HUMN 222 Black Humanities:

*The New York Times 1619 Project*

Maria Helena Lima Spring 2020

# Course Description:

HUMN 222 takes on *The New York Times* challenge to reframe American history, to consider the possibility that the origin of this country can be traced to 1619, the year that marks the arrival of the first Africans (from the land that would become Angola) to the land that would become America in all its defining contradictions. “Out of slavery,“ Nikole Hannah-Jones writes, “grew nearly everything that has truly made America exceptional: its economic might, its industrial power, its electoral system, diet and popular music, the inequities of its public health and education, […] its income inequality, the example it sets for the world as a land of freedom and equality, […] its legal system and the endemic racial fears and hatreds that continue to plague it to this day. The seeds of all that were planted long before our official birth date, in 1776, when the men known as our founders formally declared independence from Britain.”

To take on the challenge to reframe American history, we will start with Europe in the 1600s, but we will also learn about the history of Africans and peoples of African descent against what Patrick Manning calls the European “tale of modernity” (xv). Who were the people stolen from Africa? What has been preserved of their culture, religions, philosophy and way of life despite the abominable conditions they were forced to endure when brought to the “new world?” We will look very closely at the so-called Enlightenment ideals embodied in the philosophy of Locke and Rousseau, ideas that permeate the founding documents of this country but that can be exposed as lies through their obvious contradictions. Our first reading explores the historical role of Renaissance humanism in instituting the notion of human individuality and uniqueness, a notion projected back onto the writings of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century *umanisti,* but shaped by nineteenth-century concerns.

# Course Materials:

You will purchase a four-volume course packet with ALL the readings for the semester at the Duplicating Center (Welles Basement). I urge you to access *The New York Times* daily, since we will be following not only developments in “The 1619 Project” very closely, but also what’s happening in the world—these are extraordinary times, and we need to be informed citizens. With the Milne Library subscription to the **New York Times**, all members of the campus community can access unlimited articles from its website. Please see this guide on how to set up an account with *the New York Times*: <https://libguides.geneseo.edu/accessnytimes>. You can access *the Guardian, the*

*Nation, The Progressive* and other papers/magazines online.

The Pulitzer Center has created a site with the complete text of “The 1619 Project” and questions and lesson plans built around it—a truly invaluable resource:

<https://pulitzercenter.org/builder/lesson/reading-guide-quotes-key-terms-and-questions-26504> (They are included in your course packet).

# Students will

* demonstrate knowledge of the contributions of significant Enlightenment thinkers to the constitution of “the human” and of “the humanities” as an ideological enterprise;
* demonstrate knowledge of the central themes in HUMN 220 and HUMN 221, starting with the possibility of A HUMAN NATURE that can be found outside history;
* explore the role of transatlantic slavery and its challengers (i.e. the Haitian Revolution) in the creation of European (white) modernity;
* demonstrate the ability to think critically about moral, social, and political arguments in the Western intellectual tradition and across the many African diasporas, evaluating the logic of these arguments and relating them to their historical and cultural context;
* consider moral, social, and political issues from an interdisciplinary perspective in an effort to understand how “we got to be this way” and then work to change the national imaginary.

**Assignment and Evaluation:** This course is non-graded until the very end of the semester. I will return papers at individual conferences and you will be able to revise them for an “A.” Your final grade will depend upon **active and engaged class participation** which will include eventual quizzes and in-class group work **(25%),** and progress in writing critically: a midterm exam (15%); critical responses to all the documentaries shown in class (15%); a final paper that incorporates research on one aspect of “the 1619 Project” (45%), which will include the oral presentation of your argument on the last week of class and on the day of the final). All the arguments will be of your own making since I do not believe in prompts. Don’t worry: we will practice identifying arguments as we discuss the texts.

**Portfolio Grading:** The writing assignments you turn in are first drafts. While they should be free of spelling errors and grammatical mistakes (i.e. not rough drafts), they will not be finished products. Think of them as work-in-progress—not graded until revised and reworked to “perfection.” Your portfolio will be an extension and development of your work during the semester. Revision is, as Adrienne Rich writes, “the act of re-seeing and rediscovering” the significance and purpose of your writing. Do not lose any version of your essays because I do *not* have a grade book. Your grade will suffer if I cannot FIND evidence of improvement in your writing. Keep all your writings (including extra-credit write-ups) in a folder because I will collect everything yet one more time on the last day of class, to reach a final decision about your grade. I will ***not*** accept papers as email attachments or google docs. If you fall behind, do not disappear. TALK TO ME. I’ll help you catch up.

