Scientifically defining “race” is impossible, the African American scholar W. E. B. Du Bois once wrote, yet since the Enlightenment, attempts to do so have continually been made. The philosopher Immanuel Kant first introduced the concept into scientific language in the late eighteenth century, and it quickly became a vibrant point of contention among European scholars. By the twentieth century, intellectuals of color from around the world took the lead in critically reconfiguring the hitherto Eurocentric conversation around race to reflect the realities of identity, culture, and politics in the colonial and postcolonial eras; meanwhile, older patterns of thought established by thinkers such as Kant, Herder, and Hegel still persist in the ways we think about the topic. To critically engage with such an ingrained idea requires exploring the complexities and ambiguities of its history, and in this seminar, we will read a rich range of texts from Europe, the Caribbean, Africa, and North America in order to sound out some of the contending iterations of this concept that so profoundly shapes our world and the way we live in it.
**Course Objectives**

After completing this course, you will have gained:

- a solid introduction to selected texts and foundational ideas in modern German thought;
- a solid introduction to selected texts and foundational ideas in twentieth-century postcolonial thought;
- cross-cultural insight by reading work by authors writing primarily in German, French, and English, and coming from different but deeply interconnected parts of the world: Europe, Africa, the Caribbean, and North America;
- practice in critical and analytical argumentation, both in written and spoken form;
- practice in the interpretation of literary and philosophical texts;
- first-hand insight into a shift occurring now in scholarship in the humanities: the reevaluation of European intellectual traditions in the light of the history of imperialism;
- and – above all – a range of intellectual vantage points from which to critically interrogate the concept “race” in historical and philosophical perspective.

**Required Texts:**


All other texts are available as pdf’s on the course website.

**Grading:**

Reading response paper (1½–2 pages): 5%  
First take-home midterm (3–4 pages): 20%  
Second take-home midterm (3–4 pages): 20%  
Presentation and leading of class discussion: 10%  
Overall participation in class discussion: 15%  
Final paper, first draft (2–3 pages): 5%  
Final paper, oral presentation: 5%  
Final paper (10–12 pages): 20%
Disability Disclosure
Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance. You can contact the Moses Center for Student Accessibility (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd.

Academic Integrity, Plagiarism, and Cheating
Academic integrity means that the work you submit is original. Copying all or part of a paper straight from a book, the internet, or a fellow student is an obvious violation of this principle, but there are other forms of cheating or plagiarizing which are just as serious, for example, presenting an oral report drawn without attribution from other sources (oral or written); writing a sentence or paragraph that, despite being in different words, expresses someone else’s idea(s) without a reference to the source of the idea(s); or submitting essentially the same paper in two different courses (unless both instructors have given their permission in advance). Receiving or giving help on a take-home paper, examination, or quiz is also cheating, unless expressly permitted by the instructor (as in collaborative projects). This statement is adapted from the website of the College of Arts & Science, https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html

Course schedule:
(Subject to modification)

Session One, September 2:
Introductions, course overview and expectations
• Immanuel Kant: “What Is Enlightenment?” (pp. 462–467)

Session Two, September 16:
The Concept of Race in the German Enlightenment
• Henry Sussman: “Early Racism in Western Europe” (pp. 11–42)
• Immanuel Kant: “Determination of the Concept of a Human Race” (pp. 145–159); “On the Different Races of Humans” (pp. 8–22); from Physical Geography (pp. 58–64)
• Nell Irvin Painter: “Johann Friedrich Blumenbach Names White People ‘Caucasian’” (pp. 72–90)

Session Three, September 23:
Theorizing Culture in the German Post-Enlightenment

• Michael Forster: “Herder and the Birth of Modern Anthropology” (pp. 199–221)
• Johann Gottfried von Herder: from Ideas Toward a Philosophy of the History of Humankind (pp. 23–26); from Letters for the Advancement of Humanity (pp. 384–387, 392–399, 410–424)
• Friedrich Schiller: “What Is and to What End Do We Study Universal History?” (pp. 253–272)
→ Reading response paper due (1½–2 pp.)

Session Four, September 30:
World History, Africa, and the Caribbean

• G. W. F. Hegel: “Reason in History” (pp. 3–22, 68–71, 78–94) and “Africa” (pp. 162–196), from Lectures on the Philosophy of History

Session Five, October 7:

• G. W. F. Hegel: “Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness – Lordship and Bondage” (pp. 111–119) from Phenomenology of Spirit
• Susan Buck-Morss: “Hegel and Haiti” (pp. 821–865)
• Heinrich von Kleist: “The Betrothal in Santo Domingo” (pp. 324–350)

Session Six, October 14:
German Thought and North America

• Laura Dassow Walls: “‘All Are Alike Designed for Freedom’: Humboldt on Race and Slavery” (pp. 173–185, 197–209)

Session Seven, October 21:

• W. E. B. Du Bois: The Souls of Black Folk, chapters I–VII (pp. 1–99); “The Conservation of Races” (pp. 51–65)
→ First take-home midterm due (3–4 pages)

Session Eight, October 28:

• W. E. B. Du Bois: The Souls of Black Folk, chapters VIII–XIV (pp. 101–197); columns from Pittsburgh Courier (124–126, 129–131)
• Kira Thurman: “Black Venus, White Bayreuth” (pp. 607–626)

Session Nine, November 4:
• W. E. B. Du Bois: “The Exile” (pp. 1–34), from The Dark Princess
• Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: “On German Architecture” (pp. 103–111); “Prometheus”
• Alain Locke: “The New Negro” (pp. 3–16) and “The Negro Spirituals” (pp. 199–213), from The New Negro

Session Ten, November 11:
Francophone Poetry and Négritude Thought
• Léopold Sédar Senghor: essays: “The Revolution of 1889 and Leo Frobenius” (pp. 77–88) and “The Message of Goethe to the New Negroes” (pp. 141–147); poems: “Night in Sine,” “Joal,” “Black Woman,” “Snow In Paris,” “Prayer to the Masks,” “Mediterranean,” “New York” (pp. 6–9, 12–14, 45–46, 87–89)
• Birago Diop: “Breath”
• Léon Laleau: “Betrayal”
• Wole Soyinka: from Myth, Literature, and the African World (pp. 84–93)
• Michael Saman: “Senghor’s Other Europe” (pp. 23–45)
  → Second take-home midterm due (3–4 pages)

Session Eleven, November 18:
• Jean-Paul Sartre: “Black Orpheus” (pp. 115–139)
• Léopold Sédar Senghor: “Négritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century” (pp. 195–202)
• Aimé Césaire: Journal of a Homecoming (pp. 75–110)

Session Twelve, November 25:
Race and Post-War French and Francophone Thought
• Jean-Paul Sartre: preface to Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (pp. xliii–lxii)
• Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Masks, introduction and chapters 7 (pp. 195–197) and 8 (pp. 198–206)
• Claude Lévi-Strauss: “The Science of the Concrete” (pp. 1–22)
Session Thirteen, December 2:

**European Thought and Africa, African Thought and the World**

- Jacques Derrida: “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” (pp. 351–370)
- Kwame Anthony Appiah: “Ethnophilosophy and Its Critics” (pp. 85–106)
- Kwasi Wiredu: “How Not To Compare African Traditional Thought With Western Thought” (pp. 37–50)

→ First draft of final paper due (2–3 pp.)

Session Fourteen, December 9:

Concluding session: Final project presentations

Final paper due date TBA