AFRICAN AMERICAN POLITICAL THEORY (519)
Department of Political Science

Spring 2014
TH: 8:55 AM – 10:55 AM
Room 3311-Sterling Hall
263-2763
Education 345
knlindsay@wisc.edu
Office Hours - T 10:45 AM - 12:45 PM

Course Description and Objectives:
The goal of this course is to critically examine the key issues, questions, and debates that inform contemporary African American theory. In section one of the course we explore the main currents in contemporary African American political thought. We begin by interrogating how anti-black racism informs our understanding of what political theory is and what political theory is for. We move on to ask the following questions. How do past and present African American thinkers simultaneously reflect and complicate “mainstream” political theory? What are the important differences and key tensions not only among but within African American liberal, conservative, and nationalist strains of thought?

Section two of the course focuses on African American feminists and critical race theorists' important re-analyses of African American political thought. We examine how African American feminists challenge masculinist assumptions in black nationalist, liberal, and conservative thought as well as anti-black racism in feminist theorizing. We also consider critical race theorists' claim that seemingly neutral or “color blind” laws actually normalize racism and white privilege.

The third and final section of the course explores specific debates in contemporary African American political theory. The particular questions we will analyze include but are not limited to the following. What should be the grounds of African Americans’ political solidarity? What is the political importance of African American popular culture? What kind of politics does being black and middle class engender?

Course Readings/Films:
The course pack/reader is available at the L & S Social Science Copy Center, 6120 Social Science Building, 1180 Observatory Drive, Tel: 262-5396

Four required texts are available for purchase at A Room of One’s Own Bookstore, 307 W. Johnson St. These texts are also on reserve at the Undergraduate Library, Helen C. White Building.

Texts (BOOK)
- Tommie Shelby. We Who are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity (2005)
- Shelby Steele. The Content of Our Character (1991)
- Mary Patillo. Black on the Block (2008)
Course Requirements:
1. Attending class and participating in class discussion (15%)
   You must sign the sign-in sheet at the beginning of every class, except for the first two classes when I will take attendance. **You are allowed 1 absence.** Any absences greater than this number, without an acceptable excuse, will drop your participation grade by one full letter grade regardless of the extent to which you participate in class discussions when present. If you miss more than half of all of the class meetings without a satisfactory explanation you will receive a failing grade for course. Finally, please note that this is a **reading intensive course in which** close reading of the assigned texts is key to successfully participating in class discussions.

2. Discussion Questions (10%)
   You will submit a total of **four** discussion questions throughout the semester. Use each question to comment on anything that you find contradictory, controversial, confusing or otherwise noteworthy in one or more the readings. Your question may seek clarification of particular terms or ideas; it may challenge the author’s presumptions; it may interrogate the implications of an author’s claims; or it may attempt to relate assigned readings to materials beyond the course. **A discussion question is open ended. It cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.”**

   We will use Learn@UW for discussion questions. You can access Learn@UW from the University of Wisconsin’s home page. Discussion questions are due at **9 AM via learn@uw on the Wednesday before class.** Please come to class with a copy of your question in hand.

   **You must be present in class to solicit responses to and receive credit for your discussion question.**

3. In-Class Presentation (15%)
   Each student is required to make one in class presentation on specific course readings. Students will work individually or in groups of two to do the following:
   a) Summarize key themes in the assigned readings
   b) Identify what kind of theoretical assumptions unite the assigned readings
   c) Provide four specific questions to prompt or facilitate discussion of assigned readings. At least two of these questions should reflect concerns about the readings’ potential limitations or weaknesses.

   You must submit a two page individual report (hard copy only) that: 1) summarizes the main points of your specific presentation and 2) assesses your group’s overall performance. This summary is **due, in class, one week after your presentation.**

   Group members must work together to prepare for the presentation, but each group member will be graded individually according to the following criteria: 1) preparation/organization of individual presentation and 2) clarity and thoughtfulness of individual written report.
4. Mid-Term Essay (25%)
The five page mid-term essay is an opportunity for you to compare and contrast the strengths and weakness of two major schools in African American political thought. Your mid-term essay (hard copy only) is due in my office on MARCH 10th at 2:00 PM.

5. Final Essay (35%)
You will be required to write a final 8-10 page essay that explores how two African American political theorists from different ideological traditions might interpret contemporary debates in black political thought regarding the politics of place, popular culture, or solidarity. Your final essay (hard copy only) is due in my office on MAY 14th at 3:30 PM.