I tell all my students on the first day, the highest grade they can anticipate (if they do not talk in class) is a B- even if they can write like God themselves. Note that I will consider sending you home the second time you come to class without the readings… I will definitely note such failure on the attendance and participation page (the P Page). We need to look at specific passages TOGETHER, and your memory of the text will not be enough. If I fear many students have not done the assigned reading, **I reserve the right to quiz the class on the material due that day to reward the ones**

**who have done their homework.** You can only participate meaningfully if you read closely.

An "A" student will do all the work and excel in most of it. Active, thoughtful, and consistent

class participation and progress in writing critically are **m usts**. The student who earns a "B" may

lapse in one area, but they are generally committed to the work and to the class. A "C" student will do the assignments and participate in class, but will show no particular effort in doing the work thoughtfully or in engaging in class discussion reflectively and/or regularly. Since students who are unable to keep up with the work or attend class regularly will be advised to drop the course, I do not anticipate "D" or "E" students this semester. (I would *really* begin to worry after three absences!)

**WRITING:** Papers are to be typed, preferably Times New Roman 12’ font, with 1.5 spacing and one-inch margins at the top, bottom, and sides of your text; note that **only the left margin is justified**. Your name, the title of the course, my name, and the date you hand in the paper should be typed on the top-left of the page, single-spaced; the title should be centered on the page, two spaces below all that. There will be a header with your last name and page number starting on page 2. No header on the first page / title page (yes, this is the only time we will not follow MLA conventions). The paper should be stapled together (top left)—**never** add a fancy folder or cover page.

**My Classroom Pedagogy:** I believe students learn best when sitting in a circle and actively engaging in the production of meaning/interpretation of texts—this is nearly impossible in large classes, but we will try. I will not lecture much, so you need to work with me to make our class a real exchange of ideas and information. You need to read everything listed for that week by Monday.

No class work will be done online, so I will not expect laptops or Ipads or Iphones to be open in my classroom unless I tell you to (or unless you require special accommodations).

# SCHEDULE OF READINGS: This schedule may change at any time according to class needs and demands. When a teacher puts a syllabus together, they do not know what to expect, for each group is different. You need to be in class to note such changes or resort to the class list (our email addresses and phone numbers) to inquire about them. The class list is also a

**wonderful way to build community and make lasting friendships. Get to know one another PLEASE.**

# Week One

(1/22-26) Overview of the course/sharing expectations/portfolio grading explained. **Reading the whole syllabus on the first day of class.**

My version of the history of “Humanities” at Geneseo. Bertolt Brecht’s poem “A Worker Reads History”

**PBS and CBS interviews with Nikole Hannah-Jones on the 1619 Project:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xz](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xzNyrFhzew)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q14BTdS6BRc>

# Read Nikole Hannah-Jones’ Introduction to “The 1619 Project” on the weekend to decide whether to stay in the class.

**Week Two**

(1/28-31) On Monday we will discuss Hannah-Jones Introduction to *The 1619* Project (handout). On Wednesday, we will discuss Tony Davies’ Chapter “The Invention of Humanity” (handout). On Friday, we will watch in class one episode of *Africa’s Great Civilizations,* a Henry Louis Gates documentary that tells an African history most people do not know (I know I didn’t). “The Atlantic Age” is our introduction to the first part of our journey: The Modern World and the Triangle Trade. Take good notes because you will write a response for MONDAY (towards the 15%).

# Week Three

(2/3- 7) In order to make transparent the epistemologies governing Black Humanities, we’ll discuss Walter D. Mignolo’s chapter on “Eurocentrism and Coloniality: The Question of the Totality of Knowledge” (CP). **The Modern World and the Triangle Trade. England in the 1600’s**: Seventeenth-century England (our colonizers) displayed little political stability. It executed one king, experienced a bloody civil war, experimented with military dictatorship, and finally, after a bloodless revolution, established constitutional monarchy. Political stability of sorts came only in the 1690s.

The ideas in Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* (1690) stem from such tumultuous times and how England managed to become the first constitutional monarchy in Europe.

Aphra Behn. *Oroonoko or, the Royal Slave* (1688), the first work in the British literary tradition to grasp the global interactions of the modern world (CP).

# Week Four

(2/10- 14) The Commons X Enclosure – Read Noam Chomsky’s “Destroying the Commons,” *The Nation* (7/25/2012) (CP).

We will read chapters in Locke’s *Second Treatise*: “Of the State of Nature,” “Of the State of War,” “Of Slavery” and “Of Property”

On Friday, we will watch the first episode of “Africans in the Americas: The Terrible Transformation,” a documentary that tells the story of the first Africans arriving in Jamestown in 1619, and explains how slavery in this country happened through a sequence of laws from Indenture to racial slavery. See <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/title.html>

You written response to the documentary is due on MONDAY (towards the 15%).

