

San Bernardino Valley College
Course Outline for History 138
AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY I

I. CATALOG DESCRIPTION:

History 138: African-American History: From Origins in Africa to Reconstruction.
three hours lecture = three units

A general survey of African-American history to Reconstruction. This course will analyze and detail the creation and development of African-American people and culture. Topics include the Atlantic slave trade, colonial and antebellum slavery, slave resistance, and the black involvement in the Civil War.

II. NUMBER OF TIMES COURSE MAY BE TAKEN FOR CREDIT: One

III. EXPECTED OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS:

Upon successful completion of the course, the student shall be able to demonstrate proficiency in the following areas:

- A. identify, define, and discuss the key interpretations of African-American history, including the hidden-hand, contributionalist, cyclical, liberal, revisionist, and Afro-centric approaches.
- B. demonstrate the ability to critically evaluate and interpret pertinent themes such as the rise of the Atlantic World economy, the shift to slave labor in North America, and the ultimate political, social, and cultural ramifications of slavery in the American South.
- C. analyze and discuss important questions regarding the slave trade, the role of female slaves, slave resistance in the colonial and antebellum eras, and slavery as an American paradox.
- D. construct sound arguments regarding African cultural retentions among American slaves and their descendants.
- E. read, discuss, and respond to a variety of controversial interpretations of the African-American past such as Ivan Van Sertima's thesis and the "General Strike" thesis developed by W.E.B. DuBois.

IV. CONTENT:

- A. Introduction and Overview: The History of African-American History.
Through the Prism of Truth: Distortions, Myths, and Stereotypes of Africa and Africans.
Analyze the various interpretations of Africa's image and history.
- B. The Van Sertima Thesis: The Possibility of Africans in Pre-Columbian America.
Discuss the evidence supporting the assertion that Africans could have been in America before Columbus.
- C. The Atlantic World: Rise of the Sudanic Kingdoms.
Ghana, Mali, and Songhai.
Atlantic Africa before 1680:
 1. State Formation and Fragmentation in the Western Sudan.

2. The Emergence of Atlantic African Polities.
- D. The Slave Trade: Origins, Contours, and Implications 1500 to 1808.
 - “Am I My Brother’s Keeper?” Part I: African Slave Traders.
- E. Colonial Slavery in the Chesapeake: King Tobacco.

Discuss the transition from white indentured servitude to African slaves.
Analyze the role that Bacon’s Rebellion played in the formation of racial politics in early Virginia.
- F. Colonial Slavery in the Carolinas: King Rice.
 - “From Hands to Tutors”: African Agricultural Expertise in Rice Cultivation.
Discuss how Africans from Upper Guinea brought rice cultivation and cattle herding techniques with them across the Atlantic.
- G. The American Paradox: Freedom in the Land of Slaves or Slavery in the Land of Freedom?: Revolutionary Era Aspirations, Hopes, and Disappointments.
- H. Slave Resistance Movements to 1800.

Discuss the three main forms of slave resistance:

 1. day-to-day resistance.
 2. running away/maroonage.
 3. mass conspiracies and rebellions.
 - a. New York City 1712 and 1741.
 - b. Stono, South Carolina 1739.
 - c. Gabriel Prosser’s Conspiracy: Richmond, VA 1800.
- I. Antebellum Slavery in the Lower South: King Cotton.

Discuss why cotton cultivation spread through the lower South after 1800.
- J. Antebellum Slave Resistance Movements.
 1. Denmark Vesey’s Plot: Charleston, SC 1822.
 2. Nat Turner’s Revolt: Southampton, VA 1831.
- K. Slave Culture, Family, and Personality: Reflections on Historiography.
- L. Africanisms in Language, Art, Religion, Music, Folklore, and Dance.
- M. Slave Women in History and Historiography.
- N. A Qualified Freedom: Quasi-free Blacks in the Antebellum South.
 1. “Am I My Brother’s Keeper?” Part II: Black Slaveowners.
 2. Industrial and Urban Slavery in the South.
- O. North to ‘Freedom’: Blacks in the Antebellum North.

