

**Department:** AFAM POLS

**Course No.:** 3642 [248]

**Credits:** 3

**Title:** African American Politics

**Contact:** Jennifer Sterling-Folker, Associate Professor

**Content Area:** CA4 Diversity and Multiculturalism

**Diversity:** CA4 Non-International

**Catalog Copy:** "AFAM/ POLS 3642[248]. African-American Politics. Either semester. Three credits. Political behavior, theory, and ideology of African Americans, with emphasis on contemporary U.S. politics."

**Course Information:**

**a.** This course offers a comprehensive account of the black liberation struggle from the Middle Passage to the present. Through critical examination of the major philosophical and theoretical arguments contesting white supremacy, students arrive at an understanding of how African American men *and* women influence the social, economic, and political structure of the United States. The purpose of this course is to examine the political activities of African Americans and their core values—resistance, community, freedom, and self-determination—as they pursue basic citizenship rights and interact with others within the American political system.

**b.** The course requirements have five components: attendance, webct activity, class dialogue, index card submissions, and miscellaneous activities. Students are required to login to webct using their Net ID, and check for calendar updates, course materials, email messages, and discussion postings on a regular basis, at least once or twice a week. Class dialogue is mandatory. There are no lectures, but instead the instructor facilitates class dialogue so that students might become active, participatory learners. Question-answering style requires that students come to class well prepared to contribute answers, present questions, and enliven the discussion. Miscellaneous activities are randomly assigned. Students work on cooperative, collaborative assignments that encourage discourse and foster intellectual inquiry. Each assignment involves the student in a different manner from the traditional lecture format. The course has three examinations (Preliminary, Midterm, and Final), which are all taken in-class, closed book. Each exam contains multiple choice and/or essay questions covering material from the texts, lectures, and discussions. Index Cards/Quizzes are taken in class, closed book, on a random basis. Students are asked to reflect upon the course material by answering specific questions, summarizing the lesson, or indicating points of confusion. To be completed on 4x6 index cards, these exercises require students to demonstrate a factual understanding, and clear grasp of key concepts, major ideas, or core themes covered in the reading.

c. This course is systematic in its coverage and analysis of historical and contemporary trends in African American political life. While grappling with a complex political legacy, students will be expected to think, write, and speak intelligently about the political activities of African American men *and* women as they pursue basic citizenship rights and interact with others in the American political system. Topics include, but are not limited to, the ethics of living Jim Crow, black voter turnout, black representation and constituency influence, black public opinion and ideology, racialized campaigns and elections, the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, press coverage of black candidates and racial cues, as well as the crisis of black intellectuals, etc.

**Meets Goals of Gen Ed.**:The course meets several of the general education goals listed (e.g., become more articulate, acquire critical judgment, acquire moral sensitivity, and awareness of human culture and diversity).

First, students must demonstrate the ability to think, write, and speak intelligently about some of the most controversial and vexing political issues—slavery, criminal sentencing, welfare reform, and affirmative action—amidst a diverse group of their peers. All oral presentations and written assignments are evaluated on the basis of quality and development of central argument, proper organization and coherency, comprehension and understanding of relevant theoretical concepts, mechanics and style.

Second, students must come to class well prepared to participate actively and constructively in class discussions. Both lectures and class dialogue are major pedagogical strategies employed in the course. In the classroom, students are challenged to think independently and critically about the various reading assignments and topics presented by posing questions. Ideas are openly discussed and debated so that people might choose which ones they will either endorse or reject. Students are encouraged to keep an open mind, to step into another's shoes, to make decisions with others, and to reach compromises while maintaining integrity.

Third, the course content instills a sense of social responsibility and prepares students to assume leadership roles for the purpose of helping to create a more just and humane society. Students are encouraged to become actively involved in the political process and make important contributions to their communities. The course then inspires individual students to set high personal, intellectual, and career expectations in an effort to follow in the footsteps of past and present civil rights leaders. Overcoming interlocking systems of oppression has inspired African American men *and* women to actively participate in individual and collective forms of resistance— slave revolts, migrations, economic boycotts, sit-ins, freedom rides, court cases, nonviolent demonstrations, campaigns, and elections. Having moved from protests to politics, African Americans have become more active in the policy making process, specializing in research, coalition building, and constituency development. The black politics agenda has expanded to include affirmative action, unemployment, voter disenfranchisement, welfare reform, criminal sentencing, and racial profiling, among other issues. By the end of the course, students know enough about these topics, current and leading debates, and positions taken by scholars to educate others.

**CA4 Criteria:** The course meets several of the criteria that are listed, which makes it especially difficult to select between and among them. The study of African American politics provides an

intellectual arena in which students learn to critically examine and interpret the experiences, traditions, and dynamics of black liberation struggle in the United States. More specifically, the course examines the ways in which African American men and women come to develop a shared understanding of their unique disadvantaged status amidst such discriminatory practices as steering and blockbusting by realtors, bank and loan company redlining, de facto segregation of schools, and racial profiling by law enforcement that persists today. In the context of past discrimination—slave codes, de jure segregation, literacy tests, white primaries, grandfather clauses, and lynching—contemporary examples of racial discrimination serve to reinforce knowledge processes rooted in experience that remind individual members of the race of the stigma attached to them and the disadvantages derived from their inferior position vis-à-vis whites in the social, economic, and political structure of the United States.

The point is: African Americans in general and African American women in particular are positioned differently from other people in the United States and their distinct brand of activism arises from day to day experiences with meanings, practices, and structural conditions that limit their lives as they are located at the bottom of the social, economic, and political hierarchy. Structural inequality then influences the wants, interests, and desires of African American men and women as they are expressed both verbally and nonverbally in public and private domains. Given the unequal distribution of power and privilege in the United States, they develop similar kinds of knowledge about the workings of society and have similar kinds of routine experiences in which they respond to individually or collectively. By focusing on these issues, the course most certainly meets the criteria for multiculturalism and diversity.

**Role of Grad Students:** Every Spring this course is taught by Professor Simien, a regular faculty member in the department at Storrs. Graduate students are not regularly involved with the teaching of this course (either as TAs or teaching their own sections).