

# Blacks in the American Political System (GOVT 259/ AFAM 257)\*

Professor Melanye Price

SCIE 137

T&TH 2:40- 4:00 p.m.

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## Course Description

Students will examine the relationship between African Americans and the American political system in order to gain a broader prospective of the American political process. Issues of leadership, representation and empowerment strategies will be addressed. We will consider both mainstream and less traditional forms of participation as we attempt to assess Black political empowerment. We will also consider the behavior of Blacks within political institutional settings and at various levels of government.

This course provided students with structured opportunities to struggle with the issues challenging both scholars and interested citizens. What are the historical dynamics that shape the relationship between African Americans and the government? How much and in what situations have Blacks been able to exert political influence? What are some alternative forms of participation that African Americans have used when traditional channels have been closed? How has the increased presence of Blacks in government institutions changed African American politics? Addressing these and other questions is the foundation for all readings, lectures, and discussions.

Students will do well in this course by following a simple but proven formula: attend class regularly and on time; pay attention and ask questions for clarification; read thoroughly and prior to class discussion; contribute regularly; complete assignments carefully and in a timely manner; and finally, use office hours as a resource. Feel free to contact the professor if you are still experiencing difficulties after completion of the previously outlined steps

## Required Texts

Books listed are required and available at the bookstore. Other readings are on electronic reserve.

Cohen, Cathy J. 1999. *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Morris, Aldon D. 1984. *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*. NY, NY: The Free Press.

Ture, Kwame and Charles V. Hamilton. 1967. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*. NY: Vintage.

Dawson, Michael. 2001. *Black Visions: Roots of Contemporary African American Ideology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

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\*This is a template for the class and is subject to changes and adjustments throughout the semester with prior notice.

## Course Requirements and Grading

**Participation.** Students are expected to read assigned readings prior to the class period in which they are to be discussed and should come to each class prepared to participate. Class participation will involve two components: careful and respectful attention to the contribution of classmates and regular and thoughtful contributions to class discussion that demonstrate an understanding of the readings. Students are also required to sign up to be discussion leaders for two class sessions during our second meeting.

**Reaction Papers.** You must submit **TWO** reaction papers that should be typed, double-spaced and five pages in length. One must be done in the first half of the semester and one in the second half of the semester. Your reaction paper must be turned in at the beginning of class and you will be responsible for guiding the class discussion those days. You cannot turn in a reaction paper after we have discussed the material in class. A sign-up sheet will be passed around for you to choose which days you want to write a reaction paper and lead the class.

**Journal Exercise.** To facilitate a more in-depth understanding of Black political behavior, students are required to submit a writing assignment based on experiential and observational learning. As a part of this you must assess a real world application of Black political behavior. See instructions on the last page of the syllabus. **DUE ON OR BEFORE APRIL 7<sup>TH</sup>**

**Exams.** The midterm is on **Thursday, March 3**, and a take home final exam to be turned in during your final exam period as scheduled by the University Registrar.

**Grade Distribution.** Final grades will be calculated using the following formula:

Participation	10%	Journal Exercise	10%
Reaction Paper #1	15	Reaction Paper #2	15%
Midterm Exam	25%	Take Home Final Exam	25%

**Late Assignments and Missed Exams.** Late assignments are penalized one grade for each late day including weekends. *Assignments more than a week late are not accepted.* Failure to take exams at the scheduled time will result in a grade of zero.

**Attendance.** Class participation is vital necessary and mandatory. As contributing members of this course, you should consider this syllabus a contract in which attendance is a key component. Absences will have a negative impact on both your overall performance and your final participation grade. In addition, students with good attendance records whose final grades fall on the border between grades will be rewarded for regular attendance.

**Academic Honesty.** All of the work you do in this course is expected to be your own. Absolutely no cheating or plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without proper citation) will be tolerated. Any cases of cheating or plagiarism will be reported to the university committee on academic misconduct and handled according to university policy.

**Disability.** Students with disabilities are responsible for making their needs known to the instructor, and seeking available assistance, in a timely manner. Grades received before notification of disability will not be adjusted.

**Office Hours.** If you experience difficulties with readings or assignments, come to office hours. Taking corrective steps early promotes learning and desirable grade outcomes. In addition, using office hours to discuss any course-related information or feedback you might have is helpful. I will be in my office every **TU and TH from 1-2** or by **appointment**.

