

TEAM TEACHING ACROSS THE DISCIPLINES GRANT PROPOSAL REPORT –

May 25, 2008

Institute for the Arts and Humanities

The Pennsylvania State University

African American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century

AAAS/PHIL 497B - Spring 2008

Christine Clark-Evans, Associate Professor of French and Francophone Studies, Women's Studies, and African and African-American Studies

Emily Grosholz, Professor of Philosophy, African-American Studies, and English

Narrative description of course taught

Professors Christine Clark-Evans and Emily Grosholz co-taught this course on African American philosophy in the twentieth century in Spring Semester 2008, the newly minted course number AAAS / Philosophy 469, under the heading of AAAS / Philosophy 497B, on a Tuesday-Thursday schedule, 4:15-5:30 p.m., with one make-up class to replace one class missed due to inclement weather. In the accompanying series of four nationally known guest speakers, each invited scholar taught one of the classes and gave a public lecture in the evening. The 10 students enrolled, of whom one withdrew, comprised two graduating seniors, 6 other undergraduates and two graduate students, and there were six enrolled in the Philosophy Department and three enrolled in the African and African American Studies Department.

The four distinguished African and African-American scholars came to Penn State, in the context of the course examined the important role of philosophy in Africana Studies and the distinctive insights on method and ethics that Africans and African Americans have brought to philosophy. The speakers we brought in were Lewis Gordon, Laura H. Carnell Professor of Philosophy at Temple University; Joy A. James, John B. and John T. McCoy Presidential Professor of Africana Studies and College Professor in Political Science at Williams College; Koffi Maglo, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at University of Cincinnati; and Harvey Cormier, Associate Professor of Philosophy at the State University of New York / Stony Brook. We also brought in two of the four colleagues originally invited to teach on their special expertise to one class each. James Stewart spoke on recent debates about the concept of race and the philosophy of W.E.B. Du Bois, and Thomas Poole taught on the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the philosophical bases of non-violent direct action for civil and human rights. Because the Philosophy Department was in the process of interviewing candidates for a faculty position in African American Philosophy and the Department of AAAS and Philosophy are considering curricular proposals to offer dual advanced degrees, our class had the additional opportunity to hear Paul Taylor, Associate Professor of Philosophy of Temple University, one of the candidates. There was also an unexpected, fortuitous opportunity when the "Rock Ethics Institute," the annual "Malcolm X Lecture," and the "Conversations in Democracy" invited to Penn State under their own auspices and without our financial contribution

internationally recognized African American scholars Cornel West, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and “Kwame Anthony Appiah” during fall 2007 and spring 2008. The students responded very positively to the guest lecturers, raising important questions in the discussions with each lecturer, and also took advantage of the DVD recordings of the three lectures that will be deposited in the Music and Media Technology collection, 2nd floor in Pattee Library.

Books and Curriculum:

W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, Transaction Publishers, 1991
Martin Luther King, *Why We Can't Wait*, Mentor Books, Penguin, 1964
Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, 2005
Joy James, *Shadowboxing: Representations of Black Feminist Politics*, Palgrave MacMillan (MPS), 2002
Ida B. Wells Barnett, *On Lynchings*, Humanity Books, 2002
Packet of Readings: (selected texts)

While this 400-level course was designed for AAAS and Philosophy majors and minors, students from other disciplines and the graduate school in arts and sciences and education joined the class to focus on the intersection of twentieth century politics, racial issues, philosophical method, the application of abstract thought to concrete situations, as well as the use of argument and narrative. All of these topics and methods were reflected in the students' discussions, 3 short essays, and the final paper. In a seminar format, undergraduate and graduate students read and critically analyzed the five books we studied, culminating in a 12-15 page final research paper on topics developed in consultation with the professors and using summary abstracts and critical bibliographies as decisive stages in the preparation of their final papers. Each student gave an oral presentation of a draft of their final paper in week 13 of the semester and revised the paper in final form based on class discussion.

Both of the professors attended all classes (except for one each), all invited guest lectures, and most of the related outside speakers not included in the original proposal. The students discussed collectively and individually important questions in African American Philosophy and raised their own concerns about a wide range of related issues, from argument and point of view to racial politics and ideologies, definitions of race, scientific racism, power relations, civil and human rights today, the role of narrative in philosophy and history, the relationship between race, gender, and class, philosophy as a discipline and philosophical traditions, elementary, secondary, and higher education, and the future of race relations in the U.S. The students' final papers reflected the depth and breadth of their learning and engagement in the course subject matter, whose topics included “Bloodless Revolution,” “‘Lifting As We Climb’: Bridging the Gap Between the Black Socio-Economic Classes,” “A Call for Change - Mentoring within the Black Community,” “Fanon, Race and Sex: On the Natives' Land and Their Mischaracterization,” “What is Race?,” “Black Skin: My American Problem,” and “Identity Politics Among Black Queer People.”

Self-Evaluations and Student Evaluations

SRTE's

Budget Expenditures

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