course, you will present your working projects. This presentation will constitute 5% of the grade for your project.

Note: Please reach out with questions or to brainstorm ideas, no matter how preliminary they may be—the earlier the better!

#### **Final Project Options:**

- Write a **research paper**, that is 10-12 pages double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12pt font, and uses a citation format of your choice, so long as you are consistent.
- Write and design a **“zine”** with minimum 3,750 words of text and using a citation format of your choice, so long as you are consistent. You will find examples of zines

on canvas, but I encourage those who choose this option to do their own poking around too, as there are many potential zine formats and approaches.

- Write a **podcast episode** with minimum 3,750 words of text and using a citation format of your choice, so long as you are consistent. I will post examples of podcasts and several podcasting resources, but I also encourage students to do their own research on various podcast formats. Student may *but are not required* to record these podcast episodes and submit the recording alongside the written text and citations.

**Note:** All assignments must employ gender-neutral language. Academics no longer use the pronoun “he” to apply indiscriminately to everyone, nor the term “man” to refer to humanity and people in general. Though you will see such usages in the historical texts we read, in your own writing you should make such generalizations using terms like “one,” “s/he,” “they,” “him or her,” or other inclusive language. Further when referring to specific persons or groups of people you should use the specific language or pronouns they prefer. You should also be attentive to the spelling and accents of authors’ names. Finally, all authors should be referred to by their entire name, or simply their last name (i.e., never just their first name).

### GRADE DISTRIBUTION

Score Range	Letter Grade	GPA
97-100%	A+	4.00
93-96%	A	4.00
90-92%	A-	3.67
87-89%	B+	3.33
83-86%	B	3.00
80-82%	B-	2.67
77-79%	C+	2.33
73-76%	C	2.00
70-72%	C-	1.67
<70%	F	0.00

### REQUIRED TEXTS

You are not required to purchase any texts for this course. I will make all texts available through Blackboard as PDFs or URLs.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Week 1: January 24

*Welcome to class!*

Mariame Kaba, "[Towards the horizon of abolition: A conversation with Mariame Kaba](#)," *The Next System Project*, November 9, 2017; "Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish the Police," *New York Times*, June 12, 2020.

Rachel Kushner, "Is Prison Necessary? Ruth Wilson Gilmore Might Change Your Mind," *The New York Times*, April 17th, 2019.

Garrett Felber, "[The Struggle to Abolish the Police is Not New](#)," *Boston Review*, June 9, 2020.

### Week 2: January 31

*Black Radicalism in the Early Republic*

David Walker, *Walker's Appeal* (1829) (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library, 2011), 1-79.

Thomas Jefferson, "Declaration of Independence" (1776), and "Notes on the State of Virginia" (1785) (Query XIV), *Political Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 102-105, 474-480.

### Week 3: February 7

No Class: "Working Differently Day"

### Week 4: February 14

*Emigration and Colonization*



James T. Holly, "The Negro Race, Self-Government, and the Haitian Revolution," in *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787-1900*, eds. Philip S. Foner and Robert James Branham (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1998), pp. 288-304.

Martin R. Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852) & Letter to William Lloyd Garrison, 14 May 1852, in Levine, Robert S., ed. *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 189-223.

Mary Ann Shadd Cary, *A Plea for Emigration, or, Notes of Canada West, in its Moral, Social, and Political Aspect: With Suggestions Respecting Mexico, West Indies, and Vancouver's Island, for the Information of Colored Emigrants* (1852) (Detroit: George W. Patterson, 1852), pp. iii-iv, 5-44.

## **FEBRUARY 18: ASSIGNMENT #1: OP-ED DUE**

### **Week 5: February 21**

*Harriet Jacobs*

Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, ed. Nell Irvin Painter (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), pp. 1-95; 106-127; 166-178; 195-197; 212-228.

Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I A Woman," excerpt from Philip S. Foner and Robert James Branham, *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory 1787-1900* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1998), pp. 226-229.

### **Week 6: February 28**

*Frederick Douglass*

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), Chs. X-XI; "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July" (1852); "The Color Line" (1881) in John Stauffer and Henry Louis Gates eds., *The Portable Frederick Douglass* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), pp. 53-95; 195-222; 501-511.

"Citizenship and the Spirit of Caste" (1858) in *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series 1, Volume 3*, ed. John W. Blassingame (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 208-212.

