

Summer 2021: Session B
Seminar: T, Th 1:00-4:15
Office Hours: TBD
or by appointment: T,W,Th

Instructor: Anna Duensing
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HIST S126: CONFRONTING JIM CROW IN THE AGE OF FASCISM



The American League Against War and Fascism in New York protesting the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, May 1936. (FPG/Hulton Archive/Getty Images).

This undergraduate seminar situates the twentieth-century struggle for African American civil and human rights within the global age of fascism. Our focus lies in activist-intellectual responses to fascist governments, ideologies, and movements in the 1930s-1940s before turning to the memories and legacies of fascism in the United States across subsequent decades. Drawing from a broad array of scholarship, we will examine how a framework of antifascism within the Black Freedom Struggle served to critique and combat racism and racial hierarchy, Jim Crow segregation, right-wing social movements, vigilantism, militarism, imperialism, and other more insidious modes of white supremacist racial-colonial violence. While official wartime rhetoric imagined fascism as the monstrous “other” of the American cause—why we fight and what we are not—many African Americans viewed fascism instead as a kind of doppelgänger or fanatic mutation of the world in which they lived. Our readings will expand on this idea to consider the role that fascist regimes and expansionist warfare in Europe played in fostering radical sympathies and solidarities between civil rights struggles in the United States and movements for self-determination and liberation from colonial rule throughout the Global South.

In this course, we will grapple with the fundamental and contentious issue of the “f-word” itself, that is: what we talk about when we talk about fascism—its local, particular, and historical manifestations, its bedfellows, imitators, and apologists, its offshoots and analogs, its loose appropriations and vulgar echoes. In the postwar moment, however, our focus shifts primarily to evocations of and reckoning with National Socialism and the Holocaust. Our work is necessarily transnational and comparative, and we will examine theories, arguments, and popular campaigns that marked the similarities, differences, affinities, and murky gray zones between racism, oppression, and state violence in Nazi Germany and the United States. Working closely with a variety of primary source material, we will explore how the rise, fall, and memory of fascism in general and Nazism in particular shaped public discourse on racial and wealth inequality and the integrity of liberal democracy. Scholars have warned that analogies to fascism serve only to abuse, erode, and corrupt the meaning of the term to the point that it merely refers to something objectionable or evil. We will engage with this and other related critiques, but we will also take seriously those who argued that Europe was not the sole entry point for understanding fascism and antifascist resistance, and in turn delivered to the U.S. an indictment and warning.

:: COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES

Attendance and Participation.....(20%)

This seminar meets online twice a week for the full five week session. Readings and discussion are the heart of this course. Attendance is mandatory and punctuality essential, as is your active participation. I will excuse absences due to illness, religious holidays, or personal emergencies with advance notice and an agreed-upon plan to make up the material. Given the concentrated timeframe of summer session, additional absences will significantly impact your participation grade and might require you to withdraw from the course. While this is a discussion-based seminar, I recognize everyone learns differently and encourage you to hone your particular strengths between class, office hours, as discussion lead, and in your reading reflections and final assignment.

Discussion Lead.....(10%)

During our first meeting, each student will select a day on which they will serve as discussion leader. For your chosen day, you will prepare a 10-15 minute presentation that introduces the authors and the texts and opens up discussion. Your presentation should include brief and reflective summaries of the readings with emphasis on certain authors/arguments/ideas as you see fit. You should then pose two to three questions to the group. Be prepared to point the class to a particular page or paragraph in reference to your question(s). You should strive for generative, debatable, and open questions—the *so what?* that will spark our discussion that session.

Reading Reflections (4), 1-2 pages each (due at the end of Weeks 1, 2, 3, and 4).....(40%)

We will discuss expectations for your weekly reading reflections more in class, but my aim is to help you learn how to read for arguments, interventions, and evidence, encourage you make connections between different scholars and texts, and become more comfortable and fluent in evaluating and engaging with scholarly work.

