LDST 304 Social Movements
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Fall 2017 Focus: The Civil Rights Movement in America, 1865-2017 (and beyond)

Overview

The Civil Rights movement represents nothing less than the effort to establish a multiracial democracy in a nation founded on white supremacy and forced bondage of persons of African descent. This course focuses on the agency of African-American men and women as leaders and change-makers in the long Civil Rights movement. A key theme of the course is that the confrontation with doctrines and practice of white supremacy and the insistence on the dignity and empowerment of African-Americans in the United States have always taken place in multiple, interlocking spheres, not limited to formal political protests. To be sure specific protest activity—“action”—frequently serves as a focal point for change, and the course at several points will consider the mechanics and techniques of such actions. But intellectual work, education, labor organizing, economic development activity, religious expression, musical creativity, and cultural work all have and continue to have a place in the development of civil rights activity. The audacity and courage required to confront power requires cultural and community support to be successful and sustainable. Hence we will seek to understand specific civil rights actions holistically in the context of the overall African-American experience.

Method and Approach of the Course

The primary method of inquiry used in the course is historical: a disciplined effort to understand the past, based on both the thorough assemblage of relevant documentary evidence and the thoughtful analysis and assessment of such evidence. We proceed fully cognizant of the fact that the topic we are investigating is of present-day importance; indeed, we are living in a moment in which the nation as a whole is being forced to confront the meaning of its own history, and specifically the blatant contradiction between stated democratic norms and the realities of brutal racial oppression. Richmond, Virginia is and will likely continue to be at the very epicenter of that reckoning over the coming months.

This course presumes that strong historical understanding makes for better citizenship in the present day. The primary aim of the class is to strengthen students’ foundation to pursue both further study but also engage in the lifelong pursuit of democratic social change. In other words: do the reading, it’s essential! But we will also make time each way to explicitly discuss present day events, and hence students are also expected to pay attention to current events and read one and preferably both Richmond-based weeklies to keep abreast of current local events relevant to the course.
**Course Requirements**

1. Attendance at every course meeting.
2. Preparation for each class session by completion of assigned reading and active participation.
3. Weekly reading of *Style Weekly* and *Richmond Free Press* for coverage of local issues related to the course; reading of links to national news sent by professor.
4. Participation in three community events related to social movements of your choosing, at least one of which must be off-campus. The first such event is the August 31 discussion of Charlottesville taking place at 6 p.m. in Ukrop Auditorium. You should submit a one-page account of each event within seven days of the event.
5. Attendance at three film evenings at the Jepson School, 7 pm. Pizza will be served. Sunday September 3 (“Freedom Riders”); Sunday October 1 (“Fundi” and “You Got to Move”); Monday November 27 (“Mavis!”).
6. Attendance in class field trip to City of Richmond Office of Community Wealth Building, Friday November 17, 2 p.m.
8. Completion of four (4) analytical papers corresponding to each section of the course. Each paper will be 6-8 pages in length. Specific prompts will be provided.
9. Final Exam, consisting of True/False; Short Answer, and Essay questions.

**Evaluation Components**

- Class Attendance and Participation: 12%
- Community Events, Field Trip, Film Screening Participation: 8%
- Analytical Papers: 60%
- Final Exam: 20%

**General Course Policies**

1. Arrive prior to 10:30 am. every class so we can start at 10:30 a.m.
2. Get enough sleep (six hours) before you come, and eat breakfast.
3. Coffee in class is okay, but food is not.
4. Go to the bathroom before class. Do not interrupt class by doing so.
5. No electronic devices in use in class. All cell phones must be completely powered off and stored away.
6. Bring your book to class every time.
7. No class absences without permission are acceptable. Each unexcused absence will lead to a full letter grade drop in your semester participation grade. Falling asleep in class or other disruptive behavior will be treated as an absence.
8. Every student must attend professor’s office hours at least once prior to fall break.
How and Why to READ for this Class

Reading must be the fundamental default activity of all college students. When you are not doing anything else, you should be reading. This class will require that you do a lot of reading.

