***Black Radical Tradition/s*:**

**Epistemic & Political Histories, Repertoires, Perspectives, Horizons**

AFRO-AM 591-B Prof. Agustin Lao-Montes

**Course Description**

This course will serve as an introduction to the Black Radical Tradition, named in plural because there are different ways of conceptually constructing what it is, and of elaborating genealogies of who are her main actors, key texts, spaces in which it takes place, its temporalities, repertoires of action, critical categories, debates, projects and horizons.

The semester will be divided in four parts. In the first part we will read three texts that intend a history of the Black Radical Tradition (BRT) from different angles of vision. For the very first meeting, we will read Kehinde Andrews’ *Black to Black*, an historical overview, from the 19th century until now, through the lens of a Black British intellectual-activist. For the second class meeting we will read Robin Kelley’s *Black Freedom Dreams*, the twentieth anniversary, revised edition, of a now classic book on the “Black Radical Imagination”, and one of the first by a male author, that breaks from a dominant tendency to construct the Black radical subject as masculine. The last general account that we will look into is Joshua Myer’s *Of Black Study*, a recently published book which develop a genealogy of the BRT by closely reading six key figures that include three feminists—June Jordan, Sylvia Wynter, and Toni Cade Bambara.

The second part of the course will historicize the BRT in three past historical times. The first class will focus on the period between the 1930s and post-World War II, concentrating on Black radicalism in processes of decolonization and the role of Black women radicals. The second meeting will study Negritude, primarily timed 1940s-1950s, by means of reading Cesaire—arguably, his most radical exponent—and Fanon who is one of the most important figures associated with it, yet critical of Negritude. We will also read fragments of two relatively recent books which highlight the most critical and radical features of Negritude as an epistemic, aesthetic, and political movement, and, as such, a pillar of the BRT. The third class will focalize in the sixties—a period we define as running between 1955-1975. For the sixties we’ll carefully read selected texts of Walter Rodney’s analyses of Black power and the significance of African and Caribbean liberation of world socialism. We will also read Cornell West’s account of the sixties Black Freedom Movement in the U.S., and Michelle Wallace evaluation today of her own critique of Black power back in the day.

The third part of the semester will study contemporary expressions of the BRT, focused on the United States, while framing the analysis in world-historical perspective, looking into historical determinants and global connections. We will begin with analyzing the Movements for Black Lives, mostly within the U.S., but also on its hemispheric and transnational expressions. Then, we will focus on contemporary Black sexual politics—feminist and LGTBQ + –especially in the U.S. and Brazil. The last meeting of this part will analyze Black urban radicalism by means of a close look at one of the most important experiment of radical transformation of a city, led by people and movements of the RBT, the on-going process at historic Jackson, Mississippi.

In the last part of the semester, we will read selections from four books which combine history and politics from the standpoint of Africana critical theory. The first will be, Joao Costa Vargas’ *The Denial of Antiblackness*, which makes an Afropessimist argument—theoretical and political, on the basis of a relational investigation—ethnographic, archival, quantitative—of antiblackness in Brazil and the United States. On the following class we will read Nathalie Etoke’s *Black Exixtential Freedom,* which presents an Aficana existentialist argument for the fight for freedom and liberation as a foundation for Black existence, debating Afropessimist focus on death . Next, we will read Gary Wilder’s *Concrete Utopianism*, where the author formulates a critique of much that is common sense in actually existing left currents—epistemic and political—from an heterodox marxist Africana radical perspective very much within the tradition of Caribbean critical discourse and liberation politics. The last class meeting will be dedicated to analyze contending theoretical and political proposals for “Afro-Reparations” from a philosophical and political perspective, by reading Olúfẹmi O. Táíwò’s *Reconsidering Reparations*.

**Classroom Dynamics & Evaluation**

Students are expected to attend every session unless there is a substantially good excuse. This is of primary importance given that the goal is to develop an active and creative critical dialogue on the questions at stake, and ideally to collectively elaborate our own interpretation of the history, as well as a mapping of the epistemic and political perspectives within the BRT. Class attendance will count as 25% of the grade. After the first three weeks in which we will read texts that account for the BRT as a whole, students will make presentations of presenting the main arguments of the readings, making a critique (positive and negative), and bringing questions to facilitate a meaningful dialogue. The idea is for students to be developing their own toolkit of concepts and arguments to analyze the history, currents, and debates within the BRT, hence we should progressively inter-weave the reading which means consistently referring to previous readings and comparing arguments. These presentations will account for 20% of the final grade.

The pedagogical strategy will consist of a combination of presentations by the professor, and beginning in the fourth class by students—approximately the first hour—followed by facilitated discussion in the second half of the class meeting. At the very beginning of each class, I will present the themes of the section (the first 15 minutes), on the basis not only of the assigned readings, but also drawing on other sources and my own analysis of the problems to be discussed. I will also give an additional bibliography of relevant readings each week of classes.

The final requirement will be a term paper. Students should email a brief proposal (about three pages, double space, font 12) for the term paper to the professor by Wednesday, November 15th which is about half of the semester. The final paper should be short yet substantive (around 12-15 pages) and students will have a choice of writing an analytical literature review demonstrating how their theoretical statement is relevant to their own research agendas, or a thematic monograph that can serve as a basis for a doctoral comp. This term paper will count as 50% of the grade and will be due no later than a week after last day of classes, by midnight, via email.