## Course Outline and Reading Schedule

- Jan. 25      **Realizing the American Dream or Hitting the Political Glass Ceiling: Exploring the Structure of Political Power in America**  
Read: Hero, Rodney. Latinos and the U.S. Political System. Chs. 2 & 11  
Parenti, Michael. "Power and Pluralism: A View From the Bottom."
- Jan. 27      **Defining Black Power: Classic Readings in Black Politics**  
Read: Jones, Mack H. "Responsibility of Black Political Scientists to the Black Community".  
Ture and Hamilton, Black Power Chapters 1-4
- Feb. 1        **Classic Readings Cont'd**  
Read: Ture and Hamilton, finish the book, including the Afterword
- Feb. 3        **"Where Do We Go From Here": Integration vs. Separation**  
Read: King, Martin Luther. "Black Power" in Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community? Anthologized in A Testament of Hope pp. 569-597.  
Brooks, Roy L. "The Case for a Policy of Limited Separation" in Integration or Separation pp. 199-213  
Malcolm X. "The Ballot or the Bullet" in Malcolm X Speaks pp.23-44.
- Feb. 8        **Black Visions: Expanding and Historicizing African American Ideology**  
Read: Dawson, Micheal. 2002. Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African American Political Ideologies. Chs 1-4
- Feb. 10 **Black Visions cont'd.:**  
Read: Dawson, Finish Book
- Feb. 15 **Powerlessness as Cultural Product: Blacks and Popular Culture**  
Read: Kelly, Robin. "Kickin' Reality, Kickin Ballistics: "Gangsta Rap" and Post-Industrial Los Angeles." In Race Rebels. Pp. 183-228  
Pough, Gwendolyn. "Reconstructing Womanhood: Black Women's Narratives in Hip Hop Culture." In Check it While I Wreck It. Pp. 103-125  
Watkins, S. Craig. "Black is Back and It's Bound to Sell: Nationalist Desire and the Production of Black Popular Culture". In Is It Nation Time? by Eddie Glaude Jr. Pp. 189-214  
*Bring your own Political Music, Films, and Poetry to Share*
- Feb. 17 **Fighting for Social Change: The Civil Rights Movement**  
Read: Morris, Aldon. The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement. Chs.1-3
- Feb. 22 **The Civil Rights Movement Cont'd**  
Read: Morris continued. Chapters 4, 7 and 8,
- Feb. 24 **The Civil Rights Movement Cont'd**  
Read: Morris continued. Chapters 9 and 11.
- Mar. 1        **Will the Real Leaders Stand Up: Examining Black Political Leadership**  
Read: West, Cornel. "The Crisis of Black Leadership" in Race Matters pp. 53-70

Smith, Robert. "Racial Symbolism as 'Ideology' in the Post-Civil Rights Era, and a Postscript on the Clinton Admin. and the 1994 Election" in We Have No Leaders.

Mar. 3

**IN-CLASS MIDTERM EXAM**  
**PAPER TOPIC AND BREIF OUTLINE DUE**

Mar. 22 **Entering the Mainstream Political Arena: Voting Rights Act**

Read: Grofman, Bernard, Lisa Handley, and Richard Niemi. "The Right to Vote and the Right to Representation" in Minority Representation and the Quest for Voting Equality pp 4-28.

Guinier, Lani. "The Triumph of Tokenism: The Voting Rights Act and the Theory of Black Electoral Success" in The Tyranny of the Majority.

March 24

**Keeping It Real : Representation and Empowerment on the National Level**

Read: Swain, Carol. Black Faces, Black Interests: The Representation of African Americans in Congress. Chapters 9-11

Frymer, Paul. Uneasy Alliance TBA

Mar. 29 **Keeping it Real II: Representation at the Sub-National Level**

Read: Persons, Georgia A. "Black Mayoralties and the New Black Politics: From Insurgency to Reconciliation." In Dilemma of Black Politics. Pp. 38-65

McCormick and Jones. "The Conceptualization of Deracialization: Thinking through the Dilemma." In Dilemma of Black Politics, Pp. 66-84

Mar. 31 **Fitting the Description: Blacks and Crime**

Read: Brown-Dean, Khalilah.

Gilliam and Iyengar. "Prime Suspects: The Influence of Television on the Viewing Public" in AJPS

Apr.5

**FILM:" Black Is/Black Ain't"**

Apr. 7

**Black Is/Black Ain't": AIDS Policy and its Challenges to Black Politics**

Read: Cohen, Cathy J. The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics. Chapters 1-3.

**JOURNAL EXERCISES SHOULD BE TURNED IN BY THIS DATE**

Apr. 12

Read: Cohen cont'd. Chapters 4-7

Apr. 14

Read: Cohen cont'd. Chapters 8-10

Apr.19

**Intersectionality in Politics: Race, Class, and Gender**

Read: Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Color". Stanford Law Review

Carby, Hazel, "White Women Listen!"

