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MHRA 1304  
W, 3:30-6:20

### **HIS 724 - Selected Topics in 20th Century American History: The Long Civil Rights Movement, 1880-1980**

Understanding the achievements and unfinished agendas of the modern black freedom movement requires that we expand the boundaries of the conventional civil rights narrative and see this movement through the eyes of people who made it. No longer can we simply study the "classical" period of civil rights politics bounded by the Supreme Court decision *Brown versus Board of Education* in 1954 and the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968 (though that was certainly a pivotal period worthy of our attention). We will begin this class with recent work rethinking the story of national civil rights reform and local mobilization going back to Reconstruction and the "nadir" of Jim Crow (1880-1920). We will pay close attention to the deep sources and varieties of local power and struggle in the South and the North. We will try to view the movement from local, national, and international vantage points. We will examine especially the leadership and emergent issues of women as well as men -- in their workplaces, communities, streets, schools and local welfare offices. We will explore northern and western movements, the roots and achievements of the Black Power movement, and the international context of mobilization and political reform. We'll examine the "Popular Front" antifascist movement of the 1930s and 1940s culminating in World War II, and evaluate the impact of the Cold War and anticommunist movements of the 1950s and 1960s. Understanding how white resistance movements shaped and limited civil rights achievements will be integral to the course. Special attention will be given to connections between civil rights and issues of economic justice and workers' rights, and to strategies of "mobilization" and "organization" as they informed national civil rights reform and local black freedom struggles.

#### **Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:**

By semester's end you should be able to:

- 1) Identify and evaluate the significance of a range of leaders, organizations, events, issues, strategies, achievements, and unfulfilled agendas in the African American "long civil rights movement" between the 1860s and the 1980s. "Black freedom movement" is a comparable but not identical term. The emphasis will be from World War II through the 1970s.
- 2) Assess the validity of contrasting arguments and historical interpretations in terms of evidence presented by a range of scholars. Demonstrate through writing and speaking your ability to compare scholarship as well as compare strategies of social change in various historical contexts.
- 3) Discuss and give examples of the dynamic interplay of international, national, and local power and ideology, as African Americans have broken through barriers to citizenship and expanded the scope of self-determination (or alternatively, how they have coped with setbacks, white resistance, and changing socioeconomic conditions and power relations limiting their freedom).
- 4) Discuss and give examples of how leaders, organizations, and local activists have understood and acted upon related issues of civil rights and economic justice, education, jobs, physical violence, public welfare, Voting, public and private economic power.

5) Demonstrate concretely your understanding of how race, class, and gender have structured freedom movements and the social, cultural, economic and political contexts that inform these movements.

**Preparation as Reflected in Class Participation. 30%.** The class will rise or fall on this. Of course this is crucial, because so much of functioning well as a historian is the ability to capture the gist of an argument, to be fair yet critical, and to be able to contribute to ongoing conversations in the field. So much time and work can be saved if you make this a group process. I ask each of you, as professionals, to stay on-topic, stay high-minded, limit tangential anecdotes, and don't go negative on a piece of scholarship until we have a fair appreciation of an author's efforts and contributions. Ahem! This is a seminar, a collaborative enterprise. You get one unexcused absence.

Because of the volume of required reading, I will not ask you to do extra research or reading except as it bears directly upon issues before the class. The extra reading that you do for your historiographical essays I expect you to share with the group. I have found that requiring formal presentations from this material sometimes breaks up the flow of conversation. So this is an informal requirement, but a real one, which will be reflected both in your discussion grade, and in up to five points on the written assignment. I will try to prompt you, but I also expect to volunteer insights when you see that they would most appropriately add a dimension to discussion.

**Ten Weekly “Thesis-Response” Pieces. 30%.** These should be of 400-600 words and posted on Blackboard by at least 2 p.m. each day of class. They will enrich our discussion by asking that arrive at class having digested and *reflected* upon the material. Since I am requiring that you read 11 books, I need to be sure you have read them before the class in which they are discussed (hence the 10 assignments, which give you some wiggle room to miss one). I won't read or count these if submitted *after* class.

The assignment asks you to do two things: 1) In the first paragraph *state* through your own paraphrase the author's major conclusions or thesis. Try to do this before you finish the book. It will help you be an active reader who sorts out more or less relevant stories and pieces of information. Common sense hints: to identify these arguments, survey *first* the Introductions, Conclusions, Epilogues, historiographical footnotes, and summary sections that you find embedded in chapters. Once you know what arguments the author is making, it will be much easier to pull out details and evidence that are especially relevant to their conclusions. 2) In subsequent paragraphs, *respond* with your own positive and critical evaluations. Please don't summarize in detail. Does the author's evidence bear out his or her conclusions, or in fact do certain pieces of evidence or narrative point to different conclusions or emphases? Yes, if you see omissions, point out how these oversights may have skewed an author's interpretation. But please do not do this often. Criticism of what an author *should* have looked at frequently obscures how they have interpreted what they *did* look at. Make analytical points, and always illustrate with a concrete example and page citation. Grading scale: A, B, C and N/C (no credit). If you're scoring low on these, you can make up with later entries.

