

SPRING 2026

AFRO 1012: Black Worlds in Global Perspectives: Challenges and Changes (3 credits)

University of Minnesota, Twin Cities
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9:45am-11:00am
Blegen Hall, Room 225

Instructor: Yuichiro Onishi
Department of African American & African Studies
Asian American Studies Program

Office: 874 Social Sciences Building
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 9:00am-11:30am
Email: ohni0001@umn.edu

Liberal Education Requirements

This course fulfills the following two Liberal Education requirements: (1) Global Perspectives Theme and (2) Social Sciences Core. Together, these requirements set the necessary context to guide students to discover, learn, and analyze complexities within Africa and the African diaspora.

“Black Worlds” are ubiquitous, for they emerge, exist, and transform wherever Africans and peoples of African descent reside and forge their lives and communities. Most important, what helps constitute “Black Worlds” (or to put it differently what binds individuals interested in “Black Worlds”) has nothing to do with color or shared culture but everything to do with politics and power. This insight allows students of diverse racial, ethnic, religious, and national backgrounds to participate in the study of “Black Worlds” and in the process find ways to make connections across differences. The course considers such stance-taking to be essential in creating a dynamic learning space.

As such, the outcome of our concrete engagement with the hallmark of social science learning—the description and analysis of diverse human experiences and connections to broader social forces—is that we will learn how to reflect on our own respective position and place it in the local, national, transnational, international dynamics full of challenges. **Students will be introduced to such key concepts as “colonialism,” “global apartheid,” and “racialization” to come to grips with global African peoples’ struggle over identity, place, culture, and meaning of these key categories across Black worlds.**

We will also place an emphasis on the dialectical relationship between domination and resistance throughout the semester to shape our social science learning. Students will rely on how Black scholars amount a critique. Specifically, students will be exposed to the use of primary and secondary data to produce critical knowledge that aligns with the critical stance-taking of this course. Our exercise in social science inquiry involves learning how to manipulate data through qualitative analysis and critical evaluation. We will learn to tease out limitations of the public policy directive (especially in the context of environmental and climate justice movement building) by bringing into conversations the insights of grassroots organizers and activists, or their grounded knowledge: that is to say, how they push back the policy plans and priorities of powerful stakeholders in governments and industries by advancing critical knowledges in service of justice and equity.

Course Description

Our primary goal is to generate and develop analytical perspectives to deepen the understandings of the experiences of Africans and peoples of African descent in *global terms*, so as to establish connections across different histories, cultures, and political dynamics of “Black worlds,” all the while marking gaps and tensions. Searchingly looking for ways to reconnect with Africa and myriad communities of the African diaspora in the United States, the Caribbean, and Europe, this course encourages students to grapple with the challenges and possibilities emerging out the dynamic processes of the dispersal of Africans and their descendants throughout the New World. We are also equally interested in nurturing a sense of solidarity among Black peoples of the New World, Europe, and Africa, including a pan-Africanist vision. To this end, throughout, we will pay close attention to *racism*, both locally and globally, and how this “problem of the color line,” as W. E. B. Du Bois famously put it, is tightly bound up with the capitalist system of economic exploitation, or the capitalist empire, and the mechanisms of political domination connected to the historical development and legacies of New World slavery, imperialism, and colonialism. From this grounding, we will also investigate stories of struggle and resistance, how diverse constituents of social movements in the Black worlds continue to pursue the possibility of another world, then and now.

Student Learning Outcomes

This course will guide students to become critical thinkers and confident writers. By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- Explain the experiences of Africans and peoples of African descent in *global terms*;
- Understand key concepts and perspectives that are central to the study of global African peoples, including the authority of Black thought and agency that mounts a critique of the nature of domination through time and space;
- Recognize how the ideas and experiences of diverse groups and political actors converge and diverge in service of change and transformation.

In addition, students will improve their skills in critical inquiry based in social sciences:

- Synthesize various texts, especially secondary data and lecture contents, by formulating a unified topic of discussion and analysis in discussion and written work;
- Derive deeper meanings from various texts, including primary data, to formulate an original, creative, and focused thesis statement;
- Communicate thoughts and perspectives of others, as well as unexpected connections and relationships in lecture assigned readings, discussions, and written work;
- Hone sensitivities toward details and logical organization, both in their own writing and the work of others.

