

# **African American History Course Syllabus**

## **What you will learn in this course**

### **African American History**

How have African Americans shaped the culture of the United States throughout history? Tracing the accomplishments and obstacles of African Americans from the slave trade through emancipation, and to the modern African diaspora, you will learn about the political, economic, social, religious, and cultural factors that have influenced African American life. In African American History, you'll come face to face with individuals who changed the course of history and learn more about slavery, racism, and the Civil Rights Movement. You will also explore how the history of African Americans influences current events today.

### **Unit 1: Africa**

Every great legendary figure finds power in the origin story, the story of where a person or group came from. Even a civilization finds power in understanding its roots, whether that story comes with pain or triumph or both. Studying African American History must, necessarily, begin in Africa with a study of the richness of the continent that has been called the cradle of civilization. You'll learn not only about the geographical diversity of the world's second largest continent but also the rich historical and cultural influence that Africa had over the world. From triumph to tragedy, this unit will move from the great kingdoms of Egypt, Ghana and Mali to the development of the transatlantic slave trade, including the harrowing story of Olaudah Equiano and his experience of the Middle Passage. As with any origin story, you may be surprised by how much you don't know about where you come from and how you became who you are.

#### **What will you learn in this unit?**

- Describe the eight major physical regions of Africa, as well as its relationship to the major bodies of water that surround it
- Recognize the scientific evidence of Africa as the cradle of civilization
- Explain the contributions and major characteristics of Egyptian society to Africa's place as the origin of modern civilization
- Discuss how the West African kingdoms of Ghana and Mali established themselves and contributed to the economic and cultural development of the region
- Understand the development of the slave trade within Africa and the beginnings of the transatlantic slave trade
- Identify the steps of the transatlantic slave trade, including the triangular trade route, the involvement of local chiefs, the Middle Passage, and arrival in the Americas

### **Unit 2: Slavery in America from Early Colonies to Independence**

The presence of slaves in the British colonies, which later became the United States of America, began with the first settlement and continued through the Civil War. But the character of slavery

continued to change and develop as the colonies became stronger and worked toward independence. The events that shaped America and its beginnings also changed slavery, demonstrating the vast differences between the North, the Chesapeake and Upper South, and the Deep South. As the colonies struggled for independence from the British, slaves and their anti-slavery allies agitated for freedom, using the same principles that motivated the Patriots to strike against their British oppressors. Though many were successful in obtaining their freedom from slavery, the efforts toward independence—both as a nation and for slaves—became stronger in the Deep South and nearly obsolete in the North. That divide reflects a deeper economic, social, and philosophical divide that would later become explosive during the Civil War.

### **What will you learn in this unit?**

- Understand how slavery developed in the different geographic areas (Chesapeake, Lowcountry, and Northern colonies as well as Spanish Florida and French Louisiana)
- Identify how the Revolutionary activities happening in the colonies affected African Americans
- Discuss how Black Americans participated in the Revolutionary War and how that participation affected them
- Analyze how revolutionary ideals affected the anti-slavery movement
- Explain how slavery changed in the North and upper South states after the Revolutionary War
- Understand what factors contributed to the growth of slavery in the Deep South

### **Unit 3: The Expansion of Slavery**

Despite all of the strides African Americans made toward freedom during the Revolutionary War in the North, the slave trade in the South simply changed its appearance and continued to expand between 1800 and 1860. The emergence of the Cotton Kingdom, a huge economic boom in the South that drove the establishment and expansion of the domestic slave trade, was contrasted with the simultaneous expansion of free black communities and the abolitionist movement. As the North grappled with what free blacks should be allowed to do, abolitionists worked through violent and non-violent means to secure not only freedom but equal rights for all African Americans.