Hill Collins, Patricia. Fighting words TBA

Apr. 21

**Intersectionality in Politics: Race, and Nationality**

Read: Vickerman, Milton. Crosscurrents: West Indian Immigrants and Race. Introduction and Chapters 3 and 4

- Apr. 26**      **Coalition Politics: Do Interest Trump Race?**  
**Read:** McClain, Paula D. "Coalition and Competition: Patterns of Black-Latino Relations in Urban Politics." In The Politics of Minority Coalitions: Race, Ethnicity, and Shared Uncertainty edited by Wilbur Rich.  
                 Vaca, Nicolas C. "Somewhere over the Rainbow Coalition: the Zero-Sum Game and Black-Latino Conflict." In The Presumed Alliance: The Unspoken Conflict Between Latinos and Blacks and what it means for America.  
                 Kim, Claire Jean. Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black -Korean Conflict in New York City. Chapter One and Conclusion
- Apr. 28**      **FiLM: "Flag Wars"**
- May 3**        **Bridging the Past and Future: Chaos or Community**  
**Read:** King, Martin L. *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*.  
 Chpts.5 and 6
- May 4-8**     **Reading Period**
- May 9-13**   **Final Exam Week**

## Journal Exercise (10%)

DUE ON OR BEFORE APRIL 7<sup>TH</sup>

- \* Choose **ONE** from the list below. For the most part, these assignments can be done at your leisure. However, it must ultimately be turned in by .
- \* These exercises are to be five pages in length, typed and double-spaced. (This does not include your title page.) You can leave them in my box, but I will only take responsibility for those assignments I receive in class or office hours. You should spend **at least three hours** thinking, talking and observing before writing. They should be thoughtfully considered, organized, and coherent.

### CHOICES

- 1) Interview someone who was alive and can remember the Civil Rights Movement. Talk to them about what you have learned about the movement and how that compares to their actual experiences. What were they doing? Did they participate in any way (as bystanders, protesters or anti-protesters)? How did life change for them after the Civil Rights Movement? What were the reactions of the people around them? Provide name, relationship, and year of birth. If the person you choose has nothing to say or cannot remember much, choose another person. Do not write a whole journal on how you didn't get any information.
- 2) Interview an African American who is also part of another marginalized community. Talk about their level of political participation within both groups? Are there complementary or conflicting issue positions that make them more identified with one community or another? Have they had to challenge or confront stereotypes within either group? How do they see themselves fitting into Black political activities?
- 3) Attend an event (rally, lecture, planning meeting, etc.) that addresses a political debate related to one of the topics discussed in class. Briefly summarize the purpose of the meeting. How is the event tied into issues of concern to this course? Did it conflict with things discussed in class or inform them in a new way. How would the information used in this course change the nature of the discussion at this event? What were the recommendations made at this event? Do you agree or disagree with them?
- 4) Pre-approved videos from a rental outlet or the library related to some aspect of Black politics can be used as a journal exercise. Briefly summarize the major points of the movie. How does it relate to topics discussed in class? How accurately are events discussed in class depicted in the movie? What are some of the things you liked most? What are some things you found most objectionable? A quick list of movies might include but you are not restricted to the following:  
*The Undercover Brother    Long Walk Home                      Glory    Malcolm X    Boycott  
Panther    Tuskegee Airmen              Autobiography of Ms. Jane Pittman  
Once Upon a Time When We Were Colored              Brother From Another Planet*
- 5) Choose a particular issue that you think is important and is currently being discussed in the media and follow it for two weeks in both a Black and mainstream (non-Black) media outlet. What are the commonalities or differences in the tone of the coverage, information provided, and positions taken? What do your findings suggest about the nature and status of Black politics in the larger American political system? Additionally, what does that mean for the differences in Black and non-Black public opinion?

**Reaction Papers (15% each)****DUE IN CLASS ON DAY OF ASSIGNED READING**

You are required to write **TWO** reaction papers. These papers should be typed, double-spaced and five pages in length. One must be done in the first half of the semester and one in the second half of the semester. Your reaction paper must be turned in at the beginning of class and you will be responsible for guiding the class discussion those days. You cannot turn in a reaction paper after we have discussed the material in class. A sign-up sheet will be passed around early in the semester for you to choose which days you want to write a response paper and lead the class.

**Note:** These are **NOT** summaries. You should assume that I am familiar with the material, thus it is not necessary to reiterate the subject of the readings. After a very brief explication (e.g. one paragraph) of the readings there should be substantial analysis and critique. Because of the length, this means that you have to write both clearly and efficiently.