

University of Minnesota, Twin Cities
Department of African American & African Studies

Afro 3566/5866
Hist 3856
PA 5490

The Civil Rights and Black Power Movement, 1954-1984

Fall 2015
Thursdays, 6:00 – 8:45 PM
Hanson Hall 1-109

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office hours: Thursdays, 4 – 6 PM or by appointment

Course Description:

What does it mean when politicians, pundits, even professors, state that we are in a “post” civil rights era? We cannot understand this notion, let alone agree or disagree with its proponents, if we do not understand what “the civil rights era” was. This course will explore this era with particular attention to its historical emergence, its internal dynamics and controversies, and its impact on American society in general and on African Americans in particular. We rely on a range of resources – narrative historical arguments, primary documents, film, art, music – and we will employ a range of learning methods – lectures, small group discussions, and broad conversations. We will not only dig intentionally and deeply into the past, but we will also construct conversations that link the past and the present. And we will venture beyond the walls of our classroom and the boundaries of our campus to engage in conversations in the community.

The focus of our investigations will be the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement. Note that we are using the singular term “movement,” not “movements.” Our framework assumes that both the struggle for integration and access and the struggle for respect and self-identity were, essentially part of the same “freedom movement,” a movement that began with the arrival of the first slaves in the early 17th century and has persisted, albeit in different forms with different goals, throughout American history. Despite this preliminary hypothesis, we will test this assumption throughout the course, and you may well come to the conclusion that the civil rights and black power emphases were so distinct that it is more useful to understand them as two movements. We shall see. Let’s note from the outset that this will be a key question for us.

We will also wrestle with the historical concepts of “structure” and “agency.” We will be interested in the interplay between the two – how social/political/economic/cultural structures set certain challenges for human beings, particularly African Americans, while the actions of these human beings in turn impacted and changed these structures. We will follow this dialectic across the broad sweep of American history, and then dig deeply into the thirty year period that has become known as “the civil rights era.” We will be particularly interested in assessing how deeply the civil rights movement *changed* American society.

Throughout the course, we will continue to ask, explore, and test how these challenges and experiences speak to the challenges we face in the second decade of the 21st century. We are apt to find that both ends of this relationship – the past and the present – are more fluid than we might have expected, and that getting a handle on this relationship is harder than we might have thought. But I am confident that we will find that engaging in this process is clarifying for our self-understanding as citizens, for our own ability to claim agency.

Course Expectations, Requirements, and Grades:

Students are expected to attend every class and arrive on time. Since the class meets only once a week, your regular attendance is critical. Please let me know in advance of any pre-planned absences. Multiple absences will reduce your final grade. Discussion is an important part of our classwork, and your participation is not only expected, but important. Your participation should also be grounded in your engagement with the week's reading assignment. Our shared enterprise is to take the course materials, process them individually, then work with them collectively, the result being new knowledge that we have produced together. I expect you to participate in the production of this knowledge and to keep track of it so that you can draw on it (and cite it) in the written work you will undertake.

In addition to the books we will read and discuss, I will, on occasion, send you additional readings via email. Therefore, it is vital that you check your email account regularly. I will make it clear which readings are required and which are recommended. When the time comes to write your papers and your mid-term and final essay exams, I expect that you will find these readings useful. For the undergraduate students in the class, I will not expect you to research and seek out additional sources, although I am happy for you to use sources that you engaged in other courses or through independent reading. Although I am not a regular University of Minnesota faculty member, I will be available to you for consultation and discussion.

You will be expected to produce two papers, one in each half of the course, in which you analyze an event you attend in the community in relationship to the readings, films, and conversations we have had in class. I will make information about appropriate events available to you, and you may also select other events with my approval. There will also be two take-home exams, one at mid-term, one at the end of the course. These will ask you to write essays in response to a range of questions, essays in which you formulate an argument and draw on and cite course materials, lectures, and discussions. You will be allowed to use your books and notes for these exams. The two papers and the two exams must be turned in when due. There will be no extensions available.

Undergraduate students:

Papers which analyze community events – 10% each

Midterm and final exams – 30% each

Attendance and participation – 20%

Graduate students, HHH students, Law students:

Papers which analyze community events – 10% each

Historiographical/Literature Review Essay – 60% (see last page of syllabus)

Attendance and participation – 20%

These books will be available at the University bookstore:

- William P. Jones, *THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON: JOBS, FREEDOM, AND THE FORGOTTEN HISTORY OF CIVIL RIGHTS*
Manning Marable, *RACE, REFORM, AND REBELLION: THE SECOND RECONSTRUCTION IN BLACK AMERICA, 1945-1990* (other editions are ok)
Peniel Joseph, *WAITING' TIL THE MIDNIGHT HOUR: A NARRATIVE HISTORY OF BLACK POWER IN AMERICA*
Steven Lawson and Charles Payne, eds., *DEBATING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, 1945-1968* (other editions are ok)

weekly syllabus

(the structure will remain the same, but components might change, so pay attention)

9/10 Introduction to the Course

Analytical framework: What is *racial capitalism*?

Historical context: How has *racial capitalism* developed in the United States?

Film: *Slavery By Another Name*

Discussion: How can we participate in a conversation between the past and the present?

What does the Civil Rights and Black Power movement have to say to Black Lives Matter, and vice versa?

