

AP African American Studies Syllabus

Instructor:

Room #:

Email:

General Course Description:

For more than a decade, the AP Program has worked alongside colleges, universities, and secondary schools to create an AP course in African American studies.

Drawing from the expertise and experience of college faculty and teachers across the country, the course is designed to offer high school students an evidence-based introduction to African American studies. The interdisciplinary course reaches into a variety of fields—literature, the arts and humanities, political science, geography, and science—to explore the vital contributions and experiences of African Americans.

Culturally relevant curriculum is absolutely essential for our students so they can see themselves and their history reflected in the stories we read, the conversations we have, and the projects we create. It's important to note that this class has broad appeal to every student at EK; all students regardless of race will benefit from the learning that happens in this class.

Foundational Ideas:

*The following, from **Dr. Manning Marable**, Professor of African American Studies at Columbia University, are imperative words to think about, discuss, and understand before we go further in this course.*

The African-American experience spans four hundred years, from the initial settlement of the American continent by Europeans, to the establishment of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, to the present day. Throughout their sufferings and ordeals, the people of African descent who were brought involuntarily to this country found the courage and creativity to “make themselves.” They constructed their own unique rituals, traditions and symbols; a distinct spirituality, music, art, dance and folklore; a rich cultural heritage, kinship and community; and a complex body of political and social ideas. In effect, black Americans made their own history, although not always in a manner in which they chose, because they were encumbered by the constraints of institutional racism and white privilege.

We will talk about the wide spectrum of African-American leaders, writers, and intellectuals. Many have focused their work in finding ways for the black community to survive discrimination and oppression. Through the development of their unique cultural and social traditions, and the establishment of African American organizations, black people have managed to sustain themselves in the face of almost constant adversity. Some African Americans have advocated strategies of collective political change, challenging the barriers of inequality in white America. And still others have resorted to more radical means, from the slave rebellions of the nineteenth century to the ghetto uprisings of the late twentieth century, to improve the conditions of black America. What brings together nearly all representatives of the black experience are the common efforts to achieve the same goals: the elimination of racism, the realization of democratic rights and greater social fairness within a racially pluralistic society, and the achievement of cultural integrity of the black community.

This class relies on the participation of the students. Emphasizing collaboration and dialogue, conversation and debate, we, as an academic community, will engage one another in meaningful and challenging ways while we explore the varied perspectives that each of us bring to class discussions.

Therefore, various opinions will be expressed--many that you may not agree with. My expectation is that you be respectful of the opinions of your peers. Comments that stem from honest inquiry will be validated and addressed. However, comments and ideas that are disrespectful or rude cannot be tolerated in a safe academic and intellectual community as they slow down the learning process. We should be constantly vigilant that our contributions, opinions, and responses, while intellectually critical, are respectful of the differences of position, perspective, and experience we all have. In academic circles, and indeed in our larger communities, disagreement is tantamount to learning. People can disagree without being disrespectful. Discussions centering race can be sensitive, but they do not have to be polarizing. We must listen and honor the perspectives of each other and never argue that one perspective is wrong simply because we haven't experienced it. The point of this course is to learn from the work we read, the history we study, and each other. Keep that learning goal in mind all semester long.

Course Objectives

1. Combines an interdisciplinary approach with the rigor of scholarly inquiry to analyze the history, culture, and contributions of people of African descent in the United States and throughout the African diaspora.
2. Dispels misconceptions about African history and the history of the people of African descent.
3. Examine the development of ideas about Africa's history and the continent's ongoing relationship to communities of the African diaspora.
4. Read extensively and to contextualize and analyze a wide range of literary works by Black American authors, poets, artists, and historians.
5. Acquire a fuller understanding of the historical development and social construction of Black America through four centuries of text.
6. Articulate responses verbally in rich discussions conducted in an atmosphere of open exploration and acceptance of alternative interpretations.
7. Write intelligent and insightful critical analyses of literary passages, artistic expression, and political ideas, and historical claims.

AP African American Studies Course Themes

Migration and the African diaspora

Migration is a major theme in African American Studies. In this course, we explore how both forced and voluntary migration shaped African diaspora communities and African American history. The term "diaspora" refers to the movement of people from their homeland to new places. The African diaspora includes people of African descent who have relocated to different parts of the world, including the Americas, Europe, and Asia. Africa remains an important cultural and ancestral connection for these communities, influencing traditions, art, identity, and activism in unique ways over time.

Intersections of identity

African American Studies looks at how different aspects of identity—like race, ethnicity, class, nationality, gender, religion, and ability—interact and shape people's experiences. Black communities are diverse, not a single story, and this course highlights the many ways identity influences perspectives and historical events. Students will develop the skill of analyzing how identity shapes sources, debates, and key moments in history.

