

AAS:Hist 628: History of the Civil Rights Movement  
Fall 2015  
Professor Plummer

## SYLLABUS

*(Double-sided copy)*

This course is cross-listed. You may take it for either Afro-American Studies Department credit or History Department credit. Both fulfill the ethnic studies requirement. The course focuses on the civil rights movement led by African Americans in the United States. It treats the historical background to movement emergence, including industrial and demographic transition, agricultural change in the South, the rise of the liberal coalition, and the impact of World War II and the Cold War on race relations. It examines civil rights litigation and the key events and consequences of movement insurgency. It explores black radicalism, as well as civil rights in the urban North, the policies of the federal government, the impact of world affairs, and the role of gender. The course probes the evolving fight against racial discrimination. It considers the activities and life stories of some individual participants as well as broad historical forces. Upper-level undergraduate and graduate students will learn how the events and issues of this social and political movement changed the face of contemporary America. While social movements have developed around the demands for justice made by other groups, this course focuses on the African American experience. The growing body of work on civil rights history has multiplied our information on the subject and introduced numerous interpretations of the past. This course will examine diverse approaches, probe how historians have used and interpreted sources, and develop an appreciation for the variety of scholarship that they have produced. The reading load will consist of three books and a photocopied reader to be downloaded from LearnUW. There are two examinations, three quizzes, and a required 10-page paper. Specific instructions for the paper will be distributed in separate documents. There is also an attendance requirement: students missing more than 8 classes without good reason cannot get a grade higher than C in the course.

**Course objectives** include: Familiarizing students with the history of the African American freedom struggle; fostering knowledge about the broader social context in which that movement has unfolded and continues to evolve; making students aware of some of the rich resources for research available to them; exploring present-day controversies about civil rights and their relationship to the past; sharpening analytical and writing skills.

**Why an ethnic studies requirement?** (This section is based on the University's statement on ethnic studies.) Ethnic studies courses are conscious of how society has valued certain histories and discounted others. They illuminate how these differences have promoted disparities in contemporary American life. Ethnic studies courses aim to apply critical thinking skills, and encourage students to harbor a healthy skepticism towards knowledge claims about race and ethnicity, whether in the form of media, political, or popular representations. As part of this process, the ethnic studies requirement should challenge students to question their own assumptions and preconceived notions on these topics.

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Awareness of self is linked with awareness of and empathy towards the perspectives of others. Ethnic Studies courses give students an opportunity to think about identity issues, including their own identity, as well as the connections they might have to people “outside” their focused social circle.

Ethnic Studies courses endeavor to be relevant to students’ lives outside the classroom by enhancing students’ ability to effectively and respectfully participate in a multicultural society. This participation can include being able to discuss race and ethnicity with a colleague or friend, for example, or recognizing inequities that may occur in interpersonal or institutional contexts.

**Course organization:** Class meetings center on lectures and presentations, discussion, and audiovisual material. Most of these address assigned texts or scheduled topics. Scheduled topics provide broad chronological and thematic continuity and background material for students' own independent research. Students are encouraged to use the Social Action Collections at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, which includes one of the finest civil rights archives in the country, including some digitized material. Wisconsin also has a major collection of newspapers, including the African American press. The course offers an excellent opportunity to use these resources, and special consideration will be given to papers that use them *well*.

**Classroom policies.** The more controversial a subject, the more we need to respect one another's viewpoints. Class discussions can be lively and intense, but they must be diplomatic. Thoughtfully assess an idea; don't attack the person expressing it. Please turn off cell phones and other noisemakers while in class. Laptops can be useful adjuncts to learning, but unfortunately, they can also be a distraction in the classroom setting. *You are therefore requested not to use laptops, tablets, and smartphones in class for any purpose other than taking notes.*

**Evaluation:** Grades are based on the following:

1. Midterm: This will consist of an in-class essay exam = 20 percent of the grade.
2. Three in-class quizzes, short answer and/or multiple choice = 10 percent each of the grade, 30 percent total
3. 10-page term paper = 30 percent of the grade
4. Final examination: This will consist of an essay take-home exam = 20 percent of the grade.

I don't curve grades.

**Paper topics cannot be changed after October 20, and missed exams cannot be made up.**

Students with disabilities. Students with a disability should contact the professor as soon as possible to arrange for alternative testing accommodations or any other special needs.

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**DUE DATES:**

Quiz 1 – September 24

Final decision on paper topic– October  
20

Midterm – October 22

Quiz 2 – November 12

Quiz 3 – December 1

Term paper – December 15

Final exam – Distributed in class De-  
cember 15, due on Dec. 22 at  
4:45.

