

**Professor Strickland**  
**Office Hours: TuTh 9:30-11:00 (or by appt.)**  
**Office Phone: 545-5167**  
**Room: #309 New Africa House**

**Fall 2009**

**AFROAM 691F “Black Political Struggle & the American Political System”**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

An historical examination of the black political struggle for equality and citizenship in America—the obstacles placed in the path of that struggle by the American political system in general and by the American state in particular—and the countless ways in which racial politics have shaped the system that is called American Democracy...and continues to impact the unprecedented Obama presidency.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

Annette Gordon-Reed, THOMAS JEFFERSON & SALLY HEMINGS  
Garry Wills, NEGRO PRESIDENT  
Philip Dray, CAPITOL MEN  
C. Vann Woodward, THE STRANGE CAREER OF JIM CROW  
Douglas Blackmon, SLAVERY BY ANOTHER NAME  
Klinkner & Smith, THE UNSTEADY MARCH  
Steve Lawson, RUNNING FOR FREEDOM  
Wil Haygood, KING OF THE CATS  
William Strickland, MALCOLM X: MAKE IT PLAIN\*\*\*  
John A. Williams, THE MAN WHO CRIED I AM  
Michael Moore, STUPID WHITE MEN  
*The Black Scholar*, “Barack Obama 2009” (Winter, 2008)

\*\*\*This book is currently out of print but is available from Amazon.com. All other books are at the Food For Thought Bookstore.

**COURSE PURPOSE**

This seminar is designed with two purposes in mind: to give students an historical grounding in American political history—and the racial dynamic that has driven it—so that they might be able to teach that history if called upon to do so in their subsequent careers and as an exercise in political theorizing about the origin and development of the American racial state. The question that underlies this inquiry is quite simple: Since public policy in America has sanctioned slavery, segregation, discrimination and institutional racism how is it possible to reconcile the democratic theory of the state with the black civic experience? For example, the state may be conceptualized as an autonomous actor; a neutral arbiter; a gendarme; or an instrument of class, racial and gender oppression. But whichever way the state is conceived, given its racial nature, it performs a certain role in allocating wealth, status, privilege, and resources to some while withholding those perquisites from others. Moreover, although a taboo subject in conventional appraisals, the chief means employed by the state and citizenry to maintain and perpetuate the racial social order has been the resort to violence. Slavery was violent and was only overthrown by violence. Reconstruction was dismantled by violence. The system of Jim Crow rested upon the foundation of violence. And the resistance to the freedom movement was, at its core, also violent. Our challenge then is to look longitudinally at American political history to try and reformulate a more accurate understanding of how the Republic has related actually, rather than mythically, to the black

presence in its midst and to ask: What are the glaring lacunae in America's racial political history and what new research questions ought to be pursued to develop a more adequate theory of that history?

The seminar will thus have two foci. First we will review the history to try and grasp a new understanding of how and why it unfolded as it did. At the same time we will keep running notes of events that occur in the next months of Obama's presidency which validate, or repudiate, the notion of America as some new post-racial society. For example, are the "birthing movements," the uproar over his speech to public school students, the attacks on him and his policies as "socialist," just Right-wing politics as usual or a more sinister racist politics in disguise? And how do we objectively argue for one or the other interpretation?

This overview/analysis part of the course will take us through the first 12 weeks and students will be expected to write two analytical essays on the reading. With this background grounding, students will write a research paper, with the approval of the instructor, of twenty to twenty-five pages on a topic of their choice. This paper may either be on some topic of interest arising out of the overall history or a comparison of some aspect of Obama's presidency with something in America's past like the equally unprecedented racial achievements of Reconstruction. (There's also the fact that Obama likes to cite Lincoln as a role model.) Or since Malcolm always said that the essence of racism was the double standard, you might want to compare Bush's first year in office with Obama's—especially how they were, respectively, treated by the Press. The last two weeks of the seminar will be devoted to class presentations of the first and second drafts of the final research paper.

### **COURSE OUTLINE & SCHEDULE**

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| Sept 10 | Introduction: The Problem of Denial by the Historical Establishment<br>1. Du Bois, BLACK RECONSTRUCTION, chpt. 17, "The Propaganda of History"<br>2. Strickland, "Du Bois's Revenge"                      |
| Sept 17 | 1. Gordon-Reed, JEFFERSON & SALLY HEMINGS, "If Jefferson is wrong, America is wrong."<br>2. Film, "Jefferson in Paris," Part 1  |
| Sept 24 | 1. Wills, NEGRO PRESIDENT<br>2. Film, "Jefferson in Paris," Part 2  |
| Oct 1   | The Betrayal of Reconstruction<br>1. Dray, CAPITOL MEN<br>2. UNSTEADY, chpts. 1 - 3<br>3. Film, "Birth of a Nation"   |
| Oct 8   | FIRST REACTION PAPER DUE: Based on what you've read so far, how would you re-theorize the history? Can you restage it or recontextualize it? And is there any "left-out" history that should be restored? |
| Oct 15  | The 20 <sup>th</sup> Century and the Myth of the "New South"<br>Van Woodward, STRANGE CAREER  |
| Oct 22  | The Reality of the Re-Enslaving South<br>Blackmon, SLAVERY BY ANOTHER NAME  |

- Oct 29 From Protest to Resistance & From Democratic Malefactors to Republican  
UNSTEADY, chpts. 4 – 8  
Film, “Mississippi: Is This America?”
- Nov 5 Taking on the System: Adam & Malcolm  
Haygood, KING OF THE CATS  
Strickland, MALCOLM X: MAKE IT PLAIN
- Nov 12 The Best Political Novel of the Era  
Williams, THE MAN WHO CRIED I AM
- Nov 19 Conservatism as Racism  
RUNNING, chpts. 5- 8  
UNSTEADY, chpt. 9 & Conclusion  
SECOND PAPER: Political racism changes as need be with the times. So how do the  
contemporary benefits of this exploitation compare with the gains of the past?
- Nov 26 Thanksgiving! No Class
- Dec 3 Bush vs. Obama  
Michael Moore, STUPID WHITE MEN  
*The Black Scholar*, “Barack Obama 2009”
- Dec 10 Last Class!!!
- Dec 17 Papers Due

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