

**AAST 306/ POLS 311**  
**Black Politics in the United States**  
Tuesdays-Thursdays 12:30 – 1:45 PM, BSB 1115

**Cedric Johnson**

Office: 1217 University Hall

Office hours: Tuesdays 10:30 AM- 12 PM or by appointment.

cedjohns@uic.edu / 312.413.1274 (w)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is an intensive overview of African American politics. We will examine black political activity from the Jim Crow era to the present, emphasizing the discrete class interests and ideologies that have shaped black political life. Part I of the course revisits the 2005 Hurricane Katrina disaster and its aftermath, and weighs the implications of neoliberal privatization and its role in producing contemporary inequality. Part II considers the historical origins of the black ethnic politics and how the black popular struggles of the 1960s and 1970s advanced and challenged racial liberalism. We will also explore the process of black political integration, and discuss the political and fiscal challenges faced by black urban politicians. Part III examines the rise of the mass incarceration, and the various protests against police violence in Ferguson, Baltimore and beyond. The course readings will include historical studies, classic essays, documentary film, and more recent scholarly work.

**COURSE GOALS**

This course is designed to help students achieve the following learning objectives:

- a) to identify the complex political, economic and social causes of the 2005 Katrina disaster, and its implications for African American social and political life over the past decade.
- b) to understand neoliberalism as the rejection of social democracy in favor of market rule and forms of regulation that best support profit-making and capital flows.
- c) to discern how racial/ethnic identity are distinctive from and yet related to class (the roles different groups play in the production and distribution of goods and services).
- d) to understand the origins and character of black ethnic politics.

e) to identify the major ideological currents and material interests that have defined black political life since the civil rights movement.

f) to describe the process of black political incorporation and explain whether this particular strategy has led to racial group empowerment.

g) to enhance one's appreciation and capacity for critical intellectual engagement.

## **BASIC EXPECTATIONS**

I expect you to:

- Be prompt and prepared for each class session;
- Read and follow the written syllabus and ask any clarifying questions in advance;
- Take the initiative in communicating with me before problems get out of control; and
- Evaluate your own work according to the course goals and expectations.

You can expect me (the professor) to:

- Arrive on time and be prepared for class;
- Follow the syllabus and alert you to any changes in advance;
- Respond as quickly and as thoroughly as possible to your work;
- Be available to you during scheduled office hours; and  
Evaluate your work fairly according to clearly communicated expectations.

## **REQUIRED READINGS**

Cedric Johnson, ed. *The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism and the Remaking of New Orleans* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

James Forman, Jr., *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017).

All additional readings will be made available on Blackboard as PDFs or as URL links.

## **GENERAL POLICIES**

**Cell Phones and Laptops:** Cell phones and laptops may not be used during class time and must be set so that they are completely inaudible. Students who are caught utilizing cellphones, laptops, tablet computers, etc. for social media, internet surfing or other non-course related activity will be penalized with a F for their participation grade and may be asked to leave the class.

**Special Needs:** If you have any medical or other condition that affects your ability to participate in any element of the course, you must inform me no later than the second class meeting. Where appropriate, you must provide relevant documentation from the Disability Resource Center (312.413.2183, voice and 312.957.4822, video phone). Once such documentation of a medical or other condition is provided, I will try to meet any special needs you may have. If a new condition arises during the course, official and personal documentation is ABSOLUTELY required.

**Academic Integrity:** Academic dishonesty, including but not limited to plagiarism, cheating and bribes, clearly violates the university's expressed commitment to academic integrity and will not be tolerated. If you are suspected of plagiarism during the course, you will receive an "F" for the assignment and depending on the circumstances, may fail the course. Additionally, all incidences of academic dishonesty will be handled pursuant to student disciplinary policy.

**Attendance:** You are expected to attend class regularly and be actively involved in the learning process. STUDENTS WITH MORE THAN TWO (2) ABSENCES WILL BE PENALIZED WITH THE REDUCTION OF THEIR FINAL GRADE FOR THE COURSE BY ONE FULL LETTER GRADE (e.g., a student who earns an A- but has missed 3 regularly scheduled classes will receive a B- for the course). Tardiness is greatly discouraged. Out of respect for me and your fellow students, I expect you to arrive on time.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**1) Engagement:** The intensity and workload of this course demand that students take the readings seriously. You must set aside sufficient time, space and energy for reading (and in some instances, re-reading) course materials prior to coming to class. Students are expected to participate fully in class discussions by sharing their interpretations, questions and criticisms of the readings and films.

Pop Quizzes and written assignments will be incorporated as needed. These assignments will be mildly intensive in terms of labor and time commitments. Therefore, students are expected to complete these assignments in the stipulated amount of time.

**2) Short Assignments:** You are required to complete two short written assignments (4-6 pp.) for this course. Detailed instructions for the completion of this assignment will be provided during the course.

**3) Mid-Term Examination:** All students are required to take a mid-term examination. This exam is designed to assess your familiarity with core themes and concepts introduced in the first half of the course.

**4) Final Examination:** All students are required to take a final examination. This exam will be cumulative and incorporate material from throughout the course.

Make up exams are possible only under very unusual circumstances. Prior notification must be provided for a missed examination. With an acceptable excuse a make-up exam will be rescheduled within *two* days of the regularly scheduled examination date. If a student misses the make-up exam, s/he will not be allowed another opportunity.