Discuss the socio-economic, political, and racial realities found in the North by free blacks.
- P. Black Nationalism, Abolition, and Colonization on the Eve of the Civil War.
- Q. Black Soldiers and the Final Assault on the Planter Aristocracy.

Discuss the role black soldiers and slaves played in Northern victory.
Analyze the validity of DuBois’ “General Strike” thesis.
- R. Reconstruction Era Aspirations, Hopes, and Disappointments.
 1. “Forty Acres and a Mule?” America’s Unfinished Revolution.
 2. The Path to Black Nadir and White Redemption.
 3. The Return of White Supremacy.

V. METHODS OF INSTRUCTION:

- A. Lecture
- B. Audio-visual
- C. Participation and Discussion
- D. Debates
- E. Primary source references
- F. Group work

VI. TYPICAL ASSIGNMENTS:

- A. Writing, critical thinking, or performance:
 - 1. Book Analysis of a required text (i.e., *Black Thunder* or *Beloved*).
 - a. summarize the text.
 - b. respond to five interpretive questions regarding the text.
 - 2. Response papers for in-class videos, debates, and discussions.
 - 3. Group Work
 - a. Debates on controversial issues.
 - b. Discussion of readings and important topics.
- B. Reading
 - 1. Read selections from Olaudah Equiano's narrative and compare his description of the "Middle Passage" with the depictions detailed in *Roots*, *Amistad*, and class lecture.
 - 2. Read Benjamin Quarles' first chapter in *The Negro in the Civil War* and compare it to the depiction detailed in *Glory*.

VII. EVALUATION:

- A. Methods of Evaluation:
 - 1. Class Participation
 - 2. Examinations: Essay and Term Identifications.
 - a. Typical essay questions:
 - Why did English colonists in North America choose Africans as laborers? Discuss the various factors involved with this choice. Which of these factors do you believe were most important?
 - Why does July 4, 1776 represent the central paradox or contradiction in American history?
 - b. Typical term identification items:
 - hush harbor
 - Sarah Woodson Early
 - Fourteenth Amendment
 - 3. Book Analysis: Typical questions.
 - a. Throughout the work, Bontemps makes mention of signs and charms. What significance does the supernatural have during the events in the book and how do the "signs" determine, to some degree, the outcome of Gabriel's conspiracy? Provide specific examples to support your answer.
 - b. Juba, Gabriel's co-conspirator and lover, played a crucial role in Bontemps' version of the conspiracy. Discuss in detail her role in

the plot. What other forms of resistance did black women engage in throughout the book?

- c. As you should know by now, the rebellion was betrayed in the novel by two slaves, Ben and Pharaoh. Many people living in the relative comfort of the twentieth century would dismiss these two slaves as traitors and sell-outs. Concentrating primarily on Ben, discuss how such characterizations may be overly simplistic. What internal conflicts did Ben contend with and how does Ben's position on the plantation shape his decision to betray the other slaves?

4. Weekly Assignments:

- a. Audio-Visual presentation typical assignment:

Discuss how *Birth of A Nation* depicts white fears of the political and social empowerment of black people in the South.

- b. Typical debate issues and questions:

- 1) Race, racism, and racial politics in America.
- 2) Africanisms in American culture.
- 3) Did slavery destroy the Black family?

B. Frequency of Evaluation:

1. Two tests and periodic quizzes
2. One final examination
3. Weekly assignments
4. One Book Analysis

VIII. TYPICAL TEXTS:

Bontemps, Arna, *Black Thunder, Gabriel's Revolt: Virginia 1800*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.

Finkenbine, Roy, *Sources of the African-American Past*, New York: Longman Publishers, 1997.

Franklin, John Hope, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans, Vol. I*, New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1998.

Frazier, Thomas, *Afro-American History: Primary Sources*, Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1988.

Harding, Vincent, *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*, New York: Vintage Books, 1983.

Jones, Jacqueline, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family From Slavery to the Present*, New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

Morrison, Toni, *Beloved*, New York: The Penguin Group, 1987.

Wright, Donald, *African Americans in the Colonial Era*, Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1990.

**or other college level equivalents that specifically deal with African American history.

IX. OTHER SUPPLIES REQUIRED OF STUDENTS:

Floppy disk.