Creativity, expression, and the arts

Creativity and the arts are powerful ways to understand African American history and culture. This course gives students the chance to explore Black art, literature, music, and performance from early African societies to today. Each unit examines different forms of African American expression, including the role of African influences in religion and language, the use of photography and poetry for activism, and how Black artists, writers, and performers shape society. We also explore the celebration of Black beauty through styles like Afrocentric hair and fashion, while considering the global impact of African American culture and how it has changed over time.

Resistance and resilience

Resistance and resilience are key themes throughout African American history. In each unit, we study how African Americans have pushed back against oppression and found ways to survive, thrive, and express themselves politically, economically, culturally, and artistically. Resistance has taken many forms, from fighting against slavery and discrimination to creating businesses, clubs, and movements that uplift Black communities. Students will explore how these strategies have evolved over time in the U.S. and across the African diaspora.

Required Class Texts

Course Textbook:

Brooks-Higginbotham, Evelyn, and John Hope Franklin. *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*. 10th ed. McGraw-Hill, 2022.

We will also be using a few sections from:

Painter, Nell Irvin. *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and Its Meanings, 1619 to the Present*. Oxford University Press, 2006.

We will be supplementing these secondary sources with other secondary sources in each unit.

Examples include:

Unit 1:

- *Njinga of Angola: Africa's Warrior Queen*, by Linda Heywood
- *Born into Blackness: Africa, Africans, and the Making of the Modern World*, by Howard French

Unit 2:

- "The Site of Memory," an essay by Toni Morrison
- "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America" an essay by Barabara Fields
- *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi
- *How the World is Past*, by Clint Smith

Unit 3:

- *A Nation Under Our Feet* by Steven Hahn
- *The Life of Louise Norton Little: An extraordinary woman: Mother of Malcolm X and his 7 Siblings*, by Jessica Russell
- "The Tragedy And Betrayal Of Booker T. Washington" essay by Ta-Nehisi Coats
- *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* by Isabel Wilkerson

Unit 4:

- *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Vision* by Barbara Ransby
- *City Within a City: The Black Freedom Struggle in Grand Rapids, Michigan* by Todd Robinson
- *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, by Alex Haley and Malcolm X
- *The Black Church: This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song*, by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

Each unit of study also contains a list of required sources

Students must examine these sources within each topic. You can find the complete list in the [College Board's Course and Exam Description](#). These sources vary from written primary source speeches, poetry, newspaper articles, photographs, art, and lyrics.

Example from Key Concept 2.9: Creating African American Culture

- Red Appliqued Quilted Bedcover, Circa 1850
- Excerpt from Chapter 6 of *My Bondage and My Freedom* by Frederick Douglass
- 1855 Storage Jar by David Drake
- 1858 Gospel Performance of "Steal Away to Jesus" by Shirley Caesar and Michelle Williams (video)
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**Note that up to half of the source material included in the multiple-choice section on the AP African American Studies Exam will be drawn from these required sources in the course framework.*

Course Curriculum and Pacing at a glance:

Each unit* will end with a formative assessment which will contain between 25 and 40 stimulus-based multiple-choice questions as well as two free response questions or one document based question (DBQ).

- Unit 2 is the largest unit and will be broken down into two different tests that will cover approximately four weeks of material.
- A full unit 3 test will come in the second semester, even though the beginning of unit 3 is covered in the first semester.

First Semester

Unit 1: Origins of the African Diaspora - approximately 4 weeks

- Introduction to African American Studies
- The Strength and Complexity of Early African Societies
- Early West African Empires
- Early African Kingdoms and City-States
- Early Africa and Global Politics

Unit Project: Using evidence from one specific African civilization, present and defend an oral argument that refute misconceptions the complexity of the history of African civilization.

Unit 2: Freedom, Enslavement, and Resistance - approximately 8 weeks

- Atlantic Africans and the Transatlantic Slave Trade
- From Capture to Sale: The Middle Passage
- Slavery, Labor, and American Law
- Culture and Community
- Radical Resistance and Revolt
- Resistance Strategies, Part 1
- Resistance Strategies, Part 2
- Abolition and the War for Freedom

Unit Project: Based on our reading of the Clint Smith text and socratic seminars on unit 2, design a monument commemorating the legacy of the Middle Passage or the experiences of members of the African diaspora in the Americas in the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries.

