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

Spring 2017  
T, TH 1:00-2:15  
EDUCATION L177

Professor Keisha Lindsay  
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OFFICE HOURS:  
Tuesdays 8:25-9:25 am  
Thursdays 11:45-12:45 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. 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 we 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 both mandatory conferences with Writing Fellows, is thus key
both to your own intellectual development and to the success of the course. I WILL DEDUCT A
FULL LETTER GRADE from your overall participation grade if you fail to: a) attend both mandatory
conferences with your Writing Fellow and/or b) fail to submit a complete, fully-drafted mid-term and
final essay to your Writing Fellow.

You must sign the sign-in sheet at the beginning of every class. YOU ARE ALLOWED 2 ABSENces.
Any absences greater than this number 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 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 NOON via learn@uw on the DAY BEFORE
class. You must be present in class to solicit responses to and receive credit for your
reflection papers.

3. Mid-Term Essay (5-6 pages) (35%)
The first draft of your mid-term essay is due on FEBRUARY 27 AT 4:00 pm. A revised copy
of your mid-term essay (hard copy only) is due in my office on MARCH 13 AT 4:00 PM.

4. Final Essay (7-8 pages) (40%)
The first draft of your final essay is due in my office on APRIL 19 AT 4:00 PM. A revised
 copy of your final essay (hard copy only) is due in my office on MAY 4 AT 1:00 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*

January 17:
- Meet and Greet
- Review Syllabus

January 19:
- bell hooks. “Theory as Liberatory Practice”
- H. Fogg-Davis. "The Racial Retreat of Contemporary Political Theory"

January 24:
- Michael Hanchard. “The Contours of Black Political Thought” (pp. 510-516; 523-531)
- Tommie Shelby. “African American Philosophy: Theorizing Between Disciplines”

*Equality and Justice for All*

January 26:
- Frederick Douglass. “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”

January 31:
- Ida B. Wells. “Lynch Law in America”

February 2:
- 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”
February 7:
-In class film: Unbought and Unbossed

Towards a Black Nation

February 9:
-Malcolm X. “The Ballot or the Bullet; Message to the Grassroots”

February 14:
-Maulena Karenga. “From the Nzugo Saba” (Seven Principles)"
-Molefi Asante "Racism, Consciousness, and Afrocentricity”

February 16:
-In Class Film: Still Revolutionaries

Freedom Right

February 21:
-Shelby Steele. “I’m Black You’re Right, Who’s Innocent”

February 23: MID-TERM ESSAY PREP/REVIEW

DRAFT MIDTERM ESSAY DUE: MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27 AT 4:00pm

February 28:
-W.E.B. Dubois. “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others”
-Cornel West. “Demystifying the New Black Conservatism”

Towards a Black Materialism

March 2:
-Manning Marable. “Introduction” and “Conclusion”

March 7:
-Mary Patillo. “Introduction” & “The Black Bourgeoisie Meets the Truly Disadvantaged”

Section II: (Re)Reading African American Political Thought

Critical Race Theory

March 9:
-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”

REVISED MIDTERM ESSAY DUE: MONDAY, MARCH 13 AT 4:00 PM

March 14:
- Cheryl Harris. “Whiteness as Property”
- Patricia Williams. “The Emperor’s New Clothes”

March 16:
- In Class Film. Visions of abolition

“Blackness” as a Gendered and Sexual Construct
March 28:
- Patricia Hill Collins. “Politics of Black Feminist Thought” & “Distinguishing Features of Black Feminist Thought” (B) (21-33 & 39-44)

March 30:
- Patricia Hill Collins. “Toward a Politics of Empowerment” (B)

April 4:
- In class film: Brother Outsider

April 6:
- Darren Hutchinson. “‘Claiming’ and ‘Speaking’ who We Are”
- Cheryl Clarke. “The Failure to Transform Homophobia in the Black Community”

April 11:
- Talia Bettcher. “Terminology”
- H. Fogg-Davis. “Sex-Classification Policies as Transgender Discrimination: An Intersectional Critique”
- Final Essay Review

April 13: WRITING CENTER WORKSHOP

SECTION III – Select Themes in African American Political Thought

Solidarity
April 18:
- Tommie Shelby. “Introduction” & “Black Solidarity after Black Power” (B)

FINAL DRAFT ESSAY DUE WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19 AT 4:00 PM

April 20:
- Tommie Shelby. “Social Identity and Group Solidarity” & “Conclusion” (B)

Leadership
April 25:
- Tommie Shelby. “Class, Poverty, and Shame” (pp. 78-100); “Black Power Nationalism” (pp. 116-121)
- Cornel West. “The Crisis of Black Leadership” & “Pity the Sad legacy of Barack Obama”

April 27:
- Patricia Hill Collins. “Rethinking Black Women’s Activism” (B)
-bell hooks. “Black Women Intellectuals”

May 2:
-Joy James. “Captive Theorists and Community Caretakers”

May 4:
-In Class Film: An interview with the Founders of Black Lives Matter
-Conclusion/Course Evaluation

FINAL ESSAY DUE THURSDAY, MAY 4 AT 1:00 PM