### **Grading Policy**

Engagement	10%
Short Assignments	30%
Mid-Term Examination	30%
Final Examination	30%

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

### **PART I NEOLIBERALISM AND CONTEMPORARY BLACK POLITICAL LIFE**

#### **August 29 and August 31: Introduction and Course Overview**

Michael Zweig, "Six Points on Class," <http://monthlyreview.org/2006/07/01/six-points-on-class>

#### **September 5 and 7: What is Neoliberalism?**

Elizabeth Martinez and Arnaldo Garcia, "What is 'Neoliberalism'? A Brief Definition for Activists," <http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=376>

Cedric Johnson, Preface and Introduction to *The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism and the Remaking of New Orleans*.

In Class Film Screening: *Trouble the Water*, a 2008 film by Tia Lessin and Carl Deal which recounts the story of Katrina survivors, Kim and Scott Roberts.

#### **September 12 and 14: Housing and Uneven Development**

John Arena, "Black and White, Unite and Fight? Identity Politics and New Orleans Post-Katrina Public Housing Movement," in *The Neoliberal Deluge*.

Cedric Johnson, "Charming Accommodations: Progressive Urbanism Meets Privatization in Brad Pitt's Make It Right Foundation," in *The Neoliberal Deluge*.

## **September 19, 21 and 26: Land of Opportunity?**

Richard Campanella, "Gentrification and Its Discontents: Notes from New Orleans," *New Geography* 1 March 2013. <http://www.newgeography.com/content/003526-gentrification-and-its-discontents-notes-new-orleans>

Allison Plyer, Nihal Shrinath, and Vicki Mack, "The New Orleans Index at Ten: Measuring Greater New Orleans' Progress Towards Prosperity," *The Data Center* 31 July 2015. [http://www.datacenterresearch.org/reports\\_analysis/new-orleans-index-atten/](http://www.datacenterresearch.org/reports_analysis/new-orleans-index-atten/)

In-Class Film Screening: *Land of Opportunity*, a 2010 film by Luisa Dantas that examines the personal stories and larger political struggles shaping post-Katrina New Orleans.

## **September 28 and October 3: Precarity**

Linda Robertson, "How Shall We Remember New Orleans? Comparing News Coverage of Post-Katrina New Orleans and the 2008 Midwest Floods," in *The Neoliberal Deluge*.

Avis Jones-Deweever, "The Forgotten Ones: Black Women in the Wake of Katrina," in *The Neoliberal Deluge*.

Nicole Trujillo-Pagán, "Hazardous Constructions: Mexican Immigrant Masculinity and the Rebuilding of New Orleans," in *The Neoliberal Deluge*.

## **October 5: NO CLASS**

## **October 10: MID-TERM EXAMINATION**

### **PART II FROM PROTEST TO POLITICS: BLACK POLITICAL INTEGRATION**

## **October 12: The Limits of Civil Rights Liberalism**

In Class Film screening: Malcolm X's 1963 appearance on WMAQ's *City Desk*, a local Chicago television program. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yq-Q-omi3U8>

## **October 17 and 19: The New Nationalism and the Origins of Black Power**

Harold Cruse, "Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American," (blackboard)

Malcolm X, "Message to the Grassroots,"  
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~public/civilrights/a0147.html>

## **October 24 and 26: The New Black Political Regime**

Dean Robinson, "Black Nationalism as Ethnic Pluralism," from *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought* (blackboard).

Adolph Reed, Jr. Chapter 3, "The Black Urban Regime: Structural Origins and Constraints," from *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-segregation era* (blackboard).

## **October 31 & November 2: "Post-Racial" Politics**

Andra Gillespie, "Meet the New Class: Theorizing Young Black Leadership in the 'Postracial' era," from *Whose Black Politics?* (blackboard).

In-Class Film Screening: *Street Fight*, a 2005 Documentary film that examines Corey Booker's unsuccessful campaign to defeat incumbent Newark Mayor Sharpe James.

## **PART III PRISONS, POLICING AND #BLACKLIVESMATTER**

### **November 7 and 9: The New Jim Crow?**

Michelle Alexander, "The Rebirth of Caste," from *The New Jim Crow* (blackboard).

James Forman, Jr. "Racial Critiques of Mass Incarceration: Beyond the New Jim Crow," *New York University Law Review* 87 (February 2012): 101-146. (blackboard).

### **November 14 and 16: Black Washington DC and the Heroin Epidemic**

James Forman, Jr., *Locking Up Our Own*, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2.

### **November 21: Black Police and Policing Reform**

James Forman, Jr. *Locking Up Our Own*, Chapter 3.

### **November 23: NO CLASS Thanksgiving Holiday.**

### **November 28 and 30: The War on Drugs and Mass Incarceration**

James Forman, Jr., *Locking Up Our Own*, Chapters 4-6.

**December 5 and 7: What Must Be Done, and Who Is Going to Do It?**

James Forman, Jr., *Locking Up Our Own*, "Epilogue: The Reach of Our Mercy, 2014-2016,"

Cedric Johnson, "Afterword: Baltimore, the Policing Crisis and the End of the Obama Era," in James DeFilippis, ed. *Urban Policy in the Time of Obama* (blackboard).

A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom and Justice  
<https://policy.m4bl.org>

**FINAL EXAMINATION—Friday December 15, 8:00- 10:00 AM.**