HIS 724 - Selected Topics in 20th Century US History:
"The Long Civil Rights Movement and Its Legacies, 1880-1990"

This course will explore some of the best new scholarship on the sources, achievements, and unfinished agendas of the modern African American freedom movement. After grounding ourselves in a theoretical and historical and comparative understanding of white supremacy and corresponding African American oppositional cultures and movements, we will consider a series of case studies from different periods and places.

We will view the movement from local, national, and international vantage points, examining the impact of American nationalism and international pressures on civil rights organizing and reform. In particular, we will examine the leadership and emergent issues of women as well as men – "in struggle," in their workplaces, communities, streets, schools, prisons, and local welfare offices. We will be centrally concerned with how African Americans negotiated intraracial class tensions and alliances, even as we take the pulse of progressive interracial movements such as the labor movement of the 1940s and student movement of the 1960s.

We will begin by exploring the deep sources of black politics and protest traditions in communities going back to Reconstruction. We will examine how a century of social change looks through the lens of municipal power in Atlanta, Georgia. As we move forward, we will grapple with a major paradox in this burgeoning historical literature. On the one hand, we speak of a continuous and long civil rights movement that won allies and achieved important gains well before the signal achievements of the so called “classical phase” beginning with the Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka decision of 1954. On the other hand, we still regard the 1950s-1970s as a period of monumental change, developing qualitatively new forms of political action, a period when black protest spurred a broader “rights revolution” encompassing not only Blacks, but Latinos, women, immigrants, and the disabled, to name only a few.

We will give some attention to the international context of repression, mobilization and political reform between the 1940s and the 1960s. We will examine issues of violence and nonviolence, civil rights and economic justice in the period of most intense protest and organization between 1960 and 1972. We will explore the roots and achievements of the Black Power movement and its relation to concurrent and preceding civil rights politics. At that point we will consider the major policy concessions of the 1960s—the Civil and Voting Rights Acts and the War on Poverty—examining in a variety of communities how federal power and resources supported, channeled, or suppressed Black political organization.

We will examine the reaction of whites in one city, Boston, to the civil rights revolution and revolution in jurisprudence that accompanied it. We will end by evaluating what changed and what did not since the 1970s, and with some reflections on prisoners’ rights movements and local environmental justice movements.

Student 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
1880s 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 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 broke through barriers to citizenship (or alternatively, how they 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 shaped and constrained these movements. Discuss what issues and strategies and leadership roles women pursued in the racial struggle and in coalition.

**Required Readings:**

A reader with the best article length literature reviews and local studies will be available soon at only at Copy King, 611 W. Lee St., Greensboro, ph. 333-9900 (CALL THEM FIRST)


**Preparation as Reflected in Class Participation. 30%.** So much of functioning well as a historian is a conversational ability to capture the gist of an argument, be fair yet critical, and to recognize ongoing conversations in the field. Much time and work can be saved if you make this a group process. So let’s
stay on-topic, stay high-minded, limit tangential anecdotes, avoid going negative on a piece of scholarship until we have a fair appreciation of an author's efforts and contributions. This is a colloquium, a collaborative enterprise. You get one unexcused absence.

The extra reading that you do for your historiographical essays I expect you to share with the group. This is an informal requirement, but a real one. Please volunteer insights when you see that they would most appropriately add a dimension to discussion.

**Weekly Scholarly Reflection Pieces on Blackboard Discussion Board, with Post-Discussion Commentary. 30%**. Reflections pieces should be about 300 words and posted on Blackboard by midnight before each day of class. (Follow up commentary can come before or after class.) These reflection pieces will enrich our discussion by asking that you arrive at class having digested and thought upon the material. 1) Briefly *state* a question or interpretive problem that the author(s) under review address or share, and their position(s). You can do this before you finish the book or articles. Common sense hints: to identify authors’ arguments, survey first the Introductions, Conclusions, Epilogues, historiographical footnotes, or summary sections that you find embedded in chapters. 2) *Respond* with critical commentary that appreciates or critiques argument, evidence, and method. Please don't just summarize in detail. Neither should you select a small piece of the readings, especially if there are several case studies involved. Make analytical or comparative points, and always illustrate with a concrete example and page citation. 3) Later, in no more than 100 words, respond to a colleague’s comment, or follow up on something that the class did not adequately address after the class.

**“Teachable Moment” Blogs 10%**. Six times throughout the semester on a separate forum in Blackboard for that week, identify a concrete episode, quote, or development, and explain how you would use it in a classroom to illustrate an important generalization about social movements, how they develop, change course, win victories, suffer losses, or imagine alternative possibilities. These examples must be concrete and relevant to the generalization you offer, and reference identifiable people to undergraduates. And they have to be very brief, because you can only spend about 10 minutes with undergrads on any one point.