Unit 3: The Practice of Freedom - approximately 2 weeks

- Reconstruction and Black Politics
- Final Assessment: Pop-up debate on the legacy and popular misconceptions of Reconstruction

SEMESTER EXAM

- 45 stimulus based multiple choice questions
 - 1 Source Based SAQ
 - 1 DBQ
-

Second Semester

Unit 3: The Practice of Freedom (CONTINUED) - approximately 2 weeks

- The Color Line: Black Life in the Nadir
- Racial Uplift
- The New Negro Renaissance
- Migrations and Black Internationalism

Unit Project: Using primary source evidence from one African American artist or activist of the early 20th century, present and defend an oral argument that the goals and significance of the New Negro Movement.

Unit 4: Movements and Debates - approximately 5 weeks

- Anticolonial Movements and the Early Black Freedom Movement
- The Long Civil Rights Movement
- Black Power and Black Pride

- Black Women's Voices in Society and Leadership
- Diversity Within Black Communities
- Identity, Culture, and Connection

*Further Explorations Unit: a contemporary topic chosen by the class - 1 week

Individual Student Project (research, presentation, and oral defense) - 3 weeks

** The AP African American Studies course should include a Further Explorations week focused on a topic of the teacher's choice. This week offers students and teachers an opportunity to study more deeply a topic of classroom interest and/or contemporary relevance.*

Suggestions for further explorations unit:

- Contemporary Grassroots Organizing
- The Reparations Debate
- Incarceration and Abolition
- Black Women Writers and Filmmakers
- African American Art
- Black Foodways and Culinary Traditions
- Local History

** In the pilot year, EK students decided to explore a combination of incarceration issues and the connection to grassroots organizing and the Black Lives Matter movement*

More details can be found in the [College Board's Course and Exam Description](#).

Course Skills:

Notice that the **skills build on each other** and increase in difficulty from category #1 to #3. We will practice them in order and build the complexity as we go! We will take it one step at a time. You got this!

Skill #1: Applying Disciplinary Knowledge

(Demonstrating and using your knowledge of African American history and culture)

Explain course concepts, developments, patterns, and processes (cultural, historical, political, social).

- **1A** Identify and explain course concepts, developments, and processes.
- **1B** Identify and explain the context of a specific event, development, or process.
- **1C** Identify and explain patterns, connections, or other relationships (causation, changes, continuities, comparison).
- **1D** Explain how course concepts, developments, and processes relate to the discipline of African American studies.

Skill #2: Source Analysis

(What does this historical source say? What does that mean? What was the historical context of the creation of this source? Why did somebody write this? What did they want people to do because they read this?)

Evaluate written and visual sources, and data (including historical documents, literary texts, music lyrics, works of art, material culture, maps, tables, charts, graphs, and surveys).

- 2A Identify and explain a source’s claim(s), evidence, and reasoning.
- 2B Describe a source’s perspective, purpose, context, and audience.
- 2C Explain the significance of a source’s perspective, purpose, context, and audience.
- 2D Describe and draw conclusions from patterns, trends, and limitations in data, making connections to relevant course content.

Skill Category 3: Argumentation

(Making a claim and defending it with evidence.)

Develop an argument using a line of reasoning to connect claims and evidence.

- 3A Formulate a defensible claim.
- 3B Support a claim or argument using specific and relevant evidence.
- 3C Strategically select sources—evaluating the credibility of the evidence they present—to effectively support a claim.
- 3D Select and consistently apply an appropriate citation style.
- 3E Use a line of reasoning to develop a well-supported argument.

AP AFAM DBQ RUBRIC

_____ / 7 - Total

_____ / 1: Contextualization - broader background of the topic funneled into the specific topic

_____ / 1: Thesis that answers the prompt

	Doc	Summarize/topic (must have 2)	Answers the Prompt (must have 3)	Why was this written? (must have 2)
_____ / 1: S: Uses 2 to connect to topic	A			
	B			
_____ / 1: P: Uses 3 to build an argument	C			
	D			
_____ / 1: Y: Sources 2 documents	E			

_____ / 1: Reasoning skill: Use one of these to help your argument in your answer to the prompt:
comparison, or change/continuity over time, geographic impact

_____ /1: Use of Outside Evidence to answer this prompt

Guide to Document Based Question & the S.P.Y. Method Document Analysis

Step #1 - READ THE PROMPT (twice) (circle/underline keywords) The whole key to this essay is to stay on topic!!!
(1 minute)

Step #2 - Pause a moment and think, **what do you know about this topic already?** *How would you respond to this question if there were no docs?* Keep these thoughts in your head as you read. Your knowledge of the Essential Must Knows will help you analyze and interpret information. **(1 minute)**

Step #3 - Read the first 2-3 documents and brainstorm S.P.Y.

