In this course we will study the cultures of the African Diaspora that came into being as a result of the Atlantic slave trade and the struggle against it. The focus will be on the political and expressive cultures of the Black Atlantic, but we will also ask how issues concerning racial slavery, racial subordination, and racial liberation affected the formation of national cultures from Enlightenment Europe to the 20th century Caribbean and the United States. Special attention will be paid to the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), the only successful slave revolution in Western history, whose 200-year anniversary is being commemorated this year.

This course has several goals of roughly equal importance. First, it aims to introduce students to a highly significant and influential cultural formation in the Western hemisphere, which nevertheless is often neglected in historical and cultural narratives that take the nation and the nation state as their central categories. Second, it wants to introduce students to various modes of inquiry: historical analysis, normative argument, and literary and more broadly cultural analysis. Third, it wants to enable students to develop a critical understanding of how narratives of belonging are conceived. This seems particularly important at a time when various forms of ethnic, racial, and religious exclusivism are rapidly becoming the most troubling global problem and when the idea of the West, Western values, and Western modernity are appealed to to justify the use of military force.

Requirements and policies:
Attendance is required: More than 3 absences will affect the final grade
Late arrivals: Late arrivals to class are disruptive; repeated late arrivals will be considered the equivalent of absences and affect the grade accordingly
Late work: Any work submitted after the due date will suffer the loss of at least 2 steps (e.g. B+
to B-); no late work will be accepted after the end of classes; failure to submit any one piece of the required work will result in a failing grade.

No recording of lectures is permitted unless authorized by me.

About the papers (4-5 pages): I will suggest questions and topics for the essays; if you prefer to write on a topic of your own choice (no essays on texts not on the syllabus will be admitted), you must obtain permission from me or one of the TAs. Bear in mind that they are scholarly papers that need to be argumentative, analytical, and grounded in evidence--they are not newspaper columns or creative writing exercises. Remember also that they need to follow academic convention and use only one of the accepted styles (see the Chicago or MLA style manuals for details). Please consult with me or the TAs if you have questions regarding the writing of academic papers.

About the texts listed under further readings on the syllabus: These texts are not required readings, but closely related to the assigned texts; some are particularly informative on the issues at hand; others represent an important or classical position in a certain debate; others are very recent and offer an up-to-date entry into a scholarly discussion. Reading them in addition to the assigned texts will certainly improve your grasp of the issues and help you in your work on the papers. “Further readings” will be on reserve at Bobst Library.

There is a Blackboard attached to this course. You can access Blackboard through your NYU Home account: click on the “Academics” tab. Please treat Blackboard as your space. You can use it to continue class room discussion and raise questions that you feel are of general importance. (But please don’t clog the board with overly specific questions or issues that are most likely of interest only to you.) You can also use Blackboard to raise questions ahead of class: the TAs and I will monitor your postings and try to respond to your questions in class or during section meetings. Participation on Blackboard will count as classroom participation. Please check for announcements and postings by classmates prior to each class.

Composition of the final grade:
20% midterm (200 points)
40% final (400 points)
40% 4 papers (100 points per paper)

Participation in class may affect the final grade up to one step (e.g. B+ to A-; or B to B-)

Books for purchase:
Course-Reader for sale at the Textbook Store
C.L.R. James, The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution.
Alejo Carpentier, The Kingdom of this World.
Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History.
Maryse Condé, Crossing the Mangrove.

A note on The Black Jacobins. This is still the most captivating reading on the history of the Haitian Revolution, even if some of C. L. R. James’ claims need to be revised in light of recent research. But it is a long book about a very complex set of interlocking events. Don’t let yourself be bogged down by the sheer number of names and facts! Read it as a good story and try to grasp its main lines. You are not expected to remember the story in all its details.
Introduction

Week 1
9/7 Introduction: The Black Atlantic and the Idea of World Cultures
9/9 discussion of Queimada (Burn!), (Pontecorvo, USA, 1968); CLR James, The Black Jacobins: “Appendix” (391-418)

Further readings:
Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic, esp. 1-71

Slavery and Revolution

Week 2
9/14 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Silencing the Past 1-69
9/16 Silencing the Past 70-107

Further readings:

Week 3
9/23 C.L.R. James, Black Jacobins 6-61
***First paper due***

Further reading:

Week 4

Week 5
10/5 Eric Williams, “The Origin of Negro Slavery” (copy)
10/7 David Brion Davis, “What the Abolitionists were up against” (copy)
Further readings:
W. D. Jordan, “The Limitations of Antislavery” (White Over Black 342-374)

Week 6
10/12 Midterm exam
10/14 “The Last Supper” (Gutiérrez Alea, Cuba, 1976)

Week 7
10/19 The Black Jacobins 62-117
***Second paper due***
10/21 Black Jacobins 118-223

Week 8
10/26 Black Jacobins 224-288
10/28 Black Jacobins 289-377

Further readings:

What Liberty? Politics and Culture in the Black Atlantic after the Haitian Revolution

Week 9
11/2 Sibylle Fischer, “The Deadly Hermeneutics of the Trial of José Antonio Aponte”; “Beyond National Culture, the Abject: The Case of Plácido” (Modernity Disavowed 77-106) (copy)
11/4 “The Other Francisco” (Sergio Giral, Cuba, 1990)

Further Readings:

Week 10
11/9 Frederick Douglass on Haiti (pp. tba)
11/11 Frederick Douglass, “African Civilization Society” (copy); Marcus Garvey, “Address at Newport News” (copy)
***Third paper due***

Further readings:
Martin Bernal, Black Athena I (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1987) 189-223; 281-316; 439-443

Week 11
11/16  The Harlem Renaissance and the Haiti-craze: Langston Hugues, Jacob Lawrence, et al. (readings tba)
11/18  “Emperor Jones” (Dudley Murphy, USA 1933)

*Week 12*
11/23 Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of this World*
11/25  *Thanksgiving Recess*

*Week 13*
11/30  cont. *The Kingdom of this World*
12/2   Maryse Condé, *Crossing the Mangrove*
       ***Fourth paper due***

*Week 14*
12/7  cont. *Mangrove*
12/9   review and general discussion session

*Week 15*
12/14  *final exam*