Final Project.....(30%)

In Weeks 4 and 5, students will conceptualize and draft final projects, choosing between 1) 8-10-page analysis of a set of 3-5 primary sources related to the major themes of the course and supported by secondary sources; 2) proposal and outline for an imaginary exhibition that explores a key event or major theme from the course; 3) a 10-15 minute podcast that examines a major event or idea from class. I encourage you to consult with me on any ideas that pique your interest, and I will be scheduling one-on-one meetings between Weeks 3 and 4 to help support you through the planning, researching, and drafting/recording process for this assignment.

Project Proposal/Outline (due at the end of Week 4).....(5%)

Final Project (due Monday, August 16).....(25%)

:: BEST PRACTICES FOR REMOTE LEARNING

Your participation is ultimately a cumulative contribution and consists of 1) logging in to Zoom on time and being present for each and every session; 2) demonstrating that you have thought carefully about the material, readings, and the assignments; 3) responding respectfully to the contributions of your classmates; 4) asking questions and seeking clarification whenever you need (out loud, in the chat, by email, or in office hours); and 5) if you choose, posting in the class discussion forum and contributing to the class timeline. I prefer that you keep your camera on during section, but this is by no means a requirement. I realize our sessions are long and it is extremely difficult to stay focused and connected for the full session. We will have designated breaks and I will structure class time to alleviate some of the strain of Zoom-based coursework. Please note that quality of participation is far more important than quantity, and I hope we can adjust and adapt our approach on an ongoing basis, learning together as we go. If you are uncomfortable speaking in class, have tech problems, or you anticipate any other difficulties, please let me know ASAP so that we can work together on a solution.

:: ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The work you submit must be your own. Acts of plagiarism, whether deliberate or accidental, will be taken seriously. While seeking out guidance and broader intellectual engagement is permissible, if not encouraged,

you must document all your sources and references and always give credit where credit is due, no questions or exceptions. I expect you to research and write responsibly and educate yourself about the nature of this issue if you have not done so already. If you are ever unsure about what constitutes plagiarism or have other concerns, please be in touch with me or contact the Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning.

:: COURSE ACCESSIBILITY

I want to make this class as accessible as possible to everyone in it. If I am ever using language that is not easily understandable in class, in assignments, or in your feedback, or otherwise coming up short in my responsibility to help you learn, please let me know however you can (by saying something in class or office hours or by writing me in the chat or by email). If you anticipate needing any kind of modification to the class in its current form due to disability, medical ailment, personal emergency, or tech issues, please be in touch.

:: ACCOUNTABLE SPACE

Our goal is to learn together, to confront charged and violent history in a world shaped by its legacies. We will be taking these risks together and should treat one another with respect and generosity. I strive to lead this seminar as both a safe space and an accountable space. Safe space means that every student should feel safe and respected in their learning environment. Students should expect a space where they can pose ideas without fear of ridicule or failure and where all viewpoints are taken seriously. As such, please refrain from using offensive and non-inclusive language in class, and be mindful of your classmates. I will not tolerate any willfully offensive or aggressive comments, personal attacks on your peers, or racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist, anti-fat, or hateful language more generally. Accountable space, then, means that you are accountable for your actions and speech. We all try to enter the classroom with good intentions, but good intentions do not necessarily prevent us from saying hurtful, inappropriate, or traumatizing things. If you say something that is hurtful or offensive, no matter your intentions, you are still accountable. This does not necessarily mean disciplinary action, but it does mean taking responsibility for what you said and being open to having a thoughtful conversation with your peers about what occurred, why, and how to grow from it.

:: REQUIRED TEXTS

We will be reading the following texts in full or referencing them extensively. An asterisk indicates texts available for free online or through the Yale library system. All other readings will be posted to Canvas.

*Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*

*James Q. Whitman, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law*

Bill V. Mullen and Christopher Vials, eds. *The U.S. Antifascism Reader*

*George Jackson, *Blood in My Eye*

:: COURSE SCHEDULE ::

Week 1: SITUATING OUR WORK

Tuesday, July 13 – Jim Crow in the Age of (Anti)Fascism

In-Class Mini-Lecture: What is Jim Crow?

