

POSC 381: Topics in Political Science: African-American Political Thought

James Madison University – Spring 2021
Tu./Thurs. 2:40-3:55 / Online & Miller Hall 1101

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Introduction

The rise of the Black Lives Matter Movement, and in particular its prominence in 2020, has served to remind Americans that the issue of race still remains America's primary and most enduring division. Questions regarding racial justice—the gap between the principles of the American creed on the one hand, and political practice on the other—have been at the center of American political, philosophical, and religious debate since the Nation's founding. This three-credit course examines central questions in African American political thought concerning that gap from the Revolution to the present. Broadly speaking, we will consider what African American thinkers have said about their place in and relationship to American democracy. In doing so, we will also consider what those writers have said regarding a range of issues central to modern political thought more generally, including the nature of democratic life, identity and “race” solidarity, the use of violence in politics, the nexus between gender, race, and power, and more.

It hardly needs to be noted that claims about racial justice (and injustice), particularly here in the U.S., are often fraught with emotion, particularly when such claims conflict with preconceived notions we have about the American political tradition. But if we are to be good students of political theory and history, and if we are to be responsible citizens, then we must be willing to grapple with difficult questions openly, honestly, and with measured reflection and care. More, we must be open to the possibility of changing our minds—of being persuaded, upon further consideration of a line of inquiry, that our original position is in need of revision if not outright rejection. In short, we aim not for pronouncement of opinion but for thoughtful judgment, and that goal requires respect for the discipline of political theory and, more importantly, for others as well as ourselves. Classroom discussions will be governed accordingly.

It should be noted that some of the readings contain language that we today undoubtedly find offensive. I have not attempted to erase such language from the historical record.

Required Texts

Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. Penguin Books.
Buccola, Nicholas. *The Fire is Upon Us: James Baldwin, William F. Buckley, Jr., and the Debate over Race in America*. Princeton UP.
Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. Random House.
Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Dover Thrift Editions.
Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Dover Thrift Editions
Howard-Pitney, David. *Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and the Civil Rights Struggle of the 1950s and 1960s: A Brief History with Documents*. Bedford Books.

Additional readings denoted by • will be posted on Canvas

Course Requirements and Policies

Covid-19 Related Information and Policies: Policies regarding the ongoing pandemic—and whether (and when) we might meet in-person this semester—can be found in the COVID Information module I’ve created on our Canvas website.

Academic Honesty: Policies for academic honesty and plagiarism can be found at: <http://www.jmu.edu/syllabus/>. A student caught cheating—either by copying another student’s work, plagiarizing, or otherwise—will receive an F for the course and is subject to further disciplinary measures from the honor council. Students are expected to complete their own work. Academic and intellectual honesty are ground rules for this class.

Attendance Policy: These are unusual times. We will be meeting online at least until February 1st. I suspect we will continue to meet online for some period thereafter. Still, attendance for online sessions is expected and required. If we return to in-person meetings, attendance will be required then as well. I will be taking attendance at the start of class. Students absent more than three times during the term may incur penalties in their final grade. If you discover that you have trouble with your internet connection—thus disrupting your attendance/participation—let me know.

Office hours: I have scheduled online office hours on Wednesdays from 9-12 and again from 2:30-4:30. You can schedule a Zoom meeting with me ahead of time by sending me an email; or, if you want to “drop in” during my office hours, I will be checking my email often during these hours. When I see your email requesting a meeting, I will email you back promptly with a Zoom invitation. If you prefer email (rather than Zoom), we can do that. We can schedule Zoom meetings on other days, too, by appointment.

E-mail Correspondence: I make every attempt to answer email the day it is sent, although that is not always possible. If you send me email after 5 p.m. you should not expect an answer until the following day. Email response may be slower on weekends as well. Note: if I see your email (after 5 p.m./over the weekend) and it is “time-sensitive” I will respond; otherwise, I may wait until the following day/Monday. Also, when you send email please include a subject line and make sure you identify yourself and which class you’re discussing.

Grades: Grades will be based on two essays, a shorter book review, a final exam (most likely a take-home essay), and class participation (discussion board posts). More information about the essay assignments (and book review) will be discussed in class. Assignments will be weighted as follows:

First Essay	25%
Second Essay	25%
Book Review	10%
Final Exam	30%
Participation	10%

Participation grades will be based on the quality of your posts to the discussion board. If we return to in-person classes, your participation there will be “bonus.” More bonus participation points may become available through participatory opportunities during our online classes. More information about the discussion board posts can be found in the Discussion Board module on our Canvas course website.

Failure to complete any essay assignment or combination of assignments totaling 25% or more of the final grade will result in an F for the course. An essay assignment turned in more than four days late (without instructor’s allowance) will receive an F on that assignment, but credit will still be given for completing the assignment.

Final Grades: Final grades will be assessed according to the following scale and will not be rounded up. I reserve the right to depart from this scale when I believe it is warranted.

A = 100-92 A- = 90-91.9 B+ = 88-89.9 B = 82-87.9 B- = 80-81.9
C+ = 78-79.9 C = 72-77.9 C- = 70-71.9 D+ = 68-69.9 D = 65-67.9 F = 0-64.9

Withdrawal Policy: The last day to drop this class with a “W” appearing on your transcript is March 19th. The Political Science Department does not grant WPs or WFs. I will honor that departmental policy.

Information regarding inclement weather policies, religious observation accommodations, and disability policies can be found at: <http://www.jmu.edu/syllabus/>

If you have a disability and request some type of instruction (or other) accommodations, you must first provide me with documentation from the Office of Disability Services. Please do this ASAP.