**Attendance:** Attendance is required and will be kept for each class session. The reason is to protect the interests of students who diligently come to class and help create a community by their presence. It is based on the idea of a classroom as a social entity and education as a commitment. Learning is not only about what a professor says: it is also based on interaction among members of a group. Anyone can have up to 8 unexcused absences (i.e., one month of classes) without penalty. Students who belong to UW teams or who are involved with University-sponsored activities that may occasionally take them away from class, should provide a schedule of their absences to their professors. Students with constant schedule conflicts, or those who have difficulty gearing up for morning classes, should make a decision about whether to take the course. Those otherwise missing more than 8 class sessions cannot earn more than a C in the course. As per university regulations, there is no penalty for religious observances.

**Required texts:** Books for purchase are at the A Room of One's Own bookstore, 315 W. Gorham St. Texts owned by campus libraries are on reserve.

1. Danielle McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street* (2010: Knopf)
2. Michael Edmonds, ed., *Risking Everything: A Freedom Summer Reader* (2014: Wisconsin Historical Society Press)
3. Brian Stevenson, *Just Mercy* (2014: Spiegel & Grau). (This book is also the Big Read selection for this year.)
4. Course reader in Acrobat (.pdf) format, downloadable from LearnUW. Contents:
  - a. U.S. Constitution, amendments 13-15
  - b. Leon Litwack, "Jim Crow Blues," *OAH Magazine of History* (January 2004)
  - c. Paul G. Lauren, "Seen from the Outside" from *Window on Freedom*, ed. B. G. Plummer (2003: UNC Press)
  - d. Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (also available on the Internet and in various print editions)
  - e. Philip Randolph's speech at the 1963 March on Washington
  - f. Malcolm X, "Message to the Grassroots," from *Malcolm X Speaks*
  - g. Patrick Jones, "'Not a Color but an Attitude': Father James Groppi and Black Power Politics in Milwaukee," from *Groundwork: Local Black*

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*Freedom Movements in America*, ed. Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (2005 NYU Press)

- h. Nancy McLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough* ch. 7 (2006: Harvard University Press)

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Contact with professor: I will hold office hours in 4109 Helen C. White Hall on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11 to noon or by appointment. Due to staff shortages, e-mail is better for communicating with me than leaving phone messages. My e-mail address is [bplummer@wisc.edu](mailto:bplummer@wisc.edu). There is a class list. You are automatically subscribed to it if you are registered. The list address is [history628-1-f15@lists.wisc.edu](mailto:history628-1-f15@lists.wisc.edu). Students should also feel free to use the list to communicate with one another and share information about the course. E-mail is not a substitute, however, for class attendance and participation.

**New History resource:**

The History Lab: New this semester, the History Lab is a resource center where experts (PhD students) will assist you with your history papers. No matter your stage in the writing process—choosing a topic, conducting research, composing a thesis, outlining your argument, revising your drafts—the History Lab staff is here, along with your professors and teaching assistants, to help you sharpen your skills and become a more successful writer. Sign up for a one-on-one consultation online: <http://go.wisc.edu/hlab>

**For History majors:**

The goal of the history major is to offer students the knowledge and skills they need to gain a critical perspective on the past. Students will learn to define important historical questions, analyze relevant evidence with rigor and creativity, and present convincing arguments and conclusions based on original research in a manner that contributes to academic and public discussions. In History, as in other humanistic disciplines, students will practice resourceful inquiry and careful reading. They will advance their writing and public speaking skills to engage historical and contemporary issues.

To ensure that students gain exposure to some of the great diversity of topics, methodologies, and philosophical concerns that inform the study of history, the department requires a combination of courses that offers breadth, depth, and variety of exposition. Through those courses, students should develop:

1. Broad acquaintance with several geographic areas of the world and with both the pre-modern and modern eras.
2. Familiarity with the range of sources and modes through which historical information can be found and expressed. Sources may include textual, oral, physical, and visual materials. The data within them may be qualitative or quantitative, and they may be available in printed, digital, or other formats. Modes of expression may include textbooks, monographs, scholarly articles, essays, literary works, or digital presentations.

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3. In-depth understanding of a topic of their choice through original or creative research.
4. The ability to identify the skills developed in the history major and to articulate the applicability of those skills to a variety of endeavors and career paths beyond the professional practice of history.

Skills Developed in the Major

*Define Important Historical Questions*

1. Pose a historical question and explain its academic and public implications.
2. Using appropriate research procedures and aids, find the secondary resources in history and other disciplines available to answer a historical question.
3. Evaluate the evidentiary and theoretical bases of pertinent historical conversations in order to highlight opportunities for further investigation.