**Required Readings (available at UMASS WEB Du Bois Library)**

1. Kehinde Andrews. *Back to Black: Black Radicalism for the 21rst Century*.
2. Robin DG Kelley. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*.
3. Joshua Myers. *Of Black Study*.
4. Adom Getachew. *Worldmaking after Empire. The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*.
5. Aime Cesaire. *Discourse on Colonialism*.
6. Franz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*.
7. Walter Rodney. *Decolonial Marxism*.
8. Walter Rodney. Grounding with my Brothers.
9. Deva Woodly. *Reckoning: Black Lives Matter and the Democratic Neccesity of Social Movements*.
10. Charlene Caruthers. *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements*.
11. Kali Akuno et al. *Jackson Rising Redux: Lessons on Building the Future in the Present*.
12. Joao Costa Vargas. *The Denial of Antiblackness. Multiracial Redemption and Black Suffering.*
13. Natalie Etoke. *Black Existential Freedom*.
14. Gary Wilder. *Concrete Utopianism*.
15. Olúfẹmi O. Táíwò. *Reconsidering Reparations.*

**Semester’s Schedule**

1. *September 6*: **The Black Radical Tradition in its Longue Duree**.

Required Readings:

* Kehinde Andrews. *Black to Black*.

Recommended Readings:

* Cedric Robinson. *Black Marxism. The Making of a Black Radical Tradition*.
* Michael West el al. *From Toussaint to Tupac. The Black International since the Age of Revolution*.
* Anthony Bogues. *Black Heretics, Black Prophets. Radical Political Intellectuals*.

1. *September 13*: **Black Radical Imaginaries**

Required Reading:

* Robin Kelley. *Black Freedom Dreams*.

1. *September 20*: **Reimagining** **Black Radical Traditions**

Required Reading:

* Joshua Myers. *Of Black Study*.

1. *September 27*: **Black** **Radicalism against Crisis, War, and Empire**

Required Readings:

* Adom Getachew. *Worldmaking after Empire*.

Recommended Readings:

* Carole Boyce Davies. *Left of Karl Marx. The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*.
* Dayo Gore. *Radicalism at the Crossroads. African American Women Activists in the Cold War*.

1. *October 4*: **Negritude Revisited: Black Radicalism from the Caribbean to the World.**

Required Readings:

* Aime Cesaire. *Discourse on Colonialism*.
* Franz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. (Chapters 3 & 4).

Recommended Readings:

* Franz Fanon. *Toward the African Revolution*.
* Cheikh Thiam. *Return to the Kingdom of Childhood. Re-envisioning the Legacy and Philosophical Relevance of Negritude*.
* Gary Wilder. *Freedom Time. Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World*.

1. *October 11*: **Blackening the Sixties: Black Power and World Revolution**

Required Readings:

* Walter Rodney. *The* *Groundings with my Brothers*.
* Walter Rodney. *Decolonial Marxism*.

Recommended Readings:

* Harold Cruce. *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*. (Postscript on Black Power).
* Cornel West. “The Paradox of the Afro-American Rebellion”. In Sayres et al , Ed. *The Sixties, Without Apology*.
* Michelle Wallace. *Black Macho, and the Myth of the Superwoman*. (Introduction to 2015 edition)
* Anne Garland Mahler. *From the Tricontinental to the Global South*. (Intro & Ch. 1)

1. *October 18*: **A Global Renaissance of Black Radicalism: Movements for Black Lives**.

Required Reading:

* Deva Woodly. *Reckoning*.

Recommended Readings:

* Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. *From #Black Lives Matter to Black Liberation*.
* Leith Mullings. “Neoliberal Racism and the Movement for Black Lives in the United States”. In Juliet Hooker, Ed. *Black and Indigenous Resistance in the Americas: from Multiculturalism to Racist Backlash*.
* North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA). Special issue on # Black Lives Matter as an Hemispheric Movement (2017)

1. *October 25*: **Afrodiasporic Feminism, Black LGTBQ+ Radicalism & Sexual Politics**

Required Readings:

* Charlene Caruthers. *Unapologetic*.
* *Combahee River Collective Statement: Black Feminist Organization in the 70s & 80s*.

Recommended Readings:

* Lélia González,. "For an Afro-Latin American Feminism." *Confronting the crisis in Latin America: Women organizing for change* (1988): 95-101.
* Patricia Hll Collins. *Black Sexual Politics*. (Introduction)
* Joy James. *In Pursuit of Revolutionary Love: Precarity, Power, Communities*. (Introduction and Chapter 1)

1. *November 1*: **Black Urban Radicalism**

Required Readings:

* Kali Akuno et al. *Jackson Riding Redux*.

Recommended Readings:

* Jaime Alvez. *The Anti-Black City*.

1. *November 8*: **Structural Antiblackness and the Urge for Black Self-Determination**

Required Readings:

* Joao Costa Vargas. *The Denial of Antiblackness*.
* Charisse Burden-Stelly. "Modern U.S. Racial Capitalism: History, Theory, and Lessons from the Present". *Monthly Review Press*.

1. *November 15*: **Racial/Patriarchal Capitalism & the Dialectic of “Eros” & “Thanatos”**

Required Reading:

* Nathalie Etoke. *Black Existential Freedom*.

Recommended Readings:

* Norman Ajari. *Dignity or Death*. (Introduction & Ch. 6)
* Lewis Gordon. “Thoughts on Afropessimism”. In Lewis Gordon, *Freedom, Justice, and Decolonization*.

1. *November 29*: “**Black Becomings of the World”: Imagining & Forging Radical Futures**

Required Reading:

* Gary Wilder. *Concrete Utopianism*.

Recommended Readings:

* Achille Mbembe. *Out of a Dark Night. Essays on Decolonization*. (Introduction, Ch. 6 & Epilogue)

1. *December 6*: **Reparative Justice as World Revolution**.

Required Reading:

* Olúfẹmi O. Táíwò. Reconsidering Reparations.

Recommended Readings:

* Agustin Lao-Montes. *Decolonial Genealogies. Toward Reparative Justice on Africana Beats*. (unpublished manuscript).