- Read the sourcing material first! (ie: who wrote this and when?)
- Read the document
- Think: **How** does this document **answer the question (the prompt)?**
- How** does the **source material impact how** it answers the question? Does it **corroborate** with what I have learned or is this some **bullcrap** based on the author's own bias? How might a person of a different social class/nationality/race/religion/gender see this differently? **(4 minutes)**

The AP AFAM DBQ

1 Question

5 documents

45 Minutes

12% of AP Exam Score

Step #4 - Write the contextualization

- Situate the argument by explaining broader historical events
- Why did the main topic of the prompt exist/happen in the first place??
- It's the broader big picture and the **funnel** it down!
- *Example: it's a question about resistance to slavery, a PERFECT Context would be: writing how race-based chattel slavery system emerged in the first place. ie, 2-3 sentence explanation of Euro colonization of the Americans, the value of sugar, Middle Passage, etc. **(3 minutes)***

Step #5 - Write the thesis

- Re-read the prompt to MAKE sure you answer that question. **(2 minutes)**

Step #6 - Write the essay body. Write about each doc (*at least 4!*) **S.P.Y. METHOD!**

- Pro-tip: clump a few similar docs together in a paragraph. Use a clear **topic sentence** that explains how they all connect in this paragraph!

When writing about a document: **NEVER QUOTE THE DOCUMENTS - use your own words**

#1 - **Summarize** what this doc says. Specifically related to the topic of the prompt.

#2 - **Prompt:** directly answer the prompt with evidence you get from this specific doc

There is a chance that this will be different from how your thesis answers the prompt.

#3 - **whY** does this document exist? Analysis. (try to combine **author/point of view/and purpose**. (why did this person ever take the time to sit down and write this out? **What was the author's motivation?** What did they want people **to do** with this information? Did they want someone to take action? **What did they want to change?** Why?

- **HINT:** Make the documents "talk to each other" ei: "Doc B argued **X**, however, the author of doc D claims **Y** because..."
- **HINT:** You are a DETECTIVE!! Historians do not always believe or agree with everything they read! Does this relate to what you have learned in the must-know? Is there something "off" here? Does it corroborate?
- **DO NOT** quote the documents - explain them in your own words! **(27ish minutes)**

Step #6 - Outside Evidence!

- This is like a mini short answer question inside your DBQ. How would you answer this if there were no documents? This is your time to SHOW OFF your knowledge of this topic that is not mentioned in the documents.
- Think of a specific piece of evidence (not mentioned) that would answer this specific prompt. **(3 minutes)**

Step #7 - Conclude by rewriting a thesis. **(2 minutes)**

- Do not go back and literally copy your thesis...the goal is to try and write another one now that you have just spent 40 furious minutes writing this essay. Maybe your brain is clearer now. The AP people are so nice that they will give you credit for the thesis even if it's at the end!

End of the Year Individual Student Project Overview

We will begin working on our project in the second semester. You may choose any topic related to the field of African American Studies. You will present your research to the class in late April.

Students in AP African American Studies will embark on an individual project to explore four related sources on a topic of their choice and then present and defend their analysis of those sources. The project aims to deepen student understanding of their topic and help them develop disciplinary skills. I will support you as you develop your project.

Project Scoring I will use the official College Board scoring rubric to assign your score. The project has four components:

- Selected Sources Template (2 points)
- 8-Minute Presentation and Oral Defense (10 points)
 - 5-Minute Presentation
 - 3-Minute Oral Defense
- Exam Day Validation During the AP Exam’s free-response section, students will be asked a question about their individual project (2 points).
 - This question will be similar to one of the sample project oral defense questions, but students will respond in writing to this question on the exam. Their responses to this project exam day validation question will be scored alongside the rest of the student’s AP exam by official AP Readers.

The total project score including the exam day validation question, (14 total points) will contribute to **10% of students’ overall AP score.**

Example Selected Source template:

Source 1	Type	
Citation: At minimum, each citation must include the source’s title or type, the date, and if available and applicable, the title of the publication within which the source is contained and the author.		
Brief summary or description:		
Circle: This source supports / refutes my claim.		This source offers a similar / different perspective.
Description of the relevance to project topic:		

Teacher Verbal Defense Questions: End of your Presentation

1. Select one of the sources you used and explain why you chose this source to include in your project.
2. Identify the source that most deepened your understanding of your topic and explain in what way it added depth to your understanding of your topic.
3. Explain how excluding one of your sources would have weakened your argument.
4. Explain how you determined that one of your sources is reliable.
5. Identify which of your sources is the most persuasive and explain why it is so persuasive.
6. Identify the source that was most important to your research topic and explain its importance.
7. Explain why the four sources you selected, compared to other sources you considered but did not select, are the best for supporting your argument.
8. Describe the most important source of information you found while conducting your research, and explain why was it important to your research process.
9. Describe which of the various perspectives you explored was most difficult for you to incorporate into your project, and explain why this was the case.