*Collect and Analyze Evidence*

1. Identify the range and limitations of primary sources available to engage the historical problem under investigation.
2. Examine the context in which sources were created, search for chronological and other relationships among them, and assess the sources in light of that knowledge.
3. Employ and, if necessary, modify appropriate theoretical frameworks to examine sources and develop arguments.

*Present Original Conclusions*

1. Present original and coherent findings through clearly written, persuasive arguments and narratives.
2. Orally convey persuasive arguments, whether in formal presentations or informal discussions.
3. Use appropriate presentation formats and platforms to share information with academic and public audiences.

*Contribute to Ongoing Discussions*

1. Extend insights from research to analysis of other historical problems.
2. Demonstrate the relevance of a historical perspective to contemporary issues.
3. Recognize, challenge, and avoid false analogies, overgeneralizations, anachronisms, and other logical fallacies.

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COURSE CALENDAR

Week 1

Sept. 3 – Introduction to the course

Reading: no assignment

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Week 2

Sept. 8 – The promise of emancipation

Reading: US Constitution, amendments 13-15

Sept. 10 – The Jim Crow way of life

Reading: Litwack, “Jim Crow Blues”

Week 3

Sept. 15 – Early challenges

Reading: *Dark End*, Prologue and ch. 1

Sept. 17 – Visit to the Historical Society

Reading: *Dark End*, ch. 2

Week 4

Sept. 22 – The impact of World War II

Reading: *Dark End*, ch. 3

Sept. 24 – Civil rights and the Cold War

Reading: Lauren, “Seen from the Outside”

**QUIZ 1**

Week 5

Sept. 29 – Aspects of *Brown*

Reading: *Dark End*, ch. 4

Oct. 1 – Race, gender and mass mobilization in Montgomery, Alabama

Reading: *Dark End*, ch. 5

Week 6

Oct. 6 – King and the legend

Reading: *Risking Everything*, Intro. and pp. 1-17.

Oct. 8 – The student movement

Reading: *Risking Everything*, pp. 18-28, *Dark End*, ch. 6

Week 7

Oct. 13 – Freedom Riders

Reading: Randolph’s speech at the 1963 March on Washington; *Risking Everything*, pp. 29-49

Oct. 15 – Grappling with Birmingham

Reading: Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail”; *Risking Everything*, pp. 50-79

Week 8

Oct. 20

Midterm review

**Final decision on paper topic due**

Reading: no assignment

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Oct. 22

**MIDTERM EXAM**

Reading: no assignment

Week 9

Oct. 27 – March on Washington, 1963

Reading: *Risking Everything*, pp. 80-110; *Just Mercy*, Intro. and ch. 1

Oct. 29 – Freedom Summer

Reading: *Risking Everything*, pp. 111-114; *Just Mercy*, chs. 2-3

Week 10

Nov. 3 – The counter-discourse of black nationalism

Reading: Malcolm X, “Message to the Grass Roots”; *Just Mercy*, chs. 4-5

Nov. 5 – Civil rights without publicity

Reading: *Risking Everything*, pp. 145-72; *Just Mercy*, chs. 6-7

Week 11

Nov. 10 – The Civil Rights Act of 1964

Reading: *Risking Everything*, pp. 173-92; *Just Mercy*, chs. 8-9

Nov. 12 – Voting rights

Reading: *Risking Everything*, pp. 193-223; *Just Mercy*, chs. 10-11

**QUIZ 2**

Week 12

Nov. 17 – Economic democracy

Reading: *Dark End*, ch. 7; *Just Mercy*, ch. 12

Nov. 19 – no class meeting

Reading: Jones, “Not a Color but an Attitude”

Week 13

Nov. 24 – America in transition: ethnicity, immigration and migration, and identity

Reading: no assignment

Nov. 26 – THANKSGIVING DAY

Reading: no assignment

Week 14

Dec. 1- The role of backlash in the conservative revival

Reading: *Dark End*, ch. 8 and epilog

Dec. 3 – Affirmative action

Reading: McLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough* ch. 7

**QUIZ 3**

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Week 15

Dec. 8 – The carceral state

Reading: *Just Mercy*, chs. 13-14

Dec. 10 – Civil rights issues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Reading: *Just Mercy*, chs. 15-16 and epilog

Week 16

Dec. 15 – Summary and conclusion

Reading: no assignment

**PAPER DUE**

**FINAL EXAM: Final exam is a take-home, distributed in class on Dec. 15 and due on Dec. 22 at 4:45.**

*The past is never dead. It's not even past.*  
—William Faulkner