

STPEC 492H
Fall 2008, Tuesdays, 4 to 6:30 p.m.
Machmer W27

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Black Politics

The central focus of this course will be on the context and conduct of Black politics in the post civil-rights era. With the elimination of the historical barriers to political participation that followed from the civil-rights movement, Black people have secured a very real place in the American political system.

Simultaneously, there have been marked changes in the cultural, social and economic forces in the black community which have shaped a very different context for political action. The continued hyper-concentration of the Black poor, the expansion of the Black middle class, and the changing fabric of urban life are key factors shaping political agendas, alliances, limits and pre-conditions for contemporary Black politics.

We will pay attention to the historical and cultural foundations of Black politics, but our concentration will be on the nature of the struggle for power and place that defines Black politics today.

Readings

Following is a list of books which will be required for this course, available for purchase at Food for Thought Books. We will also use Reserve at the Library whenever possible. Additional articles may be required, either handed out in class or distributed via e-mail or library reserve.

1. Stirrings In the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era, Adolph Reed, Jr., University of Minnesota, 1999.
2. American Project: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Ghetto, Sudhir Venkatesh, Harvard Press, 2002.
3. Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African American Political Ideologies, Michael C. Dawson, The University of Chicago Press, 2001.
4. Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights Black Power Era, Penil E. Joseph, Routledge, 2006.
5. Black On the Block, Mary Pattillo, University of Chicago Press, 2007.
6. Revolutionaries to Race Leaders, Black Power and the Making of African American Politics, Cedric Johnson, University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Assignments

This is a seminar, so class participation is fundamental to its success. You are expected to attend regularly, to stay abreast of the assigned readings, and to be richly engaged in our conversations. Each of you will also be expected to follow the news and opinions published on a relevant website which focuses on issues we are considering.

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You will be required to complete two papers. I will provide you with guidelines for these assignments separately.

First, a 5 to 6 page essay which will be due on October 21st.

Final research paper, which is a longer project, will be due on December 20th the last day of final exams. Part of this effort will also be a presentation in class on December 9th.

Schedule of Classes

Section I. The pits and pillars of African American political life. Black Americans in the segregated American social order.

September 2 - Introduction and overview.

September 9 - Beginning at the end, exploring the beginnings. If some are imagining the end of Black politics, what were its beginnings and historical evolution to this point?

Reading: Bai, "Is Obama the end of Black politics?"

Video: "Slavery and the Making of America" vol. 3

September 16 - Slavery, Reconstruction and the establishment of Jim Crow laws and practices.

Video: "Reconstruction- the Second Civil War"

Section II. The struggle to eliminate segregation.

September 23 - Brown v. Board of Education: Its antecedents and its aftermath

Reading: Sitkoff, The Struggle for Black Equality, chapters 1-3 pp. 3-87

Video: "February One"

September 30 - The Civil Rights Movement and the emergence of "Black Power"

Reading: Joseph, The Black Power Movement, chapters 1,2 and 6-10

Johnson, Revolutionaries to Race Leaders, chapters 1-2

Section III. From militance to mainstream; constructing the 'modern' Black political regime

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October 7 - Pronouncing the Black revolution, asking, "how do we get there from here?"

Reading: Reed, chapters 1-2
Johnson, chapters 3-5 and conclusion

October 15 - No class meeting. Individual meetings during the morning and afternoon.

October 21 - Technocrats and office holders- "That wasn't so far after all"

Reading: Reed, chapters 3-5

October 28 - Black women: struggling on several fronts

Reading: Dawson, chapter 4
Joseph, chapters 3-5

November 4 - Black unity, Black divisions. Poverty and the "underclass". Who are they, where do they live?

Reading: Reed, chapter 6
Venkatesh- entire book

November 11 - No class. Research project should be developed.

November 17 & 18 - Individual meetings by pre-arrangement

November 18 - Class divisions, political divisions

Reading - Pattillo, entire book

November 25 - Thinking Black Politics: Ideas matter

Reading - Dawson, chapters 1-3, 5-6

December 2 - Black Politics in the Obama era

Reading - Reed, chapter 7
Dawson, chapter 7
Johnson, conclusion

December 9- Student Presentations