# Week Five

(2/17– 21) Selections from Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s [*D*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discourse_on_Inequality)

[*iscourse on Inequality*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discourse_on_Inequality) *(*1754)

Rousseau and Locke comparison: who decided that property is the mark of civilization? Immanuel Kant’s “What Is Enlightenment?” (1784) (CP)

The *Code Noir* (France, 1685)

# Week Six

(2/24- 28) The Enlightenment and the American Revolution

Still Locke: Chapters IX “Of the Ends of Political Society and Government” and XIX “Of the Dissolution of Government.”

Rousseau and Locke comparison: who decided that property is the mark of civilization?

Ameri American History Documents: Read the Declaration, the Bill of Rights, and Frederick Douglass’ “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” (CP)

# Week Seven

(3/2 -6) The Enlightenment and the Haitian Revolution (against the French Revolution’s “Declaration of the Rights of Man”)

We will spend as much time on the Haitian Revolution as on the American (independence struggles in European colonies) to contrast their outcomes.

Read Sibylle Fischer’s Introduction to *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution.*

We’ll watch a PBS documentary: “Egalite for All: Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution” at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3R4DQ4DlP4I> .Take good notes because you will write a response for MONDAY (towards the 15%).

# Week Eight

(3/9- 13) Olaudah Equiano. *The Interesting Narrative* (1789) (CP)

The “Science” of the Nineteenth Century: read excerpts from Arthur de Gobineau’s *The Inequality of Human Races* (1856)

Read also the “*Négritude”* entry (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

# Midterm Essay Exam is DUE this week.

**Week Nine**

(3/16-20) Spring Break

# Week 10

(3/23-27) Mid-19th-Century Capitalism and its Consequences

From *The Marx-Engels Reader: “Alienated Labor” (70-81); “Communist Manifesto”* (469-500); “Wage, Labor and Capital” (203-17),

Imperialism as an advanced stage of Capitalism

# Week 11

(3/30-4/3) W.E.B. DuBois. *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) (excerpts to understand double consciousness and black music)

Watch the Documentary *Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow* (written response due on MONDAY--towards the 15%).

# Week 12

(4/6- 10) We will discuss all the essays comprising *Project 1619:* Yiya Miles’ Chained Migration: How Slavery Made Its Way West” (22- 26); Matthew Desmond’s “In Order to Understand the Brutality of American Capitalism, you have to start on the plantation” (30-40); Mehrsa Baradaran’s “Mortgaging the Future: The North-South rift led to a piecemeal system of bank regulation—with dangerous consequences” (32); Baradaran’s “Good as Gold: in Lincoln’s wartime ‘greenbacks,’ a preview of the 20th-century rise of fiat currency” (35).

# Week 13

(4/13- 17) Tiya Miles’ “Municipal Bonds: How Slavery Built Wall Street” (40); Jeneen Interlandi’s “Why doesn’t the United States have universal health care? The answer begins with policies enacted after the Civil War” (44); Jamelle Bouie, “American Democracy has never shed an undemocratic assumption present at its founding: that some people are inherently entitled to more power than others” (51-55); Linda Villarosa, “Myths about physical racial differences were used to justify slavery—and are still believed by doctors today” (56-7).

Stacey Patton, “Who’s Afraid of Black Sexuality.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*

(December 3, 2012).

# Week 14

(4/20- 24) Wesley Morris, “For centuries, black music, forged in bondage, has been the sound of complete artistic freedom, No wonder everybody is always stealing it” (60-7); Khalil Gibran Muhammad, “The sugar that saturates the American diet has a barbaric history as the ‘white gold’ that fueled slavery” (70-77); Bryan Stevenson, “Slavery gave America a fear of black people and a taste for violent punishment. Both still define our criminal-justice system” (80).

And literary pieces by prominent African-America writers permeate the issue: of course students who would like to research them and write about the function of the arts in liberation are more than welcome to.

Michelle Alexander’s “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness”

*13th* (the documentary) --

# GREAT DAY is on Wednesday, April 22. You are expected to attend the panel with the best Black Humanities papers from last semester and another panel of your choice.

**Week 15**

(4/27-5/1) Watch *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the* Revolution (PBS documentary) The Black Panther Movement and the Movement for Black Lives: Compare Platforms <https://policy.m4bl.org/platform/>

Ta-Nehisi Coastes’ “The Case for Reparations.” *The Atlantic* (June 2014)

# Week 16

(5/4- 6) Oral presentations of research argument on Monday and Wednesday (Students who present on the first day have a guarantee A on the oral presentation).

Study Day is Thursday, May 7th – office hours 2-4 PM

# Final EXAM: Tuesday, May 12th, 12:30-3:20 PM – Final Oral presentations of the argument of your research paper

**WHOLE PORTFOLIO (all the work you’ve done this semester) IS DUE ON EXAM DAY – this includes your final paper**