Kevin Gaines. "The Civil Rights Movement in World Perspective." In *America on the World Stage: A Global Approach to U.S. History*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008, pp. 190-207.

Alberto Toscano, "The Long Shadow of Racial Fascism," *Boston Review*, October 28, 2020.

Thursday, July 15 – (Anti)Fascism in the Age of Jim Crow

In-Class Mini-Lecture: What is Fascism?

W.E.B. Du Bois. “Back Toward Slavery.” In *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. New York: The Free Press, 1992, pp. 670-710.

Christopher Vials. “Chapter 1: European Precedents, American Echoes: Fascism in History and Memory” and “Chapter 2: From Margin to Mainstream: American Antifascism to 1945.” In *Haunted by Hitler: Liberals, the Left, and the Fight Against Fascism in the United States*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014, pp. 1-69.

Harry Ward, “Fascism and Race Hate,” *Fight* (July 1934) in Bill V. Mullen and Christopher Vials, eds. *The U.S. Antifascism Reader*

:: First Reading Reflection Due ::

Week 2: GLOBAL FASCISM AND BLACK ANTIFASCIST RESISTANCE

Tuesday, July 20 – Anticolonialism, “Hands Off Ethiopia,” and the Popular Front

In-Class Mini-Lecture: International Communism and the Black Popular Front

Joseph Fronczak. “Local People’s Global Politics: A Transnational History of the Hands Off Ethiopia Movement of 1935.” *Diplomatic History* vol. 39, no. 2 (April 2015): 245–274.

Robin D. G. Kelley. “Chapter 6: ‘This Ain’t Ethiopia, But It’ll Do’: African Americans and the Spanish Civil War.” In *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*. New York: The Free Press, 1996, pp. 123-160.

Imaobong D. Umoren. “Anti-Fascism and the Development of Global Race Women, 1928-1945.” *Callaloo* vol. 39, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 151-165.

George Padmore, “Hitler, Mussolini and Africa” (1937) in Bill V. Mullen and Christopher Vials, eds. *The U.S. Antifascism Reader*

Thursday, July 22 – Encounters, Exchanges, and the Interwar Global Right

In-Class Mini-Lecture: It Can Happen Here: Transnational Political Transmission and U.S. Fascist Mobilization

James Q. Whitman. *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017.

S. Jonathan Wiesen, “American Lynching in the Nazi Imagination: Race and Extra-Legal Violence in 1930s Germany,” *German History* 36, No. 1 (2017): 38-59.

Deborah Riley Draper, dir. *Olympic Pride, American Prejudice* (2016)

:: Second Reading Reflection Due ::

Week 3: DOUBLE V, TOTAL WAR, AFTERMATH

Tuesday, July 27 – Double Victory, Wartime Protest, Patriotic Antifascism

Thomas Sugrue. “Chapter 5: Hillburg, Hattiesburg, and Hitler: Wartime Activists Think Globally and Act Locally.” In *Fog of War: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement*, edited by Kevin Kruse and Stephen Tuck. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 87-99.

Erik S. McDuffie. “Chapter 4: Racing against Jim Crow, Fascism, Colonialism, and the Communist Party, 1940-1946.” In *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011, pp. 126-159.

Henry Wallace, “The Danger of American Fascism,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 9, 1944 in Bill V. Mullen and Christopher Vials, eds. *The U.S. Antifascism Reader*

In-Class Listening: New World A ‘Comin: *The Negro, Fascism, and Democracy*, March 12, 1944

Thursday, July 29 – The Jim Crow Army and Allied Victory

In-Class Mini-Lecture: Camp Liberation and the Close of the Second World War

Vaughn Rasberry. “Chapter 1: The Figure of the Negro Soldier: Racial Democracy and World War.” In *Race and the Totalitarian Century: Geopolitics in the Black Literary Imagination*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016, pp. 29-62.

Thomas W. Guglielmo. “A Martial Freedom Movement: Black G.I.s’ Political Struggles during World War II.” *Journal of American History* vol. 104, no. 4 (March 2018): 879–903.