A final friend word-of-advice: stay in touch! If you have questions about the readings or class lectures/discussion, or if more generally you find yourself “drifting” and not keeping up with the work, let me know. If you don’t let me know until late in the term I won’t be able to help you!

** I reserve the right to make adjustments to this syllabus as needed. Enrollment in this course means that you have read, understand, and consent to the terms set forth herein. If you have any questions, just ask me. And remember, this semester will certainly pose unusual challenges, so we will all need to show patience!

Reading Schedule

January 19: Introduction

January 21:

- Declaration of Independence (draft, including deleted ¶ on slavery)
- Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, queries xiv & xviii (excerpts)
- Felix, Petition for Freedom (1773)
- Prince Hall, Petition to the State of Massachusetts (1777)
- Petition by slaves of Fairfield County (1779)
- Paul Cuffe, Petition for Relief from Taxation (1780)
- Cato, Letter to the *Freeman’s Journal* (1781)
- Barbara J. Fields, “Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America,” *New Left Review* 181 (May 1990): 95-118

January 26:

- James Forten, *Letters from a Man of Colour, on a Late Bill before the Senate of Pennsylvania* (1813, excerpts)
- James Forten and Russell Perrott, An Address to the Humane and Benevolent Inhabitants of the City and County of Philadelphia (1817)
- Paul Cuffe, Letter to President James Madison (16 June 1813)
- Martin Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852, excerpt)

January 28:

- David Walker, *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (1830, excerpts from Sections II & IV)

- February 2: Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life*, chapters I-VIII
- February 4: Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life* (remainder)
- Douglass, “African Civilization Society,” “The Folly of Colonization,”
 - Henry Highland Garnet, *The Past and the Present Condition, and the Destiny of the Colored Race* (1848, excerpt), and *Address to the Slaves of the United States, Delivered to the National Convention of Colored Citizens* (1843)
- February 9: NO CLASS (Assessment Day)
- February 11: • Frederick Douglass, “What are the Colored People Doing for Themselves?” (1848), “An Address to the Colored People of the United States” (1848), “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” (1852)
- February 16: • Booker T. Washington, “Industrial Education for the Negro” (1903)
- Frederick Douglass, *Letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe* (March 8, 1853)
 - W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth” (1903)
- February 18: • Booker T. Washington, *Atlanta Exposition Address* (1895)
- Charles W. Chesnutt, “The Disenfranchisement of the Negro” (1903)
 - Frederick Douglass, “The Civil Rights Case” (1883)
- February 23: Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (chapter 3: “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others”)
- Booker T. Washington, “The Fruits of Industrial Training” (1907), “The Intellectuals and the Boston Mob” (1911)
- February 25: Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (chapter 1: “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” & chapter 11: “Of the Passing of the First-Born”)
- March 2: Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (chapters 5-6 & 8-9)
- March 4: Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (chapter 12: “Of Alexander Crummel”)
- Du Bois, “The Conservation of Races” (1897)
 - Garvey, “The True Solution of the Negro Problem,” “Aims and Objects of Movement for Solution of Negro Problem,” “Racial Ideas”
- March 9: • A. Philip Randolph, “Lynching: Capitalism Its Cause; Socialism Its Cure” (March 1919)
- Claude McKay, “If We Must Die” (1919)
 - George S. Schuyler, “The Negro-Art Hokum,” *Nation* (June 16, 1926)
 - Langston Hughes, “The Negro and the Racial Mountain,” *Nation* (June 23, 1926)
 - E. Franklin Frazier, “Racial Self-Expression” (from *Ebony and Topaz*, 1927)
- March 11: • Ralph Bunche, “A Critique of New Deal Social Planning as it Affects Negroes” (1936), and “The Negro in the Political Life of the U.S.” (1941)
- Ralph Ellison, “An American Dilemma: A Review” (1944)

- March 16: King, "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence" (1960), "The Ethical Demands for Integration" (1963), in Howard-Pitney, pp. 40-46 & 58-67
Malcolm X, *Autobiography* (excerpts); Speech at the Abyssinian Baptist Church (1963, excerpt) in Howard-Pitney, pp. 47-56 & 67-70
- March 18: King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963), "Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom" (1966), in Howard-Pitney, pp. 74-96
Malcolm X, *Autobiography* (excerpts); "God's Judgment of White America" (1963, excerpt), in Howard-Pitney, pp. 108-116
- March 23: King, "I Have a Dream" (1963), *Where Do We Go From Here?* (1963, excerpt), in Howard-Pitney, pp. 103-107 & 147-156
Malcolm X, "Message to the Grassroots" (1963, excerpts), "The Ballot or the Bullet" (1964), in Howard-Pitney, pp. 99-101 & 128-133
• Stokely Carmichael, "What We Want" (Sept. 22, 1966)
- March 25: Buccola, *The Fire is Upon Us*, Prologue & chapters 1-2
- March 30: Buccola, *The Fire is Upon Us*, chapters 3-4
- April 1: Buccola, *The Fire is Upon Us*, chapter 5
Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (entire)
- April 6: Buccola, *The Fire is Upon Us*, chapters 6-8
- April 8: NO CLASS
- April 13: • Audre Lorde, "Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface" (1979), "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" (1980)
• The Combahee River Collective Statement (1977)
- April 15: • bell hooks, "The Imperialism of Patriarchy" (1982), "Black Women Intellectuals" (1991),
- April 20: • Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1989)
- April 22: Coates, *Between the World and Me*, part I
- April 27: Coates, *Between the World and Me*, part II
- April 29: Conclusion