Comparison of Sources

1. Explain how two of your sources provide different perspectives on an aspect of your topic.
2. Explain how two of your sources provide similar perspectives on an aspect of your topic.
3. Explain why one of your sources is more convincing than another.
4. Explain why one of your sources is more reliable than another.
5. Explain how a combination of two of your sources strengthened your argument.
6. Explain how a combination of two of your sources added depth or insight to your understanding of your topic.
7. Describe any lack of agreement or contradictory information you found as you did your research. Explain what this lack of agreement or contradiction revealed about your topic.

Other questions

1. Describe one piece of information you learned from a source you used in your project that was not included in your classroom instruction.
2. Describe one piece of information you learned from a source you used in your project that adds to information you learned in your classroom instruction.
3. Explain how the research you conducted connects to a topic from the course in ways that you did not know or expect until after you had completed your research.
4. Explain how the research you conducted revealed additional questions or insights about your topic.
5. Explain why you were initially interested in this topic and how well your research aligned with what you expected to learn about your topic.

Instructor's Expectations

Assignments:

Students are expected to arrive for class on time and to be prepared to learn. Completed assignments are expected to be of high quality and turned in on time. I will not give you any "busy work." Every assignment matters in this class and they build on each other; therefore, it is crucial that you do the work and you do the work ON TIME. The College Board has prepared a robust curriculum with many required sources. Success in this course will rely on staying up to date with your work!

Make-up Work Policy and Getting Help:

I expect you to take full responsibility for all assignments you miss when absent. My highest recommendation is to never miss class. If your absence is excused, you have a day to make up the work for every day that you missed. This policy does not apply to work assigned in advance.

Academic Bullying and Power of Kindness:

I have high expectations for my students and will not tolerate interruptions, cut downs, scoffing, obscenities, criticisms or shaming based on race, gender, sexuality, appearance, class, or ability. Be kind to one another and to me. I am here to cultivate stronger critical thinking and writing skills, so you can navigate this world with intellect. I will do everything I can to help you achieve your potential; however, I expect at least that much effort on your part. If this is something you cannot commit to, perhaps this class is not a proper fit for you.

Cell Phones:

Studies are very clear: cell phones in the classroom hinder your learning and restrict your potential for growth. It may be educational malpractice to allow to scroll through anxiety-inducing social media and missing out on growing through critical analysis of Black Panther Party policy, Claude McKay's poetry, etc. Unless I have indicated cell phone is OK, cell phones should not be out.

If a cell phone is out at a restricted time, you will be asked to place your phone in the clear box on my desk. No one but you will touch your phone. You may take it at the end of class. As long as you follow the policy, there will be no problems. If cell phone disruptions happen frequently, I will contact parents and guardians and a new more stringent plan may be implemented.

This policy exists because I take your academic and personal development very seriously. Great heroes have dedicated their careers to fight main stream academia and state legislatures to make this course a reality. I don't want you to miss any of it!

Speaker Suggestions: Do you know any performers, poets, teachers, leaders, or difference makers in our community who should speak in our classroom about African American literature, issues, culture, or history? Send me an email with their name and a brief description of their profession/vocation as well as their contact information.

Name_____

Syllabus Review and You

#1 Carefully read “Foundational Ideas” on the first page of the syllabus. This is written by the acclaimed academic Dr. Manning Marable, Professor of Public Affairs, History, and African American Studies at Columbia University.

On the syllabus, highlight THREE important lines that come from this section. Explain your thinking about each line below:

Your explanation should answer the following: Why did you choose these lines? What is significant about them? (you can't get this wrong).

First Three Words of the Line:

Your Explanation:

First Three Words of the Line:

Your Explanation:

First Three Words of the Line:

Your Explanation:

#2 Read through the “Curriculum Scope.” Which of the four AP Units looks most interesting to you and why?

#3 What do you expect/need from me to make your classroom experience a positive one? What you write here is kept in confidentiality. I want to do everything in my power to make this semester meaningful. How can I help with that?

#4 Have you taken an AP course before? What was your experience like? What did you like or dislike?

#5 Why are you taking AP African American studies?

#6 Do you have any questions or comments that you think I should know before we dive into this course together?