

Race and Rights in America

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Course Description

This course, led by Dr. Lucas Morel of Washington and Lee University, will explore the diverse political philosophies of influential Black Americans as they sought to secure their dignity as human beings and rights as citizens. What makes this story intriguing is that Black Americans struggled to secure justice for themselves on the basis of principles White Americans professed to hold near and dear. Quite simply, Black Americans asked that America be true to herself. As Frederick Douglass put it: “Not a Negro problem, not a race problem, but a national problem; whether the American people will ultimately administer equal justice to all the varieties of the human race in this Republic.” America answered by being true, to one extent or another, to the principle of consent. American Blacks asked her to be true to that other American principle, equality. This course examines the fundamental tension between human equality and government by consent, a tension present at the birth of the American Union in 1776.

The tension between freedom and equality forms the context for the struggle of Black Americans—nay, all Americans—to exercise their rights as citizens. A critical evaluation of leading Black thinkers in American political thought helps one understand what it means to be both an American citizen and a civilized human being.

Lecture Videos

This course consists of approximately 12 hours of instruction presented by Professor Morel, split into 27 lecture videos ranging from 15 minutes to 25 minutes in length. Below are the lecture titles and major themes as identified by Professor Morel. The videos provide the content needed to answer the course quizzes.

1. “The American Founding - Profession and Practice, Pt. 1” (3 videos)

2. “The American Founding - Profession and Practice, Pt. 2” (3 videos)
3. “Emigrationists (or the Colonization Movement)” (3 videos)
4. “Frederick Douglass” (2 videos)
5. “Lincoln, Emancipation, Constitutional Self-Government” (2 videos)
6. “Booker T. Washington” (2 videos)
7. “William Edward Burghardt Du Bois” (2 videos)
8. “Desegregation: Public Schools” (2 videos)
9. “Martin Luther King, Jr. and His Critics, Pt. 1” (2 videos)
10. “Martin Luther King, Jr. and His Critics, Pt. 2” (2 videos)
11. “Martin Luther King, Jr. and His Critics, Pt. 3” (2 videos)
12. “Affirmative Action: Education” (2 videos)

Note: Course lectures were originally recorded for the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s online graduate program. You can disregard references to assignments, other coursework, and the use of content in classrooms discussed in the videos. They are not part of the History U program.

Resources

Select the Resources link for information about the primary and secondary resources, videos, and websites referred to in the course. Please note: History U participants are not required to read or purchase print materials. All quiz questions are drawn from the lectures.

Quizzes

The purpose of the 4 quizzes is to review your knowledge of the material covered in the lectures. No outside reading is required to answer the questions successfully. After watching the videos for lectures 1-3, 4-7, 8-10, and 11-12, select and complete the corresponding quiz to test your knowledge and qualify for the Certificate of Completion

Certificate of Completion

After you finish watching all of the lectures, score an 80% or higher on each quiz, and complete the feedback survey, you will be able to download your certificate.

Please email historyschool@gilderlehrman.org with any questions.