

W.P. Holbrook, Ph.D.  
BLACK POLITICAL THOUGHT  
Fall 2013

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21:014:220  
Tue. & Thrs., 11:30-12:50

“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 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present. Lectures, readings, classroom discussions and examinations will compare and assess political tendencies within a broad chronological and thematic framework; more narrow and in depth explorations of political ideologies, theorists, activists, movements, organizations and institutions will be accomplished through supervised individual research projects. Themes will range from early nationalist resistance to socialism; and feminism and the debates surrounding post-racial politics in our own time will be studied. Much attention will be given to the associations and links that can be made when considering politics, social class, gender and popular culture. Predictably, the Presidency, poverty, incarceration, and women’s issues are a part of our focus. In addition to our readings in history and political science, the course calendar is punctuated with documentary films, and a theater trip is planned.

#### STUDENT REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to attend each meeting of the class. Both a mid-term and a final examination are included as a part of the course schedule. The format for examinations is as follows: 30 to 40 percent, “fill-in-the-blanks” questions; and 60 to 70 percent, essays. A research paper of roughly 15 pages is required. A list of suggested term paper topics will be discussed in detail during the second week of class. Term papers are due during the first scheduled meeting of the class after the Thanksgiving holiday.

**BOOKS** The following books have been ordered for your purchase at the New Jersey Books Book Shop, located at the corner of University Avenue and Bleeker Street.

1. Randall Kennedy. THE PERSISTENCE OF THE COLOR LINE: RACIAL POLITICS AND THE OBAMA PRESIDENCY. (Vintage)
2. Michelle Alexander. THE NEW JIM CROW: MASS INCARCERATION IN THE AGE OF COLORBLINDNESS. (New Press)
3. Robin D. G. Kelley. FREEDOM DREAMS: THE BLACK RADICAL IMAGINATION. (Beacon Press)
4. Melissa Harris-Perry. SISTER CITIZEN: SHAME, STEREOTYPES AND BLACK WOMEN. (Yale University Press)

**ADDITIONAL READINGS:** Students will be required to visit sites on the internet.

Prof. Holbrook’s Office: 303 Conklin Hall

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30 -2:30; and at other times by appointment.

## A LIST OF BROAD TOPICS SUGGESTED FOR THE RESEARCH PAPER

Topics must be narrowed and refined in consultation with the instructor, in the office, Conklin 303. This list is not presented as an exhaustive coverage of acceptable topic areas; and students are encouraged to construct independently defined projects. However, all topics must be approved by and discussed with Prof. Holbrook during September. Generous and extended office time will be made available for term paper advisement. Term papers are due on Tuesday, 3 December.

1. Nineteenth-Century Black Political Thought: An Examination of Selected Texts and Strategies
2. The Jeremiad as a Repeated Trope in African American Political Rhetoric
3. Cornel West, Tavis Smiley (and/or others), President Obama, and the Issue of Black "Accountability"
4. Social Class Identification and Black Political Thought
5. An Exploration of Pan-Africanism in Theory and Practice, Historically
6. Black Newspapers and Black Political Thought, Historically
7. Socialism and Its Impact in the African Diaspora
8. W.E.B. DuBois and His Political Economic Strategies
9. Political Directions in Hip-Hop
10. The Dialogue and Impact Between African and Diasporic Politics
11. Unemployment as an Issue in Recent Politics
12. Malcolm X: Manning Marable's Recent Biography Compared to Other Works
13. James Baldwin: From the Literary to the Political (Or choose another novelist, e.g. Richard Wright)
14. Gender Issues in Black Political Struggles
15. Comparing the Ideological Positions of Several (2 or 3) Black Political Organizations
16. "Post-Racial Politics" - A Critical Review
17. Islam and Black Political Thought
18. Bayard Rustin's Place in Black Political Strategies of the 1960s
19. Black Cultural Nationalism and Its Historical Role in Politics
20. Randall Robinson: His Writings, Organizational Efforts and Activism
21. The Inter-play Between African American Political Strategies and Activism and the United States Government (Including Government Surveillance)
22. Paul Robeson and His Political Voice
23. Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, and Transgender Issues and Black Political Thought
24. Understanding the History of the Black Panther Party Through Recent Biographical and Auto-Biographical Works
25. Christianity and Black Politics
26. The African American Novel as Political Text (including graphic novels)
27. A Focus on Local Political Thinking and Organizing
28. African Diasporic Films as Viewed Through a Political Lens: Selected Works
29. U.S. Black Conservatives in Recent Decades

