AFRICAN AMERICAN POLITICAL THEORY (PS/AFRO AM519)
Department of Political Science

Fall 2014
T, TH 1:00-2:15
Ingraham 224

Professor Keisha Lindsay
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Office Hours - T 11:00-12:00
TH 11:45-12:45

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. Section one of the course explores the main currents in contemporary African American political thought. We begin by interrogating how African American thinkers both reflect and complicate “mainstream” political theory. We move on to explore important differences and key tensions within and among African American liberal, conservative, nationalist, and materialist schools of thought. Section two focuses on African American feminists and critical race theorists’ important re-analyses of African American political thought. We examine anti-black racism in feminist theorizing and how African American feminists challenge masculinist assumptions in black political thought. We also consider critical race theorists’ claim that seemingly neutral or “color blind” laws actually normalize racism and white privilege. The final section of the course explores debates in contemporary African American political theory. The particular questions we will analyze include the following. What should be the grounds of African Americans’ political solidarity? What is the political importance of African American popular culture? How do we recognize effective black leadership when see it?

This is a writing-intensive course, which means that we will employ various writing activities that are closely integrated with course readings. Written work will include two one-page “reflection” papers; a formal five page mid-term essay (which is revised); and a formal seven to eight page final essay (which is revised). Each writing assignment requires increasingly complex and sophisticated analysis of course material. Each student will also have the opportunity to work with the Writing Fellows assigned to the course. Two key principles inform the Writing Fellows Program. The first is that all writers, no matter how accomplished, can improve their writing by sharing work-in-progress and making revisions based on constructive criticism; the second is that collaboration among student peers is an especially effective mode of learning. The Writing Fellows assigned to the course will review your draft mid-term essay and draft final essay.

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

Three required texts (B) are available for purchase at A Room of One’s Own Bookstore, 315 W Gorham St. These texts are also on reserve at the Undergraduate Library, Helen C. White Building.

**Course Requirements:**

1. **Class Participation (15%)**
   
   This course is premised on discussion-based, student-led learning. Taking part in class discussion, including attending all **mandatory** conferences with Writing Fellows, is thus key both to your own intellectual development and to the success of the course.

2. **Reflection Papers (10%)**
   
   You will submit a total of two reflection papers during the semester. Use reflection papers to comment on anything that you find contradictory, controversial, confusing or otherwise noteworthy in **at least two** of the assigned readings for a given class session. Your papers may seek clarification of particular terms or ideas; they may challenge the author(s)' presumptions; they may interrogate the implications of the author(s)' claims; or they may attempt to relate assigned readings to materials beyond the course.

   **Please end each of your reflection papers with two specific questions for class discussion.** Reflection papers are intended to keep you engaged with the readings. They should **not** be used to provide detailed summaries of the assigned texts. Each paper must be **between 250 to 275 words long.**

   We will use Learn@UW for reflection papers. You can access Learn@UW from the University of Wisconsin's home page. Please **cut and paste** your papers directly into the relevant text box (no attachments). Reflection papers are due at **6 pm via learn@uw on the evening before** class. Please come to class with **one hard copy** of your reflection paper in hand. **You must be present in class to solicit responses to and receive credit for your reflection papers.**

3. **Mid-Term Essay (35%)**
   
   The first draft of your mid-term essay is **due in my office on MONDAY, OCTOBER 6 AT 2:30 PM.** A revised copy of your mid-term essay (hard copy only) is **due in my office on Friday, OCTOBER 24 AT 2:30 PM.**

4. **Final Essay (40%)**
   
   The first draft of your final essay is **due in my office on TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2 at 2:30 PM.** A revised copy of your final essay (hard copy only) is **due in my office on FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19 at 2:30 PM.**

**Classroom Conduct:** Cell phones, texting, laptops, 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.
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
September 2:
-Meet and Greet
-Review Syllabus

September 4:
-bell hooks. “Theory as Liberatory Practice”

September 9:
-Charles Mills. “Introduction”

Equality and Justice for All
September 11:
-Frederick Douglass. “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”