Challenges of Academic Writing and Reading

Reading and writing are tightly bound up in this class. The reading load is heavy, and you will read up to 40+ pages a week. You will need to be mindful of this demand. The assigned readings serve as an anchor for discussion facilitation, in-class writing activities, scheduled quizzes, and critical analysis assignments.

Academic writing never comes easy. Such is the truth. Yet, it occupies a central place in this course. Thus, I want all of us to enter into this learning space with a sense of challenge. Yet the definition of challenge that I have in mind has less to do with how you are expected to work hard. Rather it has everything to do with *conditioning your mind* to sustain a strong desire on your part to want to become a confident writer—a writer who can read well and closely, stay patient, derive deeper meanings, and above all *make unexpected creative connections across and among various course materials and ideas*. All of these attributes are vital to your success in and beyond the academic institution.

Of late, however, the context in which we write has changed dramatically because of artificial intelligence (AI) tools. *This class prohibits the use of such AI tools as ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot to carry out the tasks of completing written assignments.* This includes using AI to summarize and contextualize materials and to generate ideas, sources, explanations, and arguments. Generative AI, in essence, violates the university policy of academic honesty. It is plagiarism; it steals ideas and phrases from various places on the internet without properly citing or acknowledging the sources. **Resist the temptation.** Always keep in mind that generative AI does not think; our mind does. Thus, all the more, it is important that we cultivate a strong sense of ownership of our own thought, including the manner in which we express the ideas and arguments in academic writing. For more information, visit the UMN Libraries page on [“AI Tools and Research.”](#)

Writing with Integrity: The course will approach writing as a process that requires a certain type of discipline (resisting the temptation to turn to generative AI), combined with intentionality that comes with integrity, thoughtfulness, and collaboration. The bulk of our writing will be done in class; you will always write in response to assigned readings. The allotted time ranges from 15 to 60 minutes. For instance, short in-class writing activities entail generating a discussion question and providing a rationale for posing such a question (that is, to explain the learning objective); this is considered a quiz. In other times, you will be asked to write an entry in response to a prompt given in class; this is considered an open-book writing activity. All of these written works can be revised if you did not meet the specifications. You will need to meet all the specifications to earn the satisfactory mark (see the required course work section for details on grading).

On Effective Reading

As you engage with assigned texts, keep in mind that best readers are not those who can whip through the material at high speed; the best readers read recursively. *That is, they shuttle back and forth, browsing, skimming, and re-reading as necessary.* Use the following checklist to further hone your effective reading strategies:

- Highlight ideas and phrases that strike you as significant. But avoid excessive highlighting.
- Re-read difficult sections or flip back and skim an earlier section if you feel yourself getting lost.
- Summarize the content of the paragraph or section in a word or two alongside the margins. These notes will serve as reminders as you re-read sections.
- Keep a record of *mental shuttling* by writing comments or questions in the margins as you read.
- Make a note in the margin if a particular section or passage puzzles you. Make sure to ponder why you felt confused, annoyed, or affirmed by a particular passage/section.

Required Course Work

In-Class Engagement (Total: 80%)*

I want to make our classroom learning a collective endeavor. To this end, your contribution to our learning process will be assessed in its totality. I am bundling the following graded components under the heading “In-class Engagement.” This approach allows me to place an emphasis on engagement, participation, and academic thinking (including writing) as process and practice.

- Participation: 10%
- In-Class Writing Activity (Total of Five – 10% Each): 50%
- Quizzes (Four Times – 5% Each): 20%

*Grading policy for in-class engagement: I will utilize a distinct approach to grading called specifications grading. In a nutshell, your work will be graded on a two-tier rubric: Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory. The point is that either your written work meets the specifications or not. In written work (both in-class writing activities and quizzes), specifications include the following three core elements of academic thinking and writing: (1) Depth/Breadth; (2) Insight/Analysis; and (3) Writing. You will need to meet all three specifications to earn a satisfactory mark. You are strongly encouraged to revise your work if you did not meet the specifications so that you can rectify your unsatisfactory mark. You are required to take into consideration the detailed feedback.

- *Depth/Breadth*: Superbly unpacks the details of readings and presents the deep understanding of the topic under study. Evident is the effective synthesis of relevant course materials, accompanied by intellectual rigor.
- *Insight/Analysis*: At every turn, the analysis is marked by independent thoughts and keen insights. It also presents creative interpretations, that is unexpected connections and relationships.
- *Writing*: It shows utmost sensitivity toward grammar, spelling, clear sentence development, logical organization, effective paragraphing, transitions, and documentation.

