

University of Illinois at Chicago

**BLST 306/ POLS 311
Black Politics in the United States**
Mondays and Wednesdays 8:00-9:15 AM, Taft 204

Cedric Johnson

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

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the making of contemporary 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 examines core concepts and debates in contemporary black political life. Part II considers the historical origins of black ethnic politics and how black political movements 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 politics of mass incarceration, and the various popular mobilizations against police violence in Ferguson, Baltimore and beyond. The course readings will include historical studies, classic essays, documentary film, and more recent works in the sub-field.

COURSE GOALS

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

- a) 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).
- b) to understand the origins and character of black ethnic politics.
- c) to identify the major ideological currents and material interests that have defined black political life since the civil rights movement.
- d) to describe the process of black political incorporation and explain whether this particular strategy has led to racial group empowerment.
- e) to understand neoliberalism as the rejection of social democracy in favor of advancing market rule and forms of regulation that best support profit-making and capital flows.
- f) to understand the role of neoliberalization in shaping the American city, and its implications for African American social and political life over the last four decades.
- 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

William P. Jones, *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2013).

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 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 / drc@uic.edu). 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.

Pop Quizzes and short 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 Paper: You are required to complete one short paper (4-6 pp) for this course. Detailed instructions for the completion of this assignment are provided in the reading schedule below.

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 Paper	20%
Mid-Term Examination	35%
Final Examination	35%

COURSE SCHEDULE

PART I WHAT IS BLACK POLITICS?

August 23 and 25: Introduction and Course Overview

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

August 30 and September 1: Thinking Race and Class

Barbara Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," (blackboard)

The Dig with Daniel Denvir, "Revisiting *Racecraft* with Barbara Fields and Karen Fields," radio podcast interview, <https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/daniel-denvir-2/the-dig-2/e/52552588>

September 6: NO CLASS Labor Day

September 8: The Underclass Myth

Micaela di Leonardo, "White Lies, Black Myths: Rape, Race and the Black 'Underclass,'" in Roger Lancaster and Micaela DiLeonardo, eds., *The Gender/ Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy* (Routledge, 1997). (blackboard)

Adolph Reed, Jr., "The Underclass as Myth and Symbol," in *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Postsegregation Era* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999). (blackboard)

Short Paper Assignment: Micaela di Leonardo seeks to debunk common myths about race and upward social mobility in America. What are the "white lies" she refers to in her work? What are the "black myths"? What is the "underclass"? What are alternative ways of thinking about the making of the middle class does di Leonardo offer? *Your paper is due on Wednesday September 15 (NO LATE EXCEPTIONS). All work must be typed, double-spaced, 12 pt. type size. Your paper should run approximately 4-6 pages in length.*

PART II FROM PROTEST TO POLITICS: BLACK POLITICAL INTEGRATION

September 13 and 15: The March on Washington Movement and the New Deal

William P. Jones, *The March on Washington*, Preface and Chapters 1-3.

A. Philip Randolph: For Jobs and Freedom, 1996 film by Dante James (Kanopy).

September 20 and 22: The 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

William P. Jones, *The March on Washington*, Chapters 4-6 and Epilogue.

September 27 and 29: The Limits of Civil Rights Liberalism

Malcolm X, "Message to the Grassroots,"

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~public/civilrights/a0147.html> (blackboard)

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

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> (blackboard)

October 4 and 6: The New Black Political Regime

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 11 and October 13: "Post Racial" Politics

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

Street Fight, a 2005 Documentary film that examines Corey Booker's unsuccessful campaign to defeat incumbent Newark Mayor Sharpe James. (Kanopy)

October 18: MIDTERM EXAMINATION

PART III PRISONS, POLICING AND #BLACKLIVESMATTER

October 20: Ferguson

In-Class Film Screening: *Whose Streets?* A 2017 film directed by Sabaah Folayan and Damon Davis, which explores the Ferguson uprising following the police killing of Michael Brown (<https://uic.kanopy.com/video/whose-streets>).

October 25 and October 27: The Policing Crisis and the Movement for Black Lives

Jarrod Shanahan and Zhandarka Kurti, "Prelude to a Hot American Summer," *Brooklyn Rail* July-August 2020. <https://brooklynrail.org/2020/07/field-notes/Prelude-to-a-Hot-American-Summer>

Mariame Kaba, "Yes, We Literally Mean Abolish the Police," *New York Times* 12 June 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/12/opinion/sunday/floyd-abolish-defund-police.html>

November 1 and 3: 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 8 and 10: Black Washington DC and the Heroin Epidemic

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

November 15 and 17: Black Police and Police Brutality

James Forman, Jr. *Locking Up Our Own*, Chapter 3-4.

In-class Film Screening: Brett Story's 2016 film *The Prison in Twelve Landscapes* (<https://uic.kanopy.com/video/prison-twelve-landscapes-1>).

November 22: The War on Drugs and Mass Incarceration

James Forman, Jr., *Locking Up Our Own*, Chapters 5-6.

November 24: NO CLASS THANKSGIVING

November 29 and December 1: 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,"

Tauheeda Yasin Martin, "Between #Defund and Reform: Reimagining Safety and Restructuring American Policing," (blackboard).

Dustin Guastella, "To End Police Violence Fund Public Goods and Raise Wages," (blackboard)

FINAL EXAMINATION: Wednesday December 8 @ 8:00 AM.