**Two Coherent Historiographical Essays. 40%.** 8-10 page essays that survey common issues and compare authorial methods and conclusions across several scholarly studies. Each essay will grapple with at least one extra book and several related scholarly articles (so grapple all-told with

two scholarly books or one scholarly book and one memoir). Up to half of what you write may discuss in greater depth the required readings. But *at least* half of each paper must assess and compare supplemental readings. As with your weekly readings, you may use book reviews (which are available online or through the Infotrac links on each book's Jackson Library page). Also, broad historiographical reviews, such as those assigned for the first class can be helpful. But since these reviews do not reflect primary research, they should not come in for *substantive* treatment. In other words, use book reviews and historiographical reviews only to help you structure the big picture and formulate questions about monographs and articles you are evaluating. Since I am looking for *your* evaluations and conclusions, if you echo a reviewer's point, you must cite it. You certainly should paraphrase and not quote it, and I need to see a greater level of depth in your analysis.

What do I mean by "coherent historiographical essays"? Basically you want to set up a limited number of related issues and pose central questions in the first paragraph. These should be questions that you find compelling, and will be common questions addressed by different authors in different ways. What you want to avoid at all costs is a *seriatim* summary of each reading, which still happens among graduate students. If you do so, your essay will hop around, feel clunky, and lack logical development. Common sense hint: If you don't see good transitions between your paragraphs, you know you've got a problem with development and coherence.

**Deadlines, or Livelines:** I will not impose overly rigid deadlines, but these must be submitted in a *timely* fashion. The first will be due no later than **October 15**, and the second no later than **December 3**. I expect your extra reading to be shared verbally and informally when it is relevant. As a rule, I would like these papers handed in the week when they are most relevant or in the *latest* week in which they are relevant. For example, if you are writing about the variety of resistance strategies against Jim Crow in the early and mid-20th-century, you should shoot for September 17. If you are writing about the impact of the Cold War on activists nationally and locally, October 15 should be the date you shoot for. If you are writing about Deep South school desegregation, October 29 should be your date (as you would also be drawing on the reading for October 8). Varieties and understandings of Black Power in the North: November 12. A comparison of the impact of white popular violence against freedom movements would be due December 3.

Check Blackboard for weekly updated supplementary reading lists and suggestions for historiographical essays. I will place citations and, when possible, .pdf documents under each week by topic. Use large integrative historiographical surveys to pinpoint works that address common questions in complementary or contrary ways.

### Schedule of Meetings and Assignments

#### 8/26: Introductions

#### 9/3: Overview of the Long Civil Rights Movement and the First Reconstruction

Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past." *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (2005).

Payne, Charles. "Debating the Civil Rights Movement: The View from the Trenches." In *Debating the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1968*, edited by Steven F. Lawson and Charles Payne, 99-136. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998.

Lawson, Steven F. "Debating the Civil Rights Movement: The View from the Nation." In *Debating the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1968*, edited by Steven F. Lawson and Charles Payne, 3-42. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998.

Ortiz, Paul. *Emancipation Betrayed : The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, 1-32.

De Jong, Greta. *A Different Day : African American Struggles for Justice in Rural Louisiana, 1900-1970*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002, ch, 1.

Preview Bolton, *Hardest Deal of All*, section on Jim Crow if time permits.

### **9/10: The Grave of Reconstruction and the Seedbed of Civil Rights**

Ortiz, Paul. *Emancipation Betrayed*, finish.

### **9/17: Survival, Self-Defense, and Black Awakening in the Rural South**

De Jong, Greta. *A Different Day*, finish.

Reflect especially it upon the impact of the New Deal and World War II on southern labor relations and race relations.

**Shortly after this class you will find your first participation evaluation grade on Blackboard.**

### **9/24: Fighting Apartheid in the Belly of the Free World -- New York City**

Biondi, Martha. *To Stand and Fight : The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003.

### **10/1: Fighting Apartheid at Home and Abroad -- Cold War Foreign and Civil Rights Policy**

Borstellmann, Thomas. *The Cold War and the Color Line : American Race Relations in the Global Arena*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001.

### **10/8: The Difference Brown Made -- School Desegregation and Local Struggle**

Bolton, Charles C. *The Hardest Deal of All : The Battle over School Integration in Mississippi, 1870-1980*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005.

**Shortly after this class you will find your second participation evaluation grade on Blackboard.**

### **10/15: Connecting the Local to the National -- Martin Luther King**

Jackson, Thomas F. *From Civil Rights to Human Rights : Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Struggle for Economic Justice*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.

**First historiographical paper is due no later than October 15.**

### **10/22: From Liberalism to Black Power in Philadelphia**

Countryman, Matthew. *Up South : Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*, Politics and Culture in Modern America. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.

### **10/29: Sources and Achievements of the Organizing Tradition -- Sunflower County Mississippi**

Moye, J. Todd. *Let the People Decide : Black Freedom and White Resistance Movements in Sunflower County, Mississippi, 1945-1986*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

**Shortly after this class you will find your third participation evaluation grade on Blackboard.**

**11/5: Women's Organizing and Coalitions -- Durham, North Carolina**

Greene, Christina. *Our Separate Ways : Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

**11/12: Fighting with "Violence" and Organizing the Community -- The Black Panther Party**

Austin, Curtis J. *Up against the Wall : Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006.

**11/19: Local and National -- Workplace Organizing and Title VII**

MacLean, Nancy. *Freedom Is Not Enough : The Opening of the American Workplace*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation; Harvard University Press, 2006.

**Shortly after this class you will find your fourth participation evaluation grade on Blackboard.**

**11/26: Black Women's Praxis: Continuities And Innovations**

Orleck, Annelise. *Storming Caesars Palace : How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2005.

**12/3: Ethnic Nationalism And the Conservative Turn**

Formisano, Ronald P. *Boston against Busing: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

**Second historiographical paper is due no later than December 3.**