September 16:
-Martin Luther King. “I Have a Dream;” “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”; Why We Can’t Wait (pp. 518-533 only)
-Barak Obama. “A More Perfect Union”

Towards a Black Nation
September 18:
-Malcolm X. “The Ballot or the Bullet; “Message to the Grassroots”
-In class film clip – Malcolm X/Bayard Rustin Debate
September 23:
- Maulena Karenga. “From the Nzugo Saba” (Seven Principles)"
- Molefi Asante "Racism, Consciousness, and Afrocentricity"

September 25:
- Cornel West. “Malcolm X and Black Rage” (B)

Freedom Right
September 30:
- Shelby Steele. “I’m Black You’re Right, Who’s Innocent”

October 2:
MID-TERM ESSAY PREP

DRAFT MIDTERM ESSAY DUE: MONDAY, OCTOBER 6 AT 2:30PM

October 7:
- W.E.B. Dubois. “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others”
- Cornel West. “Demystifying the New Black Conservatism” (B)

Towards a Black Materialism
October 9:
- Cornel West – “Preface 2001” (B)
Manning Marable. “Introduction” and “Conclusion”

October 14:
- Lucius Outlaw. “On Race and Class or the Prospects of Rainbow Socialism”
- Angela Davis. "Rape, Racism and the Capitalist Setting”

Section II: (Re)Reading African American Political Thought

Critical Race Theory
October 16:
- Gloria Ladson-Billings. “Just what is critical race theory and what’s it doing in a nice field like education?”
- Derrick Bell. “Brown versus Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma”

October 21:
- Cheryl Harris. “Whiteness as Property”
- Patricia Williams. “The Emperor’s New Clothes”

“Blackness” as a Gendered and Sexual Construct
October 23:
- Sojourner Truth. “Ain’t I A Woman”
-Anna Julia Cooper. "Woman vs. The Indian"
-Patricia Hill Collins. “Politics of Black Feminist Thought” (B)

**REVISED MIDTERM ESSAY DUE: FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24 AT 2:30PM**

October 28:
-Patricia Hill Collins. “Distinguishing Features of Black Feminist Thought” (21-33 & 39-44) & “Toward a Politics of Empowerment” (B)


October 30:
-H. Fogg Davis. “Theorizing Black Lesbians within Black Feminism”
-Cheryl Clarke. “The Failure to Transform: Homophobia in the Black Community”

November 4:
- In class film: Brother Outsider

**SECTION III – Select Themes in African American Political Thought**

*Solidarity*

November 6:
-Tommie Shelby. “Introduction” & “Black Solidarity after Black Power” (B)

November 11:
-Tommie Shelby. “Social Identity and Group Solidarity” & “Conclusion” (B)

*Leadership*

November 13:
-Cornel West. “The Crisis of Black Leadership”; “The Pitfalls of Racial Reasoning” (B)

November 18:
-Tommie Shelby. “Class, Poverty, and Shame” (pp. 78-100); “Black Power Nationalism ” (pp. 116-121)
-Joy James. “Captive Theorists and Community Caretakers”

November 20:
-Patricia Hill Collins. “Rethinking Black Women’s Activism” (B)
-*bell hooks. “Black Women Intellectuals”*

November 25:
-FINAL ESSAY PREP

**DRAFT FINAL ESSAY DUE TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2 AT 2:30 PM**

December 2:
- In class film: Unbought and Unbossed
Popular Culture

December 4:
- Adolph Reed. “Posing as Politics”
- Richard Iton. “Known Rivers/New Forms”

December 9:
- Robyn Kelley. “Looking to Get Paid”
- Michael Eric Dyson. “Gangsta Rap and American Culture”

December 11:
- Patricia Hill Collins. “Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images” & “Pornography and Black Women’s Bodies” (B)
- Mullins, Katie L. “Black Female Identity and Challenges to Masculine Discourse in Rah Digga’s Dirty Harriet”

REVISED FINAL ESSAY DUE IN MY OFFICE FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19 AT 2:30.