Class participation, obviously, goes hand in hand with attendance. You are expected to share your insights and perspectives derived from assigned readings, as well as your own opinions about arguments and analyses presented. You will also have to ask questions. We want to make this learning community productive for analytical discoveries and new kinds of social relations and political visions to emerge. I want each student to feel embolden to pursue the task of analyzing unresolved questions and problems concerning historical injustices and global inequalities. The more we participate mindfully, the more we move in a direction toward creating an active, open, and engaged learning community. This component will be evaluated based on the following two specifications. Again, you will need to meet these two specifications to earn a satisfactory mark.

- *Preparedness*: This class will become generative and enabling if (1) you come to class on time and are consistent in attendance; (2) you come to class prepared to discuss assigned readings; and (3) everyone feels a sense of responsibility toward each other and this class overall.
- *Collaboration*: The central idea that drives our concept of participation is collaboration. Throughout the semester, you will learn to listen to each other, share insights, and work together in small groups (discussion facilitation, in particular). *Learning how to work with people with various orientations and experiences is at the core of what we do. We need to bring together, at every turn, passion, commitment, and mindfulness to make our in-class engagement work.*

Critical Analysis: Beyond Waste Colonialism: Toward Critical Environmental Justice (Total:20%)

3-4 pages in length: Presenting the promise of a zero-waste city. In the second half of this course (total of seven weeks), we will work together to unpack the problem of waste-to-energy incineration, specifically the damages and harms that Hennepin Energy Recovery Center (HERC) has wrought to the most vulnerable in North Minneapolis and the environment since the trash burner went online in 1989. It continues to operate despite the repeated grassroots campaigns against environmental racism. Our inquiry will be guided by the following questions: (1) What is HERC?; (2) How did it get here?; (3) Why is it bad?; and (4) What do we do about it? This critical analysis papers responds to the last question to present what Environmental Justice Worldmaking looks like going forward after HERC.

Academic Honesty

The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

“Scholastic dishonesty means **plagiarism**; cheating on assignments or examinations, including the unauthorized use of online learning support and testing platforms; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work, including the posting of student-generated coursework on online learning support and testing platforms not approved for the specific course in question; taking, acquiring, or using course materials without faculty permission, including the posting of faculty-provided course materials on online learning support and testing platforms; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, misrepresenting, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.”

“Plagiarism shall mean representing the words, creative work, or ideas of another person as one’s own without providing proper documentation of source. Examples include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Copying information word for word from a source without using quotation marks and giving proper acknowledgement by way of footnote, endnote, or in-text citation;
- Representing the words, ideas, or data of another person as one’s own without providing proper attribution to the author through quotation, reference, in-text citation, or footnote;
- Producing, without proper attribution, any form of work originated by another person such as a musical phrase, a proof, a speech, an image, experimental data, laboratory report, graphic design, or computer code;
- **Paraphrasing**, without sufficient acknowledgment, ideas taken from another person that the reader might reasonably mistake as the author’s; and
- Borrowing various words, ideas, phrases, or data from original sources and blending them with one’s own without acknowledging the sources.”

On Paraphrasing

It is not acceptable to use author’s words almost verbatim and change only an occasional word or two. When paraphrasing is acceptable, the original text is significantly recast.

Original: “In the postwar period, industrialization developed through the use of government subsidies and investment in basic infrastructure in the United States.”

Not Acceptable: Following World War II, industrialization developed through the use of government subsidies and investment in basic infrastructure in the United States.

Acceptable: Following World War II, U.S. government subsidies and infrastructural investments were the major factors in developing industries.

You are plagiarizing if:

- You directly quote (or copy) a source without placing that material in quotation marks and acknowledging the source.
- You use information from a source, and only slightly alter words or phrases without acknowledging the source and placing quotation marks around direct “borrowings.”
- You use source’s arguments, evidence, main points and/or structure without acknowledging the source.
- You paraphrase someone else’s ideas without acknowledging the source.
- You use “facts” gathered by someone else’s research without acknowledging the source.
- Your ideas or method of analysis have been heavily influenced by someone else’s theories and you do not acknowledge the source.
- Someone else writes your paper or supplies your argument for you.
- You submit a paper obtained from a paper mill, a paper writing service, and on-line sources.
- You turn a paper in to more than one class without explicit (written) permission from all professors involved.