**Week 7: March 7**

*Ida B. Wells*

Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horror: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (1892); *A Red Record* (1895), “Lynch Law in America” (1900), “Lynching and the Excuse for It” (1901), in *The Light of Truth*, eds. Mia Bay and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Penguin, 2014), pp. 57-82; 218-236, 307-312, 394-403, 408-414.

**Week 8: March 14**

*Anna Julia Cooper*

Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman* (1892) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 9-47; 80-126.

Recommended:

Sojourner Truth, “Equal Rights for All, Three Speeches,” excerpt from Philip S. Foner and Robert James Branham, *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory 1787- 1900* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1998), pp. 463-466.

~ **March 19-April 3: Spring Break** ~

**Week 9: April 4**

**ASSIGNMENT #2: MID-TERM**

**Week 10: April 11**

*W.E.B. Du Bois I*

Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Edited by Richard Allen and Tantor Media (United States: Tantor Media, 2008), Chs. 1-4, 6, 8, 9.

**Week 11: April 18**

*W.E.B. Du Bois II*

Du Bois, W.E.B. *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860 – 1880* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1998), Chs. I, II, IV, and XVI.

W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), 29-52.

Recommended:

Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, eds. Crenshaw et al. (New York: W.W. Norton Press, 1995), 276-292.

**Week 12: April 25**

*Civil Rights, Protest Politics, Capitalism*

Bayard Rustin, “[The Failure of Black Separatism](#),” *Harper’s Magazine*, January 1970, pp. 24-34.

Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), Ch. 6 (pp. 143-176).

**Week 13: May 2**

*Abolition in/of the Present*

Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1-30; 128-248.

Recommended:

Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), pp. 1-9; 84-115.

**Week 14: May 9**

Final Project Presentations

*Final Project due during exam week, TBD*

## IMPORTANT DATES

**January 24:** First day of classes

**February 7:** No class—“Work Differently Day”

**February 18:** Assignment #1, Op-Ed, Due at 5:00 PM

\_\_\_\_\_ : Assignment #2, Class Presentation (write in your date)

**March 19:** Spring Break begins

**April 4:** Classes Resume

**April 4:** Assignment #3, Mid-Term, during class time, at \_\_\_\_\_ (write in your specific timeslot)

**May 13:** Last day of classes

**May 16:** Exam Week begins

**May 20:** Last Day of Exam Week

**May 20:** Assignment #4, Final Project due

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

Plagiarism is a serious form of academic dishonesty and will not be tolerated. No credit for the assignment is the usual consequence. But particularly egregious cases may lead to further action such as automatic failure of the course.

Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following:

1. The direct copying of any source, such as written and verbal material, computer files, audio disks, video programs or musical scores, whether published or unpublished, in whole or in part, without proper acknowledgement that it is someone else's.
2. Copying of any source in whole or in part with only minor changes in wording or syntax even with acknowledgement.
3. Submitting as one's own work a report, examination paper, computer file, lab report or other assignment which has been prepared by someone else. This includes research papers purchased from any other person or agency.
4. The paraphrasing of another's work or ideas without proper acknowledgement.

Please note that you are not allowed to submit a paper that you have written for a previous class; all submitted work must be original work for this class.

If you are unsure of how to cite a source, ask!

Grinnell College's Academic Honesty policy is in the online [Student Handbook](#). The College expects students are aware of and meet the expectations expressed in this policy.

Remember that, though there are no group assignments in this course, collaborating, discussing, and studying with one another is expected and encouraged. Collaboration will be especially helpful to you in studying for the mid-term; and discussing your presentation, op-ed, and final projects with one another is an excellent way to develop your ideas. If you have questions about how a particular assignment relates to the College's policy, I will gladly consult with you in advance of the assignment's due date.

### **ACADEMIC RESOURCES**

Grinnell offers a number of services that will help you make the most of both this and future classes. I recommend the writing center in particular.

Writing, Reading, and Speaking Center:

<https://www.grinnell.edu/academics/centers-programs-and-resources/reading-writing-speaking>

N3129 Humanities & Social Studies Complex (HSSC)

1226 Park St

Phone: [641-269-3117](tel:641-269-3117)

Library Lab:

[https://grinnell.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_efECq6VFplUC74N](https://grinnell.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_efECq6VFplUC74N)

Counseling Services:

<https://www.grinnell.edu/about-grinnell/leadership-and-administration/offices-and-services/student-health-wellness>

1119 6th Ave, Grinnell IA 50112

Phone: [641-269-3230](tel:641-269-3230)

Hotline: [641-269-4404](tel:641-269-4404)