W.E.B. Du Bois, “Negro’s War Gains and Losses” (1945) in Bill V. Mullen and Christopher Vials, eds. *The U.S. Antifascism Reader*

In-Class Viewing: United States Department of War, dir. *Don’t Be a Sucker* (1947)

:: Third Reading Reflection Due ::

Week 4: BLACK AND RED SCARES

Tuesday, August 3 – The Cold War, Decolonization, “We Charge Genocide”

In-Class Mini-Lecture: Nuremberg, the United Nations, and the Crime of Genocide

Carol Anderson. “Bleached Souls and Red Negroes: The NAACP and Black Communists in the Early Cold War, 1948-1952” in *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs*, ed. Brenda Gayle Plummer (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2003), pp. 93-152.

Vaughn Rasberry. “Chapter 2: Our Totalitarian Critics: Desegregation, Decolonization, and the Cold War.” In *Race and the Totalitarian Century: Geopolitics in the Black Literary Imagination*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016, pp. 63-106.

Aimé Césaire, from *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950) in Bill V. Mullen and Christopher Vials, eds. *The U.S. Antifascism Reader* (full text also available on Canvas)

Civil Rights Congress, *We Charge Genocide* (1951) in Bill V. Mullen and Christopher Vials, eds. *The U.S. Antifascism Reader* (full text also available on Canvas)

In-Class Viewing: Leo Hurwitz, *Strange Victory* (1948)

Thursday, August 5 – The Specter of Fascism in the “Classical Era” of Civil Rights

In-Class Mini-Lecture: The Far Right, American Conservatism, and Massive Resistance

Dayo F. Gore. “Chapter 3: Reframing Civil Rights Activism during the Cold War: The Rosa Lee Ingram Case, 1948-1959.” In *Radicalism at the Crossroads: African American Women Activists in the Cold War*. New York: New York University Press, 2011.

Timothy Tyson, “Robert F. Williams, ‘Black Power,’ and the Roots of the African American Freedom Struggle,” *Journal of American History* 85, No. 2 (September 1998): 540-570.

Stephen J. Whitfield. “The South in the Shadow of Nazism.” *Southern Cultures* vol. 18, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 57-75.

Robert F. Williams, from *Negroes with Guns* (1962) in Bill V. Mullen and Christopher Vials, eds. *The U.S. Antifascism Reader*

:: Fourth Reading Reflection Due ::

:: Final Project Proposal/Outline Due ::

Week 5: BLACK POWER AND U.S. RACIAL FASCISM

Tuesday, August 10 – The New Left and the New United Front Against Fascism

In-Class Mini-Lecture: The New Left and the Global “New Fascisms” Debate

Christopher Vials. “Chapter 6: United Front against Genocide: African American Antifascism, the Black Panthers, and the Multiracial Coalitions of the Late 1960s.” In *Haunted by Hitler: Liberals, the Left, and the Fight Against Fascism in the United States*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014, pp. 159-193.

James Baldwin. “An Open Letter to My Sister, Miss Angela Davis.” *New York Review of Books*, January 7, 1971.

Angela Davis. “Political Prisoners, Prisons and Black Liberation” in Angela Davis et al., *If They Come in the Morning*. New York: Third Press, 1971.

Kathleen Cleaver, “Racism, Fascism, and Political Murder,” *Black Panther*, September 14, 1968 in Bill V. Mullen and Christopher Vials, eds. *The U.S. Antifascism Reader*

Thursday, August 12 – Late Fascism and Racial Capitalism

In-Class Optional Final Project Presentations

Dylan Rodríguez. “Chapter 3: Radical Lineages: George Jackson, Angela Davis, and the Fascism Problematic” in *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, pp. 113-144.

George Jackson. *Blood in My Eye*. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1996.

Penny Nakatsu, Speech at the United Front Against Fascism Conference (1969) in Bill V. Mullen and Christopher Vials, eds. *The U.S. Antifascism Reader*

:: Final Project due via email by Monday, August 16 ::