Course Resources

- *Student Writing Support:* Located in 15 Nicholson Hall and 9 Appleby Hall (East Bank), it is an important source of support for you. Although many of the locations across the Twin Cities campus hold walk-in hours, in order to get the best writing help, Student Writing Support advises that you come well before the assignment is due. It offers both face-to-face and on-line consulting. For more information about hours, locations, and services, visit <http://writing.umn.edu/sws/>.
- *Classmates:* Throughout the semester, you will work with classmates to discuss and analyze common readings. You will be assigned to work with peers in discussion facilitation preparation, especially. I encourage you to recognize the power of dialogue; it can enhance your comprehension of course materials in unexpected ways.
- *Instructor:* My role is to be a resource for you. If you have questions about assigned readings or need guidance as you prepare to complete your writing assignments, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Important University Policies

- *Accommodations for students with disabilities:* It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact their instructors to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. For more information, please contact the Disability Resource Center (<https://diversity.umn.edu/disability>).

- *Sexual Misconduct and Discrimination*: University policy prohibits discrimination, sexual misconduct, and related retaliation as defined in the University policy. Complaints should be reported to the University Office of Equal Opportunity & Title IX (<https://eot.umn.edu/>).
- *Academic Workload Policy*: For undergraduate courses, one credit is defined as equivalent to an average of three hours of learning effort per week (over a full semester) necessary for an average student to achieve an average grade in the course. For example, a student taking a three-credit course that meets for three hours a week should expect to spend an additional six hours a week on coursework outside the classroom.

Definition of Grades

A – Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.

B – Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.

C – Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.

D – Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.

S – achievement that is satisfactory, which is equivalent to a C- or better

F (or N) – Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I (see also I).

I (Incomplete) – Assigned at the discretion of the instructor when, due to extraordinary circumstances, e.g., hospitalization, a student is prevented from completing the work of the course on time. Requires a written agreement between instructor and student.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Introducing the Course

-Read: Binyavanga Wainaina, "[How to Write about Africa](#)," *Granta* 92 (Winter 2005).

Week 2: A Critique of Eurocentrism

-Read: W. E. B. Du Bois, "Sociology Hesitant" (ca. 1905) *[Original](#) and [Annotated](#) by Nahum Dimitri Chandler

-Read: Leith Mullings, "Interrogating Racism: Toward an Antiracist Anthology," *Annual Review of Anthology* 34 (2005): 667-694.

-In-Class Material: James Baldwin, "The War Crimes Tribunal," *Freedomways* 7:3 (Summer 1967).

Week 3: The Intellectual Authority of Black Worlds

-Read: Robin D. G. Kelley, "'But a Local Phase of a World Problem': Black History's Global Vision, 1883-1950," *The Journal of American History* (December 1999): 1045-1077.

In-Class Writing #1

Du Bois troubles the discipline of sociology and how sociologists approach knowledge (their imagination), while James questions the premise of socially progressive politics, majority leading scientists and thinkers of the twentieth century, especially their proposal for the War Crimes Tribunal. Both of them mount a critique of scientific knowledge encased in Eurocentrism, or the dominant system of knowledge connected to historical injustices and their living legacies. **How do Du Bois and James skewers (or manipulate) visions, interpretations, and analyses propagated as scientific knowledge to render visible the intellectual authority of Black worlds.**

Week 4: Belonging in Black Worlds, Part I

-Read: Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 3-48.

-Listen: [Sheeko: Somali Youth Oral History Collection](#) (also read this [MN Daily coverage](#))

-Listen: Somali-Canadian artist and rapper K'naan ([August 6, 2009](#)).

-Learning Objective: How do these wide-ranging and diverse *stories of becoming* in the African diaspora challenge assumptions about the lived experiences of global African peoples?

