

*HIUS/AAS 3500*

***BLACK FIRE: THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND RACIAL  
EQUALITY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, 1969-1995***

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**Office Hours: Wednesday: 10-12**  
**Course website: [blackfireuva.com](http://blackfireuva.com)**

**Course Description:**

Does the idea of a “post-racial society” hold true when we examine the complex nature of social and cultural life at the University of Virginia, particularly in light of the contemporary experiences of African American students? How and to what degree have the intellectual, social, and cultural experiences of African American undergraduates transformed since the arrival of the first “critical mass” of black students to UVA in the late 1960s? Is there still a need for administrative and academics units like The Office of African American Affairs, the Office of Diversity and Equity, and the Carter G. Woodson Institute for African American and African Studies? Have they been successful in bringing about meaningful change in the experiences of underrepresented minorities? And if not, how can future efforts to make the University a more inclusive institution benefit from a critical engagement with past struggles for social justice and racial equality?

To facilitate critical thinking and exchange on these and other important questions, this hybrid course grounds contemporary debates on the state of race relations at UVA within the larger, historical context of the “black Wahoo” experience. In addition to exploring contemporary issues affecting academic, cultural, and social life on grounds, our classroom and online activities will draw attention to an important yet insufficiently explored chapter in the history of “Jefferson’s University” by examining the varied ways in which various student-led movements have transformed the intellectual culture and social fabric of everyday life at the University. How those transformations continue to shape our experiences on grounds will be a topic of frequent discussion. Though the focus of this course is local, we will explore topics that have and continue to engage college students across the nation: the integration of African Americans into the post-civil rights, historically white university, the viability of African American Studies programs and departments, and the impact of Affirmative Action on higher education.

**Course Objectives:**

Upon the completion of this course, students will be able to document the varied ways in which the presence of African Americans at the University of Virginia has and continues to transform the intellectual, cultural, and social landscape of the University. They will also be able to:

- evaluate the validity and historical accuracy of common representations of UVA as an unchanging “racial plantation” or a bastion of political and cultural conservatism.
- provide quantitative evidence of the changing nature of the black student experience at UVA
- articulate in a clear and concise fashion the intellectual and ethical benefits of a multicultural education and a diverse learning environment in a highly interconnected world
- debate highly contentious matters such as affirmative action, as well as interracial and intra-racial conflict from multiple political perspectives - discussion
- evaluate the evidentiary strengths and weaknesses of oral histories
- approach contemporary problems in the arena of higher education from the perspective of a historian with a broad interdisciplinary perspective – a range of assessments
- create a web-based archive that documents the African American experience at UVA from 1969 to the present

### **Required Texts:**

The interdisciplinary and multimedia texts for the course will be located on collab and on our course site, [blackfireuva.com](http://blackfireuva.com). [Blackfireuva.com](http://blackfireuva.com) is a wordpress site that includes found footage, digitized rare audio and files, including some of the administrative files and correspondence from the Black Student Alliance, and a discussion board that enables students to communicate with each other and the larger public.

### **Assignments:**

1. *Quizzes.* Students will have **four quizzes** over the course of the semester. The quizzes be fill-in-the blank and will be based on key terms distributed at the beginning of in-class lectures.
2. *Editorials/Blogs.* Students will write two editorials and one blog entry that provide historically informed analysis of contemporary race relations at UVA. Your blog entry will be submitted on the website [blackfireuva.com](http://blackfireuva.com). [Blackfireuva.com](http://blackfireuva.com) is a website frequented largely by African American students and alums associated with the University of Virginia. This will provide you with the opportunity to share your work and your ideas with the

world outside academia, as well as showcase your creative skills. Your reflections will also be of great historical value to future students and scholars seeking to understand our current moment and how you all connected your experiences to the past.

3. *Small Group Project.* Students will work in groups throughout the semester. The first group assignment will divide students according to their major. Each group will write a two-page assessment of the racial demographics of your major that illuminates the representation of African Americans among undergraduates, how that representation compares to other majors in your school (i.e. Curry, College of Arts and Sciences, Engineering, Commerce) and two possible explanations for the statistical evidence. This assignment will help you in making a longitudinal assessment of the black student experience academically. It will also help us speak and write with more specificity about the diversity and complexity of the black student experience.
4. *Final Group Projects.* Students will add to the content of the blackfireuva.com website by collectively producing two oral histories. Students will work in groups of 8-10 members. Each group will be responsible for conducting 2-3 oral histories that provide insight into the major themes discussed in the course. A short biographical introduction of the interviewee will accompany the oral history, which should be no longer than 10 pages. Students are required to interview one alumnus and one current student from an underrepresented minority. The point here is to assist in the creation of an active archive that will help the class, the University community, and the larger public understand not just the past but the contemporary moment. These oral histories will be posted on the website, blackfireuva.com. \*We will also make these oral histories part of a video documentary.
5. *Learning Portfolio.* At the end of the course, each student will submit a learning portfolio. This portfolio will consist of two components: (1) a 3-5 page reflection paper on the course, how the course reinforced or challenged your assumptions about race relations at UVA, and its potential role in making UVA a more racially inclusive environment; and (2) mini assignments that chart your transformation over the semester. The mini assignments will include the following tasks:
  - a. a one page list of commonly held stereotypes about race relations at UVA and or the black student experience that you have discovered to be true or false.
  - b. a paragraph on one or two academic affiliations/majors, athletic teams, Greek organizations, religious groups, residential dorm/living arrangement, or person that has significantly informed