### **What will you learn in this unit?**

- Describe the emergence of the cotton culture in the South, including how it fueled the economy of the United States
- Explain what a day in the life of a slave in the South was like, including the types of tasks slaves were assigned
- Understand the slave trade—how it was created, how it worked, the role of slave traders, and the family structures it was disrupting
- Analyze the environment in which free blacks were living, including where they settled and the difficulties they encountered
- Describe the role of black women in the abolitionist causes, as well as the three influential male abolitionists discussed in the unit

## **Unit 4: African Americans and the Civil War**

By 1861, the Union that had held together the United States of America had fractured along the lines of slavery and the economy. The road to the Civil War, fought by the North to preserve that Union and by the South for the rights to be an independent nation free to pursue the expansion of slavery as they saw fit, was long and marched right through weighty issues like Westward Expansion and Manifest Destiny, the Supreme Court, and the growing tension between Northern abolitionists and Southern slave owners. Understanding how the Civil War came to be, and the role African Americans played in that important chapter in our nation's history, will help you to understand the century of struggle for civil rights that blacks fought after they were free, and continue to fight today.

### **What will you learn in this unit?**

- Explain the four key factors that led the United States to civil war
- Describe Abraham Lincoln's attitude toward slavery and emancipation and how that changed over the course of the 1860s
- Explain how the Fugitive Slave Laws, Underground Railroad, and the Dred Scott decision fueled the tension between the North and South about slavery
- Understand the role of black Americans in the Civil War
- Identify and explain the role of key African-American leaders and groups before and during the Civil War

## **Unit 5: Freedom and Reconstruction**

The Civil War ended in early 1865, but the real work had just begun. Suddenly, four million African Americans were now free, with generations upon generations of slavery as their history and an uncertain future before them. The United States had quite a challenge ahead of it—how to completely change a society that, for generations, had only known a deeply divided North and South and slavery. Deep racial divides and an uncertain economic future led the South to pass restrictive black codes and to grapple with violence, while Northern industrial workers worried about job competition. Through it all, lawmakers in Washington, D.C., worked to knit the divided nation back together. Would they be successful?

### **What will you learn in this unit?**

- Identify the ways that freed African Americans dealt with economic and social change, including employment and education
- Understand the role of the Freedmen's Bureau in the Reconstruction period
- Explain the role of the black church in the creation of community and political leaders
- Describe the reaction of white Americans to the end of the war, including violence and black codes
- Analyze how Congress and President Johnson influenced Reconstruction through the Reconstruction Acts
- Explain how the Thirteenth and Fourteenth amendments affected the African-American community

## **African American History Midterm Exam**

- Review information acquired and mastered from this course up to this point.
- Take a course exam based on material from the first five units in this course (Note: You will be able to open this exam only one time.)

### **Unit 6: The Jim Crow Era**

The glorious hope at the end of the Civil War, and the potential of the Reconstruction Era, very quickly made way for the demoralizing reality of the Jim Crow Era for African Americans. Particularly in the South, African Americans faced persecution, poverty, injustice, violence, and an increasing attempt to strip them of their Constitutional right to vote. Amid all of this chaos were the success stories—prosperous black landowners and courageous settlers who moved West to establish thriving towns and cities. As the twentieth century loomed closer, many black Americans felt like their great hope for equal rights had been snatched away by the failure of Reconstruction and the resentment of whites.

#### **What will you learn in this unit?**

- Describe segregation and how the Plessy v. Ferguson decision contributed to it
- Explain the role that violence played in the lives of African Americans, including race riots and lynching, during this period
- Analyze the reasons behind the migration of African Americans to Africa, the western United States, and Southern cities, and the effects of that migration
- Understand the role of sharecropping and its consequences to African Americans
- Express how the justice system was applied to African Americans, especially in the South

### **Unit 7: African Americans in the Early Twentieth Century**

By the turn of the twentieth century, African Americans found themselves once more under the thumb of a white population that was violent and angry. Though it began with Southern backlash against the policies of Reconstruction, the trend toward white supremacy and anger toward blacks began to spread across the entire United States. At the same time, African Americans were moving forward, focusing on ways to improve their lives. They were actively examining how to address Jim Crow laws and discrimination while also funneling energy and effort into economic and cultural progress. The result, in the early twentieth century, was a time of tension and triumph.