We live in a culture that has devalued deep reading and thinking. Why then read books, as opposed to just a series of short articles or excerpts? Because books are still the best technology we have for allowing a sophisticated train of thought—or body of knowledge—to be communicated from one human mind to another. A book allows the author to explore an event, person, or question in sustained depth, to present a sustained argument supported by evidence, to make connections between different events or phenomena, or to explore all sides of a disputed question thoroughly. Or a book may simply expand or stimulate our imaginations, our moral consciences, our sense of what is possible in human life. To read an interesting, important, or imagination-expanding book is one of life’s great pleasures—but it is a pleasure it takes effort to cultivate. Think of reading a book as engaging your mind with someone else’s mind in an extended, in-depth conversation. If your reading takes the form of a thoughtful, internal conversation with the author, when it comes time to write your papers—your actual chance to “talk back” to the author and his or her ideas—you won’t be struggling to generate material from scratch; instead you will simply be transcribing and refining the conversation you’ve already had in your brain. Good writing is fundamentally a result of good thinking, and good thinking comes about via the practice and habit of being in conversation with good thinkers—such as the authors we will be reading this semester.

But how then to read thoughtfully? First, cut out the distractions. Turn off social media, the Internet, and anything else that might tempt you to turn your mind away from what you are reading. Find a quiet space where you can concentrate fully on the text. Second, set yourself an attainable goal for how long you will concentrate fully on reading the text. Whether it’s thirty minutes, an hour, or two hours, set a goal, and stick to that goal, with the aim of increasing it over time. If you can learn how to sit in the library or somewhere for three consecutive hours, reading for 45-50 minutes at a time, then taking 10-15 minute breaks each hour, you will over the course of the week get a lot done—and more importantly, have a lot of fruitful conversations with great thinkers and writers. Third, take notes as you go—either in the text margins, or in a notebook. This is helpful in keeping track of the author’s train of thought, and will help you remember arguments and key points when you go back to review or re-read. Fourth, when you are done reading a section, write down a few key points the author made, or alternatively some questions you have about the author’s arguments. Fifth, as you are reading, think not just about the face value arguments of the text, but also about the author’s intended audience and purpose. Why and for whom was this book written? Being able to answer that question often is very helpful in understanding the text as a whole. Sixth—and this is the most advanced skill, and one that will take time to master—think critically about what you are reading. Even the most brilliant texts, texts that have impeccable internal logic and that will make you smarter simply by reading them, have limitations of perspective and purpose.

It’s a privilege to have the opportunity to study this particular topic in this particular time and place. Let’s make the most of it!
Course of Study

Prologue: The Movement: A Quick Primer

Week 1: August 30, September 1
John Lewis, *March* trilogy. Read Book 1 prior to August 30 and Books 2 and 3 for September 1.
Ungraded reflection on “March” and “Freedom Riders” due Monday September 4 at 6 p.m.

Part I. Black Men

Week 2: September 6, September 8

Week 3: September 13, September 15

Week 4: September 20, September 22
Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, remainder of novel

*Paper 1 Due Monday September 25, 6 p.m.*

Part II. Black Women

Week 5: September 27, September 29
Septima Clark, *Ready from Within*

Week 6: October 4, October 6
Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*

Week 7: October 11, October 13
Ransby, *Ella Baker* (conclusion); Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*

Week 8: October 18, October 20
Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*

*Paper 2 Due Monday October 23, 6 p.m.*

Part III. Race, Labor, Economics

Week 9: October 25, October 27
Michael Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers*
Week 10: November 1, November 3
David Lewis-Colman, *Race Against Liberalism: Black Workers and the UAW in Detroit*

Week 11: November 8, November 10

*Paper 3 Due Monday November 13, 6 p.m.*

Part IV. Religion, Culture, Identity

Week 12: November 15, November 17
James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*

*Class field trip: Listening hours, City of Richmond Office of Community Wealth Building, Friday November 17, 2 pm*

Week 13: November 29, December 1
Greg Kot, *I'll Take You There: Mavis Staples, the Staples Singers, and the Music That Shaped the Civil Rights Era*

Postlude: Black Lives Matter

Week 14: December 6, December 8
Christopher Lebron, *The Making of Black Lives Matter*

*Paper 4 Due Monday December 11, 6 p.m.*

Final Exam: December 12, 9 a.m.