

Elvira Basevich, Ph.D.

Afro-Modern Political Thought: Contemporary Survey

(Suggested Course for Successful Completion of the AFAM Major)

Intermediate/Advanced Course in Philosophy/ Africana Studies/ Political Science

In this course we will survey the debates currently animating Afro-modern political thought. Inasmuch as they figure in the latter, we will read modern political philosophers, including John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Dewey, and John Rawls. While these philosophers' critique of modern society neglects to focus on – and often, even, broach – the issues of racial justice and the social and political organization of white supremacy, contemporary Afro-modern political philosophers draw from them. In doing so, they transform, amplify, and sharpen the critique of modern society in order to dismantle white supremacy and complete African American emancipation. The dominant themes that we will address in this course are the virtues (and vices) of appropriating the following traditions of modern political thought for the Afro-modern political tradition: (1) civic republicanism, (2) Rawlsian political liberalism, and (3) American pragmatism. We will strive to achieve a consensus about which of these traditions holds the greatest promise for the future development of Afro-modern political thought.

SAMPLE READINGS

- I. Week 1. Introduction
 - a. Bernard Boxill, *Blacks and Social Justice* & Pittman and Lott, *A Companion to African-American Philosophy*
- II. Week 2-5. The Revival of Republicanism for Imagining Black Emancipation
 - a. John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract* & *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (selections)
 - b. Robert Gooding-Williams, “Douglas’s Inheritance of Declarations and Practices of Politics”; Melvin Rogers, “Republican Confusion and Liberal Clarification,” Philip Pettit, *On the People’s Terms*, chp. 1; Judith Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion: Tanner Lectures*
- III. Week 5-7. Racial Justice in Non-Ideal Conditions and Rawls’s Political Liberalism
 - a. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (selections) & *Political Liberalism* (selections)
 - b. Charles Mills, “Lost in Rawlsland” & *Contract and Domination*, chps. 3-4; Tommie

Shelby, *We Who Are Dark*, chps. 6-7 & *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform*,
chp. 1 & Epilogue

IV. Week 8-10. Afro-Modern Political Thought and the American Pragmatist Tradition

- a. *The Philosophy of John Dewey* edited by John J. McDermott (selections)
- b. Melvin Rogers, *The Undiscovered Dewey*; Cornell West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (excerpt); Interview, “Paul Taylor: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Critique of ‘Race’”