#### **What will you learn in this unit?**

- Compare and contrast the two philosophies of African-American progress, represented by Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois
- Explain the role of African-American soldiers in the U.S. Armed Forces from the Civil War to World War I
- Describe the reasons behind the Great Migration
- Identify the reasons behind the race riots between 1906-1923

- Analyze the differences between the mission of the NAACP and the UNIA
- Explain the roots of the Harlem Renaissance and the Jazz Age and identify a few of the major artists associated with it
- Describe the reasons behind the resurrection of the Ku Klux Klan and the changes in the organization during the 1920s

## **Unit 8: The Great Depression and World War II**

The 1920s was an era of growth and progress, excess and extravagance, economic stability and the beginning of the consumer credit craze. The Jazz Age, named for the music African Americans created in neighborhoods like Harlem, was an era of triumph and tragedy for African Americans, much like the times before it. As the 1920s ended, and the economic crash sent America reeling, African Americans suffered more than nearly anyone else as they faced devastation far harsher than most of their white counterparts. Despite the struggle, the 1930s also saw huge steps forward as the NAACP fought for racial justice and a new president brought a new approach to relief and racial progress. Though it was a painfully slow road toward progress, the 1930s and 1940s laid the solid foundation for the Civil Rights movement and real change for African Americans.

### **What will you learn in this unit?**

- Explain some of the causes of the Great Depression and why African Americans were heavily impacted
- Describe the steps the NAACP took during the 1930s to challenge racial inequality in schools
- Analyze how President Franklin D. Roosevelt's First New Deal affected African Americans
- Evaluate the role of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt in the cause of racial justice
- Explain how the Second New Deal changed the United States and offered opportunities to African Americans
- Understand the state of segregation in the military at the beginning of World War II and what steps were taken during the war to integrate the military

## **Unit 9: Protest and Struggle in the Civil Rights Era**

After nearly one hundred years of struggling for equal rights, with progress and backlash becoming the cycle that African Americans had both learned to live with and fear in equal measure, the time had finally come. The civil rights movement, after the efforts of the NAACP in the courts during the 1930s and small steps toward desegregation during World War II, had reached a point where real change could happen. But how would it happen—and what would be the result? If you've ever heard of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr., the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the lunch counter sit-ins, this is that chapter in the incredible history of African Americans.

### **What will you learn in this unit?**

- Explain how Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, changed the face of segregation
- Understand what nonviolent resistance is and how African Americans used it in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, including the role of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Analyze the Little Rock desegregation challenge and how it reflected the white backlash to the progress of African Americans
- Describe a few of the grassroots efforts toward progress, including sit-ins, freedom rides, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)
- Discuss how the legal changes in the 1960s offered more opportunities for African Americans
- Analyze how the black power and black nationalism grew out of the civil rights movement and the reasons behind inner city violence during the late 1960s

## **Unit 10: To the Present**

From the story of their passage to the Americas to the election of the first African-American President of the United States, the history of black Americans has one common theme: progress and backlash. As we bring the story of African Americans to the present day, we will focus on the political and economic progress that has been made and what challenging issues still remain. From representation in Congress, to increased presence in professional fields and universities, to the continuing gap in wealth and income between white and black workers, the present day is filled with points of great pride and points of great tragedy. What will the future hold?

### **What will you learn in this unit?**

- Trace the development of an increased political voice of African Americans from the local to the national level, including those who ran for president
- Identify how No Child Left Behind, the Welfare Reform Act, and affirmative action affects the lives of African Americans
- Analyze the ways in which African Americans have not yet reached economic equality with white Americans
- Explain how incarceration and police brutality continue to be an important issue in the African-American community and the nation at large
- Discuss the challenges and divisions exposed by the 2016 election, along with the protests and reactions that occurred afterward

## **African American History Final Exam**

- Review information acquired and mastered from this course up to this point.
- Take a course exam based on material from units six to ten in this course – the last five units. (Note: You will be able to open this exam only one time.)