AAS 372: African American Identity
Guidelines for Writing Assignments

General Overview:
As mentioned in the syllabus, there are two types of writing assignments for this class: short (one to three page) essays, and research papers. The short essays will be the basis for 20% of your grade, and the research paper will account for 32%.

These writing assignments will allow you to explore more deeply some topics in this course that are of interest to you. Many questions, issues, and topics will be raised throughout the course of our study, and any of them could be a possible topic for you to write about. You may also choose to write about the reading assignments, or parts of books and/or articles that are not required reading. Films or videos can also provide topics or ideas for writing. You may also write about your personal experiences with some of the issues or topics that we will cover.

Short Essays
You will need to write a total of six pages of short essays for the semester. The short essays, of one to three pages (double-spaced) each, will be responses to questions raised about the topics that we discuss in class. Some usable sample questions will appear in the study guide handouts, or you may find other sources for topics on your own. I will raise questions nearly every day in my lectures, and students will, hopefully, also raise questions through discussion. Most of these questions will make good topics for short essays. There are also some questions on the syllabus (under “Course Description”), and other questions will occur to you during the course of your reading. There are limitless potential questions that could make good topics for essays. If you are uncertain about the appropriateness of a possible essay topic, please ask me if it would be O.K.

Your responses to the questions do not have to be in the form of “answers,” but should express your ideas or opinions about the issues raised. Essays should express ideas, opinions, or concerns and clearly communicate at least one main point or idea. They should begin with a thesis statement (either one sentence or a paragraph) and end with a concluding or summarizing point. A short guide to forming and writing thesis statements is attached to the back of this handout. You should also read professional editorials (not just “letters to the editor”) in newspapers or magazines to find examples of this type of writing.

The short essays do not need bibliographies, but all direct quotes should be followed by a citation of their original source. All opinions should be based on some facts, and the sources of the facts that you use should be mentioned in some way in the essay. Be sure to edit your writing and correct typos and misspellings before you turn your papers in. Do not turn in your first rough drafts for these essays, but you may show me a draft if you would like help or advice on writing your essay.

Guidelines, Rules and Standards for the Research Paper:

1. The total amount of writing required for the research paper is 10 pages, typed and double-spaced, using a 12-point font. Shorter papers will be accepted, but they will earn less points, proportionately. For example, an eight-page paper can
only earn a maximum of twenty six points, a six-page paper twenty points, etc. (see “Grading” section below)

2. **All writing must refer to at least one of our topics, and describe, analyze, evaluate, or critique some aspect of the topic.** In other words, you must do more than simply report facts- you must also give your own explanation or evaluation of the facts. Your chosen topics may be as broad as the general subject of African American identity, or as specific as any of the details raised in the daily lectures, readings, or discussions. A sampling of some possible topics could include: indigenous African cultural forms in current African American cultures; identity issues of “mixed-race” people; the effect of media stereotypes about African Americans on their identity; reasons why most Euro-Americans are not inclined to discuss "racial" issues; and, alternatives to thinking about people in racialized terms. You can probably think of many other topics besides those, and I'm sure I can think of thousands of them. Our three textbooks contain many other possible subjects to evaluate and report upon, and other sources can be found in the Mansfield library and the little library in my office (I do loan out some of my own books and articles).

3. **Do NOT turn in any rough drafts as final papers,** but all students must show me one draft before you do the final one. Please edit your work for spelling, grammar, clarity, complete sentences, etc. I will be glad to look at rough drafts of works-in-progress and offer suggestions and assistance during office hours. I also recommend that you take advantage of the free assistance provided for any enrolled students at the Writing Center which is located in the LA building, room 144 and on the first floor of the Mansfield Library. Their phone number is 243-2266. Hours: (TBA). For more information, see their website, www.umt.edu/writingcenter You can walk in and get help without an appointment but if you call ahead and make an appointment you can avoid sitting there waiting. **Word of advice:** the Writing Center will be much busier toward the end of the semester than at the beginning. Can you guess why? Don’t procrastinate!

4. **Each research paper must include a bibliography,** listing at least three print sources that you used for your research. If film or video sources or used, you must also have at least two print media sources. Examples of the format that I would like for you to use in your bibliographies are described below.

5. All work must be original. Plagiarism is unacceptable and plagiarized papers will receive no credit and can not be re-done or made up. You can quote from your sources (sparingly), but you must use quotation marks and cite your sources. Lengthy quotes (4 or more lines) must be set off and single-spaced (See "Academic Honesty" section in syllabus for more details, and a warning about getting papers off the internet.)
Sample Formats for Bibliographies:

For books;

For articles (from journals, magazines, newspapers, anthologies, etc.);

For internet articles;
Author’s name, name or title of web site, and url (http://www.etc.etc.etc.)
(note; many web site articles are anonymous. Do not use such sites as sources for your bibliography. Use only articles that give the name of the author.)

For videos or films:
Title of film or video, date of production, name of producer, name of writer or director, name of distributor or publisher

The format for citing works listed in your bibliography within your text is simple: author’s last name and page number where the reference may be found, in parentheses, i.e., (Katz, pg.44), or (Katz, 44). For a film or video, just the title.

**Grading:** As stated in the syllabus, I use a precise, numerical, percentage point grading system. No letter grades are assigned until after the final exam and all of the points are added up. The highest total combined points possible for all writing assignments (research papers and essays combined) is 52 points. The six pages of short essays have a maximum point value of twenty points. The ten-page research paper has a maximum point value of 32 points. That comes out to a possible three (3) points per page of writing. Each page of writing will be given a score between one and three, depending on the quality of the writing (as defined by the criteria described above). If you feel that you will not be able to meet the maximum page requirements (for essays or research papers) by the deadlines, please turn in as much work as you can. You will at least get some credit (up to three points per page) for anything you turn in. Only plagiarized papers receive no credit at all. There is also a possibility for earning a limited amount of extra credit points by turning in extra writing, or turning papers in early (see details below).

**Due dates:**
First essay due: Oct. 8
Second essay due: November 5
Third essay due: November 14
Submit ideas for research papers by: November 7
Rough draft of research paper due: November 19
Research paper and any late essays due: **Dec. 3**. This is the final date for turning in papers! Try to turn papers in early and get extra points--see details below
I would prefer it if people would turn in papers *spread out evenly over the course of the semester*, instead of a dozen or so pages of writing on the final deadline day. For that reason, I am offering **extra point incentives** for those who turn in writing earlier in the semester than the due dates, and **penalties** for those who turn in papers after the due dates, as follows:

*For every two class days earlier than a due date, you will receive one extra credit point.*
*For every two class days later than a due date, you will lose one point.*
*Any papers accepted after the final due date will lose an additional two points.*

If you need help getting started, or at any time during the process, please let me know. I will be glad to assist anybody with ideas or work in-progress. Also, some sample student writings from previous classes are available to look at in my office. More helpful information on research and writing will be given in class.