9/17 African America Between the Wars: Jim Crow, Migration, Resistance, & the New Negro

Read: *RACE, REFORM, AND REBELLION*, "Prologue"

Patterson, "Introduction," *DEBATING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT*

Robin Kelley, "We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," *JOURNAL OF AMERICAN HISTORY*, 60:1 (June 1993)

Lawrie Balfour, "A Most Disagreeable Mirror': Race Consciousness as Double Consciousness," *POLITICAL THEORY*, 26:3 (June 1998)

Recommended: Naomi Wallace, *THINGS OF DRY HOURS*

This play is being staged by Frank Theatre at the Playwrights Center, September 11 to October 4. It is highly recommended as a community activity. There will be post-show discussions after the Sunday matinees on 9/13, 9/20, and 9/27.

Film: *The Killing Floor*

Hand out: Guidelines for papers analyzing community events

Discussion: How have African Americans, by their actions, changed the structures and dynamics of American society?

9/24 World War II, the Double V, and the Emergence of a New Movement

Read: *THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON*, chapters one – three

DEBATING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, I, document 1

Film: *Miles of Smiles*

Discussion: How did the experiences of World War II, fighting for "democracy," working for "democracy," impact the consciousness and capacity of African Americans?

- 10/1 The Cold War
 Read: RACE, REFORM, AND REBELLION, 2
 THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON, Four
 Eric Arnesen, "American Civil Rights and the Cold War at Home: Postwar Activism, Anticommunism, and the Decline of the Left," AMERICAN COMMUNIST HISTORY, 11:1 (2012)
 DEBATING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, I, documents 2
 Discussion: How did the Cold War change the context of possibilities for African Americans? How did African Americans understand themselves and their struggles in a global context?
- 10/8 Roger Guenveur Smith performs "Rodney King" (Penumbra Theatre)
 We will attend this community event together. Tickets are \$15. There will be a post-show discussion the night we attend.
- 10/15 Exploring the Movement from the Top and the Grassroots, Considering Structure and Agency
 Read: DEBATING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT
 Lawson, "The View From the Nation"
 Payne, "The View From the Trenches"
 Film: *Eyes on the Prize* (selections)
 Discussion: How did the Civil Rights Movement's ability to organize on the ground interact with its ability to generate structural change?
- **First paper on community event is due
 **Hand out mid-term exam questions
- 10/22 The Push for Access and Integration
 Read: RACE, REFORM, AND REBELLION, 3 & 4
 THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON, 4 (review)
 DEBATING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, I, document 7
 II, documents 1 – 5
 Film: *Nothing But a Man*
 Discussion: How did the Civil Rights Movement change the everyday lives of African Americans?
- **Mid-term exam is due in class
- 10/29 Confronting White Supremacy in the North
 Read: WAITING 'TIL THE MIDNIGHT HOUR, Intro and 1-4
 Film: *Finally Got the News*
 Discussion: How did racial capitalism circumscribe the lives of African Americans in the North? How did the Civil Rights Movement impact life there?

- 11/5 A Movement in Transition
 Read: WAITING 'TIL THE MIDNIGHT HOUR, 5 & 6
 DEBATING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, I, documents 8-9
 II, docs 6-7-8
 Film: *At the River I Stand*
 Discussion: How did the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement revolve around the intersections between race and class?
- 11/12 Black Power
 Read: WAITING 'TIL THE MIDNIGHT HOUR, 7 & 8
 RACE, REFORM, AND REBELLION, 5 & 6
 Film: *The Black Power Mixtape*
 Discussion: What sort of shifts – in ideology, in strategy and tactics, in goals, in Leadership – did the emergence of Black Power reflect?
- 11/19 The Movement Takes Stock
 Read: RACE, REFORM, AND REBELLION, 7
 DEBATING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, I, 10
 Film: *Malcolm X*
 Discussion: How can we think of the entire movement as an educational enterprise?
- 11/26 THANKSGIVING
- 12/3 Engaging Racial Capitalism, North and South
 Read: WAITING 'TIL THE MIDNIGHT HOUR, 9 & 10
 Film: *A Huey P. Newton Story*
 Discussion: How deeply did the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement change American society?
- **Second paper on community event is due
 **Hand out final exam questions
- 12/10 Civil Right and Black Power? Civil Rights or Black Power?
 Read: RACE, REFORM, AND REBELLION, 8 7 Epilogue
 WAITING 'TIL THE MIDNIGHT HOUR, Epilogue
 THE MARCH ON EASHINGTON, Epilogue
 Discussion: What can we learn from a discussion between the past and the present, around the notion that we are in a “post” civil rights era?
- 12/14 **Turn in final exam by noon

Graduate and Law Students only:

You are being asked to participate in two community events and write about them, as are your undergraduate colleagues in the course. You are not being asked to take the mid-term and final exams. Instead, you will be asked to produce a substantial paper (at least 20 pages in length) in which you develop a conversation between the past (Civil Rights and Black Power era) and the present which explores one of the following issues:

1. Voting rights
2. Housing
3. Education
4. Affirmative action
5. Equity and equality
6. The role of culture in social movements

You will be expected to incorporate a range of sources (at least ten) outside the assigned readings of this course in your preparation and support of this paper. I will be happy to consult with you as you conceptualize and construct this paper.

This paper will be due on December 14, 2015, at noon.