Classroom Conduct: Cell phones, texting, Ipods, laptops, PDAs, and their accompanying earpieces are NOT allowed during class in order to facilitate a non-distracting and intellectually productive learning environment. If you are found using any of these devices your attendance will be "zeroed" for the day in question. "Testing" is not a valid excuse for using any of the above devices during class.

Grade Related Questions and Appeals:
I will only discuss questions about grades during office hours or by appointment - not over email or before/after class. If you would like to challenge your grade, please wait 24 hours after receiving the grade before contacting me. Final grades will be determined according to the following official UW grading scale: A 93-100; AB 88-92; B 83-87; BC 78-82; C 70-77; D 60-69; F below 60.

Late Paper Policy: Assignments turned in late will be penalized by ten (10) percentage points for each 24-hour period after the due date.

Accessibility: Please let me know if you require any alternative accommodations or if you have any accessibility concerns that may affect your performance in this course. The McBurney Resource Center (www.mcburney.wisc.edu), 1305 Linden Dr. 263-2741, TTY 263-6393, provides useful assistance and documentation regarding physical, learning, sensory, or psychological disabilities.

Section I: Roadmaps to African American Political Thought

Introduction
January 23:
- Meet and Greet
- Review Syllabus

January 30:
- H. Fogg-Davis. "The Racial Retreat of Contemporary Political Theory"
- Charles Mills. “Introduction”
- bell hooks. “Theory as Liberatory Practice”
Equality and Justice for All
February 6:
-Maria W. Stewart. “Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, the Sure Foundation of Which We must Build”
-Frederick Douglass. “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”

February 13:
-Martin Luther King. “Why we Can’t Wait;” “Letter from Birmingham;” “I Have a Dream”
-Barak Obama. “A More Perfect Union”

Towards a Black Nation
February 20:
-Malcolm X. “Message to the Grassroots;” “American colleges skillfully used to miseducate;” “The Ballot or the Bullet”
-Stokely Carmichael. “What We Want”

-Film Clip – Malcolm X/Bayard Rustin Debate

February 27:
-Maulena Karenga. “From the Nzugo Saba” (Seven Principles);" “Kawaida And Its Critics. A Sociohistorical Analysis”
-Molefi Asante “Racism, Consciousness, and Afrocentricity”
-C. Hudson-Weems. “Africana Womanism”

Freedom Right + Mid-Term Essay/Exam Review
March 6:
-(BOOK) Shelby Steele. The Content of Our Character, 1-55; 93-148

MIDTERM ESSAY DUE IN MY OFFICE ON MARCH 10th at 2:00 PM

Section II: (Re)Reading African American Political Thought

Critical Race Theory
March 13:
-Derrick Bell. “Brown versus Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma”
-Patricia Williams. “The Emperor’s New Clothes”
-Cheryl Harris. “Whiteness as Property”
Recommended:
-Richard Delgado. “Crossroads and Blind Alleys: A Critical Examination of Recent Writing About Race”

“Blackness” as a Gendered and Sexual Construct
March 27:
-Cheryl Clarke. “The Failure to Transform: Homophobia in the Black Community”
-H. Fogg Davis. “Theorizing Black Lesbians within Black Feminism”
-Pauline Terrelonge. “Feminist Consciousness and Black Women”

-Film Clip – Still Revolutionaries

April 3:
-The Combahee River Collective. The Combahee River Collective Statement
-(BOOK) Patricia Hill Collins. Black Feminist Thought, 3-23; 24-48; 269-290

SECTION III – Select Themes in African American Political Thought

Solidarity
April 10:
-(BOOK) Tommie Shelby. We Who are Dark, 1-23; 60-100; 136-160

April 17
-(BOOK) Tommie Shelby. We Who are Dark, 161-200; 201-259

Popular Culture
April 24
-(BOOK) Patricia Hill Collins. Black Feminist Thought, 76-106; 135-143
-Adolph Reed. “Posing as Politics”
-Richard Iton. “Known Rivers/New Forms”

May 1
Class and the Politics of Place
-(BOOK) Mary Patillo. Black on the Block, 1-22; 81-112; 113-148

Conclusion; Final Essay/Exam Review
May 8:
-(BOOK) Mary Patillo – Black on the Block, 259-298; 297-308

FINAL ESSAY DUE IN MY OFFICE ON MAY 14th at 3:30 PM.