

black existentialism :: fall semester 2010

Professor John Drabinski
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meeting : mw @ 12:30-1:50
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office : Johnson Chapel 30B
hours: mw @ 10-12 & appt.

Course books : Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (Wesleyan); W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* (Dover); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Grove) and *Toward the African Revolution* (Grove); Lewis Gordon, *Existentialia Africana* (Routledge); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Antisemite and Jew* (Schocken); Richard Wright, *Eight Men* (Harper); electronic texts by Césaire, Lamming, and Sartre.

Course description : During the middle decades of the twentieth century, existentialism dominated the European philosophical and literary scene. Prominent theorists such as J-P Sartre, Albert Camus, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty put the experience of history, alienation, and the body at the center of philosophical and literary life. It should be no surprise, then, that existentialism appealed to so many Afro-Caribbean and African-American thinkers of the same period and after. This course examines the critical transformation of European existentialist ideas through close readings of black existentialists Aime Césaire, Frantz Fanon, George Lamming, and Wilson Harris, paired with key essays from Sartre, Camus, and Merleau-Ponty. As well, we will engage black existentialism not just as a series of claims, but also a method, which allows us to read works by African-American writers such as W.E.B. Du Bois, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison in an existentialist frame. Lastly, we will consider the matter of how and why existentialism continues to function so centrally in contemporary Africana philosophy.

Course requirements : The requirements of this course are very straightforward. You are required, of course, to attend and participate (20%). Upon your third absence, subsequent absences will draw down your *final grade* by 1/3 for each missed session. There will be two 8-10 page essays, each comprising 30% of your grade. The midterm essay is due 29 October. The final essay is due 19 December. Each student will make a significant contribution to the course wiki project (20%). Details for the wiki project will come under separate cover.

Course reading schedule : We will keep close to the following schedule of readings. Please do not fall behind. The total page count for each session is modest. I expect close, attentive readings. At times, the material will seem exceptionally difficult. Even at those moments, it is important to read every word.

08 sept course overview...	04 oct Césaire, <i>Notebook of a Return</i>	27 oct Fanon, <i>BSWM</i> , 198-206	22-24 nov (thanksgiving break)
13 sept introducing existential motifs	06 oct Fanon, 'Racism and Culture'	01 nov Sartre, 'Black Orpheus'	29 nov Wright, 'Man Who Lived'
15 sept Sartre, <i>Antisemite</i> , 7-58	11 oct (fall break)	03 nov Sartre, 'Black Orpheus'	01 dec Du Bois, <i>Souls</i> , ch. i
20 sept Sartre, <i>Antisemite</i> , 59-141	13 oct Fanon, 'W. Indians and Africans'	08 nov Lamming, 'Occasion for Speaking'	06 dec Du Bois, <i>Souls</i> , ch. xi
22 sept Sartre, <i>Antisemite</i> , 143-153	18 oct Fanon, <i>BSWM</i> , xi-23	10 nov Lamming, 'Negro Writer'	08 dec Gordon, <i>Existentialia</i> , 1-40
27 sept Césaire, 'Culture & Civilization'	20 oct Fanon, <i>BSWM</i> , 89-119	15 nov Lamming, 'Negro Writer'	13 dec Gordon, <i>Existentialia</i> , 62-95
29 sept Césaire, <i>Notebook of a Return</i>	25 oct Fanon, <i>BSWM</i> , 185-197	17 nov Wright, 'Man Who Almost'	15 dec overflow/discuss/exist/bye

important dates : 15 sept (add/drop) : 11 oct (fall break) : 29 oct (midterm) : 19 dec (final)