30. Student Voices in Black Politics, Historically
31. Trayvon Martin, The Dream Defenders, Recent Issues Centered on the Criminal Justice System, and Political Thought and Activism
32. Political Writings, Strategies and Activism from the Caribbean (C.L.R. James and others)
33. Women's Voices and Leadership in Black Political Strategies and Activism, Historically
34. Political Thought in Black Poetry, Historically: Selected Works
35. Political Thought in Black Drama, Historically: Selected Works
36. Frantz Fanon: From the Psychological to the Political
37. Nelson Mandela and His Global Political Significance
38. African Anti-Colonialist Strategies (Compare Developments in Two Countries)
39. Communism and Black Political Thought in the 1930s
40. The Reparations Issue
41. The First World War and Black Political Thought
42. The Second World War and Black Political Thought
43. The Cold War and Black Political Thought
44. Barack Obama's Writings and Speeches on Race
45. Black Political Thought and Comedy
46. Black Political Thought and the Wider Issues of Coalition Building
47. Black Political Thought and Organized Labor
48. The New Deal and Black Political Thought
49. Angela Davis: Her Works and Activism
50. Newark, New Jersey: A Focus on Recent African American Leadership, Strategies and Activism

Expanded office hours will be posted for individual sign-ins, beginning the first week of October. These sessions in Conklin 303 will be used for research paper advisement.

CALENDAR

Week 1, The Week of 3 September 2013

Introductory Lectures, Course Overview and Organizational Sessions

Week 2, The Week of 9 September

Readings: Michelle Alexander, *THE NEW JIM CROW: MASS INCARCERATION IN THE AGE OF COLORBLINDNESS*, Introduction; Chapters 1 and 2

A Detailed Discussion of Broad Topics for the Research Paper

Week 3, The Week of 16 September

Readings: Michelle Alexander, *THE NEW JIM CROW*, Chapter 3  
Film: "Slavery By Another Name"

Week 4, The Week of 23 September

Readings: Michelle Alexander, *THE NEW JIM CROW*  
Film: "Ida B. Wells: A Passion for Justice"

Week 5, The Week of 30 September

Readings: Complete Michelle Alexander, *THE NEW JIM CROW* (Chapters 4, 5 and 6)  
Research Paper Workshop: Format, Documentation and Writing.

Week 6, The Week of 7 October

Readings: Melissa Harris-Perry, *SISTER CITIZEN: SHAME, STEREOTYPES AND BLACK WOMEN IN AMERICA*, Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Week 7, The Week of 14 October

Readings: Melissa Harris-Perry, *SISTER CITIZEN*, CHAPTERS 5 AND 6.

Week 8, The Week of 21 October

Readings: Complete Melissa Harris-Perry, *SISTER CITIZEN*, Chapters 5, 6, and 7.  
Written and oral review in preparation for the mid-term examination.

THE MID-TERM EXAMINATION, Thursday, 24 October 2013

Week 9, The Week of 28 October

Readings: Robin D. G. Kelley, *FREEDOM DREAMS: THE BLACK RADICAL IMAGINATION*, pp. 1-134.

Film: "Scottsboro: An American Tragedy"

Week 10, The Week of 4 November

Readings: Complete Robin D.G. Kelley's *FREEDOM DREAMS*, pp. 135-198.

Film: "Scandalize My Name"

Week 11, The Week of 11 November

Readings: Randall Kennedy, *THE PERSISTENCE OF THE COLOR LINE: RACIAL POLITICS AND THE OBAMA PRESIDENCY*, Chapters 1 and 2.

Week 12, The Week of 18 November

Readings: Randall Kennedy, *THE PERSISTENCE OF THE COLOR LINE*, Chapters 3, 4 and 5

Week 13, The Week of 25 November

Film: "Marcus Garvey : Look for Me in the Whirlwind"

THANKSGIVING

Week 14, The Week of 2 December

Readings: Complete Randall Kennedy's THE PERSISTENCE OF THE COLOR LINE,  
Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

RESEARCH PAPERS ARE DUE ON TUESDAY, 3 DECEMBER

.OUR FINAL DAY OF CLASS IS TUESDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2013

Review in Preparation for the Final Examination