or shaped your experience at UVA. Your responses will be the foundation for our unit on black social life at UVA. It will enable us to gauge the organizational activities of African American students, the degree to which those organizations shape our views on race relations, and how they help underrepresented minorities forge meaningful relations across grounds.

- c. A pithy editorial on race relations or the black experience at UVA that can be published in the *Cavalier Daily*.

## **Course Calendar and Assignment Schedule**

\*Please be sure to carefully read the schedule. Because this is a hybrid course we will not be meeting “face to face” every class period.

### **January 14—Class Introduction**

#### **January 16:**

*In Class Lecture: Whose University: Race, and the Politics of Belonging at the University of Virginia (Part 1)*

Homework Assignment: compile a short list of commonly held stereotypes about race relations at UVA and or the black student experience that you have discovered to be true or false. We will discuss your comments on January 21<sup>st</sup>.

#### **January 21**

*In Class Lecture: Whose University: Race, and the Politics of Belonging at the University of Virginia*

Homework Assignment: **read** *Cavalier Daily*, “Black Enrollment Hits 1.3% of Student Body,” November 11, 1969; Van Deburg, *A New Day in Babylon*; Black Students for Freedom Proposal for African American Studies, <http://blackfireuva.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/black-students-for-freedom-proposal-for-afro-american-studies-program-19691.pdf>. You will be responsible for knowing the material by January 23<sup>rd</sup>.

#### **January 23/No Class**

*Online Lecture: Young Gifted, and Black: African Americans Integrate UVA, 1965-1970*

Homework Assignment: **read** *Cavalier Daily*, “Transition: A Program in Conflict December 2, 1976;” BSA Annual Report, 1976-1977, 1-10;

<http://blackfireuva.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/black-student-alliance-annual-report-1976-1977-part-1.pdf>. We will discuss the report in class on **January 28<sup>th</sup>**.

### **January 28:**

*In Class Quiz*

*In Class Lecture:* The Making and Remaking of the Black Protest Tradition at UVA during the 1970s

*In Class Assignment:* Write an exam essay question based on the themes discussed in the previous two lectures. You will have 10 minutes to complete the assignment and it should be no longer than 3 sentences. Place a copy of the essay question in your portfolio.

### **January 30/No Class**

*Read and Response to Blog Post on Black Greek Life at UVA during the 1970s*

*Homework Assignment:* Watch video interview of C. Ann Spivey Colley (Class of 1974, Black Student Alliance Member, and Charter Member of Kappa Rho Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Incorporated) and Kent Merritt (One of the four African Americans who integrated the football team in 1970, charter member of Kappa fraternity). Write a 1-2 page reaction to the interviews. List the strengths and weaknesses of the two interviews and their usefulness as historical evidence. Place your reaction in your learning portfolio. We will discuss your reactions in class on

### **February 4**

*In Class Lecture:* Then and Now: Black Social Life at UVA

*In Class Reflective Question:* Have Greek organizations created a social and cultural environment that has been beneficial to the entire UVA community.

### **February 6**

*In Class Lecture:* Profiles in Courage: The Black Student-Athlete at UVA

*Online quiz:* will be posted on **February 6<sup>th</sup>** no later than 6 p.m. It needs to be turned in by **noon, February 10<sup>th</sup>**.

*Homework Assignment:* **read** Claudrena N. Harold's, "Of the Wings of Atalanta: The Struggle for African American Studies at the University of Virginia," *Journal of African American Studies*, March 2012, Volume 16, Issue 1, pp 41-69. We will discuss the article's main points on **February 11<sup>th</sup>**.

## **February 11**

*In Class Lecture: I Am Not My Major: The Racial Politics of Major Selection*

\*On an index card, guess the five most popular majors among African Americans. This assignment will be conducted at the beginning of class

## **February 13/No Class**

*Watch webcast on Farmington Club and the Creation of the Office of African American Affairs*

Homework Assignment—Write a 1-page response to the video and insert it in your learning portfolio

## **February 18--**

*In Class Lecture: Winter in America: Black Student Life in Post-Civil Rights America*

Homework Assignment: Listen to Gary Flowers's Reflections of Black Life at UVA in the 1980s. <http://blackfireuva.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/uva-in-the-1980s.m4a>

\*Reflect on the extent to which Flowers observations about student life in the 1980s still holds true. Do you view the existence of separate black and white institutions as a problem? Feel free to post your response in the comments section of blackfireuva.com.

