Black Politics
Dr. Peniel E. Joseph
Spring 2019
PA 388K (unique# 60060)/HIS 389 (unique# 39224)
SRH 3.355 Wed 9:00AM-12:00PM

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Course Description

Black Politics examines the political thought and practice of African Americans from the end of slavery to the present. The course defines “politics” broadly, ranging from movements to elect officials at the local, state, and national level to civic groups, fraternal association, religious, and cultural and educational movements that organized for political self-determination during the Age of Jim Crow segregation that gripped the nation for a century after slavery’s legal demise. A wide range of African Americans have organized themselves in public and private spheres in pursuit of political power; through womens clubs; civil rights organizations; self-help group; labor union; institutes of higher and vocational education; the creation of the public school system; and churches, Black politics has consistently sought to reimagine American democracy as a vehicle for political liberation, freedom, power, justice, love, and compassion. On this score activists supported liberal, conservative, moderate, and radical ideologies in search of a liberated future. Black Republicans, Democrats, socialists, Marxists, Christians, atheists, feminists, and conservatives engaged in vigorous, at times contentious, debates over the direction of Black Politics that is sometimes reduced to the controversy between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. The Civil Rights Movement is perhaps the best known expression of Black Politics, but far from the only one. Efforts to secure decent housing, health care, good schools, clean neighborhoods, employment, safe spaces, playgrounds, clean water, and healthy environments represent one aspect of Black Politics that is too often reduced to a quest for symbolic representation (black faces in higher places) rather than, as political activist Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) famously advocated in 1966, a struggle for Black Power.

Students interested in black politics, civil rights, social policy and the deep connections between the historical development of racial justice struggles and contemporary policy debates and challenges would find this course of interest.

Students will be evaluated based on five criteria:

1) Weekly three-paragraph critical analysis of the readings.
2) Class participation
3) Research Progress Reports
4) Draft of Research Paper
5) Final Research Paper
Assignments

A weekly three-paragraph response on the assigned reading is due by 5 PM the day before our seminar. Each student should read everyone’s essay before the start of class and provide comments, both positive and critical, that will be used for class discussion. Your responses should be submitted in the “Discussion” section of Canvas which will allow you to post your response as well as comment on the responses of others.

Each paragraph should be five sentences and consider the following:

1. How does the author approach black politics? How does the history being explored connect to our contemporary understanding of black and Africana identity and what are the theoretic and political implications of the work, both historically and contemporaneously?

2. What’s the argument being laid out and how persuasive do you find it to be? Examine the sources in the bibliography and endnotes to consider the way in which the author has marshaled their evidence.

3. How does the work merit analytically and stylistically? Does the author’s analysis seem persuasive and insightful, even when you disagree?

4. Think about the readings in tandem, both thematically, chronologically, and theoretically. How does America’s complicated racial history and legacy shape the social, political, and cultural contexts that Obama imbibes on his journey intellectually, personally, and politically?

5. Meetings with Professor Joseph: All students are required to meet with Professor Joseph one-on-one once during the semester.

Midterm Assignment: Rough Draft of Final Historiographical Paper.

Final Assignment: Historiographical Essay on Black Politics

Students are required to write a critical 20-page essay on Black Politics. The final paper will utilize the books we have read in class plus 5-10 additional articles to explore any aspect or theme of the history of black politics, its historical evolution, and impact on public policy, law, society, and culture.

Our semester reading list provides a sample of many of these issues, but of course is not exhaustive. How has this scholarship impacted the real world and what are its flaws, omissions, strengths, and weaknesses?

Please source your speech/policy paper with a bibliography and endnotes. This final project is due in Professor Joseph’s LBJ office by 6PM on Wednesday, May 8, 2019.
Class Schedule

Part 1. Black Politics: History, Themes, Consequences

January 23  Lebron, The Making of Black Lives Matter
January 30  Anderson, White Rage
February 6  Davis, Freedom Is a Constant Struggle
February 13  Coates, We Were Eight Years in Power

Part 2: Memoir and the Struggle for Black Dignity

February 20  Gay, Bad Feminist
February 27  Khan-Cullors and Bandele, When They Call You a Terrorist
March 6  Moore, No Ashes in the Fire: Coming of Age Black & Free in America
March 13  Chang, We Gon Be Alright
Rough Draft/Outline of Research Paper Due


March 20  Spring Break
March 27  Smith, Ronald W. Walter and the Fight for Black Power, 1969-2010
April 3  Moore, The Defeat of Black Power
April 10  Musgrove, Rumor, Repression, and Racial Politics, Part 1: Intro and Chs. 1-3
April 17  Musgrove, Rumor, Repression, and Racial Politics, Part 2: Chs. 4-Conclusion

Part 4. Barack Obama and the Transformation of Black Politics

April 24  Joseph, Dark Days, Bright Nights
May 1  Dyson, The Black Presidency, Part 1: Intro and Chs. 1-4
May 8  Dyson, The Black President, Part 2: Chs. 5-8
Assigned Readings

Books can be found at the MAIN Co-op, on Guadalupe, under HIS 382/unique# 39345. They are also on reserve at the Benson Latin American Collection Library in SRH 1 and can be borrowed for 24 hours. In addition, those that are offered as e-books for checkout from UT are noted below.


Chang, Jeff. We Gon’ Be Alright: Notes on Race and Resegregation (New York: Picador, 2016). Paperback.


Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259 (voice), 512-410-6445 (video phone) or via email ssd@austin.utexas.edu For more information on available services, please see http://diversity.utexas.edu/

By UT Austin policy, you must notify Professor Joseph of any pending absence to observe a religious holy day at least 14 days in advance of the day you wish to take an absence. If you miss a class to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete any missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

For information on UT policies on Student Conduct and Academic Integrity, please see http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct/