Hybrid Traditions: U. S. African-American and Latin American Political Thought

Despite the current trend towards the study of comparative political theory, the work of Latin American political thinkers, which has been tremendously influential in their own region, remains marginal to the canon of Western political thought. Likewise, the work of U.S. African-American political thinkers is an important yet often overlooked strand of American political thought. This course is an introduction to the history of these two traditions, and a comparative effort to understand the main thematics in each and the similarities and differences between them. It examines the answers U.S. African-American and Latin American thinkers have given to some of the fundamental preoccupations of political theory, as well as to other questions that have sometimes been viewed as marginal, such as: What is justice? What is freedom? What are the conditions of possibility for democratic politics? How should we theorize race? How should we conceive racial identity? What form should anti-racist politics take? The course will introduce students to some of the most influential figures in U.S. African-American and Latin American political thought, including: Domingo F. Sarmiento, José Martí, José Vasconcelos, Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. DuBois, as well as to contemporary thinkers and debates about racial justice and black, Latino, and indigenous politics in the U.S. and Latin America. The aim of the course is to identify the contours and substantive problematics of U.S. African-American and Latin American political thought, particularly as they relate to questions of racial justice.

Course Requirements: Attendance is required, as is completion of all assignments. Students will write two short (2 page, single spaced) critical response essays about the readings and one longer final paper (10-15 pages). Response papers should include a brief summary of the main arguments of the relevant text(s), an evaluation of their validity/persuasiveness, and further questions for class discussion derived from them. Critical response essays will be due at NOON on the Monday prior to class and should be submitted electronically. Late papers will NOT be accepted. The final essay will be a more extended analysis of the work of two of the thinkers we’ve read during the semester, one from each tradition, or may (with the prior approval of the instructor) focus on the work of a single thinker or two thinkers within the same tradition.

Students will also make one in-class presentation on the readings. The in-class presentation should consist of: 1) a brief summary of the readings, and 2) important issues/questions raised by the readings that should serve as the focus of class discussion. Final grades will be assessed based on two critical response essays (17% each for a total of 34%), the final essay (34%), in class presentation (16%), and class participation (16%).

UT-Austin provides, upon request, appropriate accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Disability and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, at x471-6259 or http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssl/.

Required Texts The following books are available for purchase at the Co-op Bookstore:
In addition, readings marked below with an asterisk will be available through blackboard.

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

Week 1 (January 17): Introduction

Week 2 (January 24): The Contours of Latin American and African-American Political Thought

Week 3 (January 31): Latin American Philosophy and Political Thought—Aims and Method
Week 4 (February 7): African American Philosophy and Black Political Thought—Aims and Method

Week 5 (February 14): The Colonial Era—Origins of Latin American Political Thought?

Week 6 (February 21): Slavery and Democracy in the U. S. — Origins of African-American Political Thought?

Week 7 (February 28): Latin American Political Thought in the Post-Independence Era

Week 8 (March 6): 20th Century Latin American Political Thought—Race, Empire, and National Identity

March 12-17: Spring Break

Week 9 (March 20): 20th Century African-American Political Thought—What is Racial Justice?

Week 10 (March 27): 20th Century Latin American Political Thought—Race and Mestizaje

Week 11 (April 3): Black Political Thought in Latin America
Abdias do Nascimento, Brazil: Mixture or Massacre? Essays in the Genocide of a Black People (Majority Press, 1989).

Week 12 (April 10): Black Feminism
Angela Davis, Women Race and Class (Vintage, 1983).

Week 13 (April 17): Latino Political Thought in the U. S.

Week 14 (April 24): Latin American and Black Political Thought in the 21st Century: Indigeneity, Postcoloniality, Diaspora

Week 15 (May 1): Presentations of final papers and submission of paper proposals or drafts/Conclusion.
Final Paper Due May 10 by 5pm