## **February 20—Independent Group Meeting/No Class**

## **February 25 Independent Group Meeting/No Class**

## **February 27**

*In Class Lecture: The Best of Times, the Worst of Times: UVA in the 1980s*

\*Each group must turn in a list of 3 possible interviewees for their final project accompanied by three to four paragraphs on why their interviewees would be ideal subjects for an oral history project

## **March 4**

*In Class Lecture: Black UVA in the 1990s*

## **March 6/No Class**

*Online quiz will be posted on **March 6<sup>th</sup>** at noon, submit your answers to the quiz by March 7<sup>th</sup> noon.*

**\*Each group must turn in their possible interview questions**

**March 8-16—Spring Break**

**March 18**

*In Class Assignment/Midterm Reflections on the Course and Group Project Reports*

**March 20**

*In Class Lecture and Discussion: “Don’t Call Me Whitey, Nigger, Don’t Call Me Nigger Whitey: Racial Epithets and Freedom of Speech”*

Homework Assignment: Write a 500-word editorial on the Beta Bridge incident. It should be submitted by **March 24<sup>th</sup>, noon.**

**March 25/No Class**

*Group meetings*

*Watch webcast featuring second-generation African immigrants who attend UVA*

**March 27**

*\*Online Quiz*

*In Class Group Presentation: I’m not black, I’m African: Race and the Politics of New Immigrant Realities at UVA*

\* Each group will present a 5-7 minute presentation based on interviews with a second-generation immigrant student of African descent

**April 1/ No Class**

*Group Meetings*

**April 3**

*In Class Lecture: Class Matters: Is the Living Wage Struggle a “Race Issue”*

**April 8/No Class**

**Each student will submit a blog post or 500-word editorial summarizing race relations at UVA during the 2013-2014 academic year. Assignment must be submitted by noon, April 9.**

**April 10/No Class**

**Group Meetings**

**April 15/ No Class**

**Group Meetings**

**April 17**

*In Class Activity:* Group Presentation Review

**April 22-24**

*In Class Activity:* Group Presentations of Oral History Project

**April 29<sup>th</sup> Last Day of Class**

### **Evaluation Procedures**

#### **Class Attendance, Participation, and Engagement—20%**

Students are expected to come to class prepared and ready to engage with the material and their peers. This portion of your grade will be based on class attendance, participation, and your engagement with course website, [blackfireuva.com](http://blackfireuva.com).

#### **Blog post/blog comments/ editorials—20%**

Learning to present an argument in a concise yet informative manner is an important skill to possess. Over the course of the semester, you will have the opportunity to present your views on highly controversial issues. Many of us have been involved in heated debates over some of the topical themes in this course; thus, it is important that you be able to share that information with your peers and the larger community in an informed manner. To help develop your voice, you will complete a blog post on contemporary race relations at UVA and an editorial on the Beta Bridge incident of 2013. The blog post will communicate your thoughts on race relations at UVA during the 2013-2014 academic year. It will appear in the section of [blackfireuva.com](http://blackfireuva.com) entitled “Snapshots in Black and White.” Throughout the course you will also have the opportunity to respond (in one to two paragraphs) on a blog posted on the course site.



### **Final Group Project—15%**

Collectively, students will have the opportunity to create a historical archive to demonstrate their mastery of the material as well as bring to the public's attention the different perspectives and viewpoints on the history of African Americans at UVA. Our class will be divided into 10 groups, each consisting of 6-8 members. Students will be given the opportunity to constitute their own groups.

Each group will be responsible for conducting and posting on [blackfireuva.com](http://blackfireuva.com) oral histories of a current student and an alumnus who provides significant insight into the evolving nature of the black experience and race relations at the University of Virginia. Each oral history provide insight into some of the major themes discussed in the course. A short biographical introduction of the interviewee will accompany the oral history. The introduction should be no longer than two paragraphs. The oral history should be between 5-8 pages. Students are required to interview one alumnus and one current student from an underrepresented minority. The point here is to assist in the creation of an active archive that will help the class, the University community, and the larger public understand better understand the past and our contemporary moment. These oral histories will be posted on the website, [blackfireuva.com](http://blackfireuva.com).

### **Quizzes—20%**

**To test your foundational knowledge, we will have four short quizzes. At the beginning of each class, I will hand out a list of key terms that you will be responsible for knowing. Your quizzes will be based on those terms.**

### **Learning Portfolio—25%**

At the end of the class, students will have the opportunity to demonstrate their mastery of the course's subject matter, their evolving views on various topics, and their general reflections on the course. On May 1<sup>st</sup>, students will turn in their portfolio.