Week 5: Belonging in Black Worlds, Part II

-Context: Saidiya Hartman is an African American woman scholar, and her life experience as a person of African descent in the United States is vastly different from Somali stories featured in the *Sheeko* collection. In *Lose Your Mother*, she writes about her struggle to attain a wholeness of being, a sense of belonging. But she expresses difficulties because her past is a mystery. Her sense of "homelessness" is, indeed, compounded by the racial past—forced migration, chattel slavery, Jim Crow racial order and violence, disenfranchisement, and social exclusion—that obliterated her history. This past haunts her, and it is buried so deep to make it irretrievable. Despite this challenge, Hartman takes a journey back to Africa, tracing the Atlantic slave route in Ghana. She tries to derive a sense of "home," a human story and life, but does so through preoccupation with *death*. Somali youth, on the contrary, understands where they came from, or their home. Such is a key difference between Hartman and Somali youth, and it is self-evident.

In-Class Writing #2

How do these stories concerning refugee identity formations in the context of the African diaspora relate to Sadiya Hartman's deep desire on her part to return to and dwell in a place/space she can truly call "home" as an Afrodiasporic person? **The task here entails critically interpreting "Sheeko data" critically and along way manipulating qualitative research materials with a help of Hartman and Lowe's analytical insights to develop a critical synthesis. Are there any keywords or dominant themes that emerge out of "Sheeko data"? How do account for such patterns of thought found in data points?**

Week 6: Mechanisms of Impoverishment

-Read: Wayne Ellwood, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Globalization*, 8-52.

-Watch: *T-Shirt Travels* (Documentary)

-Learning Objective: Define structural adjustment programs: How do they work? do acts and causes of "charity" (in this case, secondhand clothing) contribute to the underdevelopment of Africa?

Week 7: Waste Colonialism: Critical Framework

-Read: Max Liboiron, "Waste Colonialism" (2018).

-Overview/In-Class: The Story of Stuff Movie (2007).

-Lassana Koné, "The Illicit Trade of Toxic Waste in Africa" (2014).

In-Class Writing #3: Define Waste Colonialism

Week 8: Environmental Justice: Critical Framework

-Read: David Pellow, *What Is Critical Environmental Justice Studies?* (Polity Press), Chapters 1 & 4.

In-Class Writing #4: Define Critical Environmental Justice

Week 9: Local Context: The Trash Burner in Downtown Minneapolis, 1980s-Present

Guiding Questions: (1) What is HERC?; (2) How did it get here?; (3) Why is it bad?; and (4) What do we do about it?

-Luke Cole and Sheila Foster, "The Political Economy of Environmental Racism," *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement* (NYU Press), 34-53.

-Read: "Incineration 101 (Waste-to-Energy Dirtier Than Coal)

-Patricia Wilson, "Demystifying the County's Garbage Burner Propaganda," *The Alley* (November 1988): 4.

-Read: "HERC and Environmental Injustices in Minneapolis"

Week 10: Scrutinizing Hennepin County's Zero Waste Plan: Preparation

Guiding Questions: What's missing in the County's Zero Waste Plan? What does it mean to center the agency of the most impacted? Apply critical frameworks introduced in Week 7 and Week 8

Essential Resources

-Read: "Hennepin County Zero Waste Plan"

-Read: "The People's Transition Plan"

-Read: “Environmental Advocates Present Plan to Close HERC Trash Incinerator by 2025”

-Read: “Cumulative Burden Analysis for Zip Code 55407 & 55411.”

Week 11: Scrutinizing Hennepin County’s Zero Waste Plan: Writing

In-Class Writing #5: What’s Missing in the Hennepin County Zero Waste Plan?

What are the concrete steps needed to re-vision zero from the standpoint of Environmental Justice Movement Building so as to go beyond waste colonialism? Is there a promise of translocal (not just local) organizing for environmental justice in a place like Minnesota that exceeds the nation-form? Does where we are matter in re-imagining Zero Waste Minneapolis—that is to say we are visitors on Dakota Homeland and learning/working on UMN Campus?

Week 12: What Do We Do About It?

*Introduce visions and solutions that take into consideration the stance-taking of antiracism and anticolonialism – anchoring the Principles of Environmental Justice developed by the delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held on October 24-27, 1991 in Washington, D.C. You are asked to critically evaluate (or to put it differently, skewer) the policy briefs and directives put forth by the Hennepin County by engaging with the grounded knowledge presented by grassroots organizations tied to the Zero Burn Coalition (<https://linktr.ee/zeroburn>), especially the blueprint titled “The People’s HERC Transition Plan.” In this assignment, you are presented with the challenge of manipulating social science, the hallmark of social science learning.

Week 13:

Wrap Up

***Environmental Justice Worldmaking Assignment Due**