**Book Review, due March 30, 10%**. 5-6 pp. Write a concise, critical review of a book of your selection for that week, either a community study or the oral history collection, *Hands on the Freedom Plow*. If you do a community study, try to answer several of the questions posed under that week that reflect upon the course’s main themes of continuity and discontinuity, local and national power.

**Historiographical Essay. 20%. Due April 27.** Write a 10-12 page essay that survey common issues and compare authorial methods and conclusions across several scholarly studies. Always address issues of how evidence supports interpretation. Each essay will grapple in a formal way with assigned readings and several related scholarly articles and at least one book. Book reviews and broad historiographical reviews, such as those assigned for the first class can be helpful. But since these reviews do not reflect primary research, you should not lean on them for substantive analysis. Use them only to help you structure the big picture and formulate questions about monographs and articles you are evaluating. If you echo a reviewer’s point, you must cite it.

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, one after the other, without unifying themes and questions. Hint: If you don't see good transitions between your paragraphs, you know you've got a problem with development and coherence.
Check Blackboard for updated supplementary reading lists and suggestions for historiographical essays. I will place citations and, when possible, .pdf documents under each week by topic. Use historiographical surveys to pinpoint works that address common questions in complementary or contrary ways.

**Grading Scale:**
- A+: 98-100; A: 93-97; A-: 90-92; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73-76; C-: 70-72; D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; D-: 60-62; F: 59 and lower.

**Schedule of Meetings and Assignments**

1/10: **Introductions and Discussion of Historiographical Frameworks and Questions**
- Readings for this first week are all on blackboard, not the reader. All readings after today are in the Reader. I expect by week 4 that you will have read the first 3 of these articles and taken possession of the framework of questions the class will start to develop the first day.

1/17: **Jim Crow Contested: The Politics of Race and Class**
- Klincker and Smith, *The Unsteady March*, pp. 1-125 (skim early parts and grapple with Reconstruction forward)


**Recommended:**


**1/24: Intraracial Coalitions and Black Mobilization in Depression and War**

Klinkner and Smith, *The Unsteady March*, pp. 125-201 75


Beth Tompkins Bates, "A New Crowd Challenges the Agenda of the Old Guard in the NAACP, 1933-1941 " *American Historical Review*, 102, no. 2 (Apr., 1997)): 340-77. 37


**Recommended:**


**1/31: International Human Rights and Domestic Civil Rights**


Recommended:


2/7: Black Freedom and Urban Power


Revisit the long civil rights historiographical debate if you did not get to read it all.

Recommended:


2/14: From Brown to Bakke: School Desegregation and Quality Schooling

Bayor, Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta, pp. 221-260.


Recommended:

2/21: Martin Luther King, Economic Justice, and the Power of Nonviolence


Klinkler and Smith, The Unsteady March, ch. 8.

2/28: Black Revolution: New Directions in Activism and Scholarship
Jackson, From Civil Rights to Human Rights, 6-8.


Recommended:


**Spring break**

**3/13: The Power of Place: Community and Social Change**

A community study of your choosing or an analysis of *Hands on the Freedom Plow*. STUDENT REPORTS AND BOOK REVIEW DUE.


Students will select from among the many local studies listed in on blackboard. Write a book review, touching on several of the following questions:

1. What institutions, leadership, and traditions of opposition to white supremacy existed before the “classical period” of “civil rights” mobilization (1955-1968) that help explain the change that did (or did not) occur?
2. How revolutionary and in what ways were the 1960s and 1970s “movements” to this place? Does its story conform or not conform to the traditional civil rights narrative? What really changed?
3. How did national and international developments inspire local mobilization and how consequential were national institutions in accelerating and directing change? In other words, was national reform consequential?
4. What role did women play, and were there “gendered” issues?
5. What kinds of divisions, especially of class, did these black communities have, and did they develop effective cross-class coalitions? Who were the significant class bridgers?

6. What principal strategies did the local movement employ in making the most significant breakthroughs? Does this place provide insights into the interplay of nonviolence and violence or self-defense, into

7. Social Learning: Can you see people evolving in the context of political opposition and social organizing, changing strategies and issues as they experience either breakthrough or repression?

3/19: Lecture/Presentation by authors of Hands on the Freedom Plow 4 pm Virginia Dare Room
Alumni House

3/20: War on Poverty
Jackson, From Civil Rights To Human Rights, chs. 9-11.

Recommended:

3/27: Black Power

Recommended:

Jackson, From Civil Rights To Human Rights, ch. 12.


4/10: Ethnic Identities and Reactionary Populism in the 1970s


4/17: Post Civil Rights? Environmental Racism and Prisoners’ Rights

Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights*, epilogue.

Klinkler and Smith, *The Unsteady March*, 288-351.


**Recommended:**

