“If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning.” Frederick Douglass (1857)

“Black Political Thought” is presented this term as a reading course focused on the historical development of political perspectives and strategies among African Americans (and more broadly, the African diaspora) from the 17th century to the present. This term, our work together, our learning experience, will be conducted online. BLACKBOARD is a center piece of our communications. Presentations, analyses and reviews of our readings, discussions, and essays will compare and assess political tendencies within a broad thematic framework. Themes will range from nationalist resistance to socialism, feminism/womanism, conservatism, progressivism/liberalism, and pan-Africanism. Leadership, organizations, the reparations debate, and grassroots activism are also examined. Much attention will be given to intersectionality, and to the links and associations that can be made when considering politics, social class, gender, sexuality, and race. Mass incarceration, race and the criminal justice system, and the Black Lives Matter movement are a major focus in our studies. In addition to assigned readings, a documentary film series is also a part of the course calendar.

One online session will be devoted to the African American community’s response to, participation in, and assessments of the ongoing Presidential campaign, the November 3rd election, and its aftermath.

The course calendar will be divided into four broad thematic topic areas (UNITS). At the core of each unit is a book that we will review, along with other shorter readings and videos.

A. UNIT 1  Resistance as a necessary component of Black Political Thought from the era of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade to the present: A focus on the early period.

B. UNIT 2  Artists, activists, organizers, and Intellectuals and their political voices, work, and significance to Black political thought and accomplishment: Includes a special focus on the 19th century and early 20th century women

C. UNIT 3  Artists, theorists, intellectuals, activists and their political voices, work, and significance to Black political thought and activism: A focus on the 20th century

D. UNIT 4  Recent Political Thought and Activism with special attention to James Baldwin, Ta-Nehisi Coates, The Black Lives Matter Movement, and Electoral Politics 2020
Books: The following books have been ordered at the Rutgers University Book Store. The order in which the books are listed is also the order in which the books will be read.

1. David Walker and James Turner. DAVID WALKER’S APPEAL. (BCP)

Additional Readings: Some of our readings will be found as articles or short data sheets to be accessed on the internet. At this particularly challenging moment in our political economic history, developments will emerge in our time frame which will press their way into our syllabus for discussion and review; therefore, we leave open the possibility that, from time to time this semester, we will introduce topics and issues which demand our scholarly attention.

Student Requirements: At the end of each Unit of study, students will submit a review of the assigned book and other sources assigned during that time frame. The papers will be structured around questions provided by Prof. Holbrook. Each paper should be 5 pages in length. The Dates on which papers are to be submitted are listed below. Each paper is worth 20 per cent of the course grade. An additional 20 per cent of the grade will be tabulated from the final examination.

A. First paper due: 29 September
B. Second paper due: 22 October
C. Third paper due: 19 November
D. Final paper due: 10 December

The four papers submitted during the semester will be submitted via e-mail. Each student will receive (individually) evaluations and recommendations from the professor. A format guidance sheet for the short papers will be provided by Professor Holbrook in week 2.

Zoom communications will begin during the second week of class; and, typically, they will be held on Thursdays.

Virtual office sessions will be announced on blackboard, and begin in week 2; they will be held on Tuesdays. The professor will also be available for text exchanges (via telephone) Thursdays from 1 pm to 2:30 pm, beginning in week 2. Calendar note; last class day: 12/10.