

History 155:
The Long Black Freedom Struggle from the Civil War to the Present

Meetings:

Lecture:
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00-12:15
1121 Mosse Humanities

Discussions:

301 - Thursdays, 2:25-3:15 pm - 2241 Mosse Humanities
303 - Fridays, 11:00-11:50 am - 2125 Mosse Humanities
304 - Fridays, 12:05-12:55 pm - 2115 Mosse Humanities

Instructors:

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“The Long Black Freedom Struggle” refers to the generations-long effort by African Americans and allied forces to achieve full citizenship in the United States and equitable footholds in American society. Forged in a history of enslavement and in many ways ongoing, the Long Black Freedom Struggle encompasses the history of abolitionism to the struggle for civil rights to the fight for Black Power to the effort to make Black Lives Matter. “Freedom is a constant struggle,” as Angela Davis has written, is the guiding ethos for this class. This course explores the rhythms and rhymes of that constant struggle for Black Americans over the course of post-Civil War U.S. history.



Left: SNCC Poster: “Come Let Us Build a New World Together,” 1963, Zoya Zeman Papers, USM.
Right: Iesha Evans, a demonstrator protesting the shooting death of Alton Sterling, is detained by law enforcement near the headquarters of the Baton Rouge Police Department in Baton Rouge, La., on July 9, 2016. Jonathan Bachman, Reuters.

There are a whole range of aims and goals underlying a course such as this. If we were to whittle down to the five most sustained goals, however, they would be these: 1) to introduce students to the history of African American people in the United States from the end of the era of slavery to the present day; 2) to explore how that history has been shaped directly by the actions and activism of Black people and their allies; 3) to consider how that history intersects with, shapes, and is shaped by other historical moments and movements; 4) to give students from various backgrounds opportunities to think more actively about issues of belonging, citizenship, difference, and interpersonal and structural power, and 5) to invest students with the skills to analyze historical documents, secondary literature, and arguments about history in order to formulate forceful and coherent arguments based upon those analyses.

While we will cover important names, dates, and events, our primary attentions will be paid to *interpreting those pieces of data in the interests of assembling a more complete picture of African American and American history*. In other words, we will be less concerned with memorizing minutiae than with better understanding history and the human experience. You've probably heard the adage about not seeing the forest for the trees. The trees matter. But so does the forest.

The course meets three times weekly. Tuesday and Thursday meetings will overwhelmingly be devoted to lectures from me, as your professor. A third meeting will entail discussion sections in which students, guided by a teaching assistant, will engage in conversations about readings, lectures, and how they relate to one another. Lectures and discussion sessions are not mutually exclusive, and students should be prepared and expect to be called upon—at any point throughout the week—to talk about relevant material. That being said, discussion session will be the primary context in which to parse and discuss in detail the content, themes, and questions raised by readings and lectures. That means arriving for those meetings having completed **ALL** of the assigned readings for the week, and having thought carefully and critically about the content within.

Course Aims and Description

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- Identify important events, movements, and people, in African-American history since 1865
- Formulate arguments about change over time
- Evaluate arguments about history
- Determine what constitutes reliable and valid evidence
- Interpret, compare, and contrast primary sources
- Think critically about how the narratives about the past are constructed and told

As a course that meets the University's Ethnic Studies Requirement, additional learning outcomes are as follows. By the end of the semester, students will

- Have gained a better understanding of how racial conflict, inequality, and movements against the same in the past have shaped American society in the present
- Have developed a better sense of their social position relative to history, and of how other people's pasts and experiences perhaps don't align with their own
- Be better-equipped to operate in a pluralistic, multicultural society – one in which their own experiences are not the assumed default

What actually *is* a syllabus?

Many instructors call a syllabus a "contract" of sorts. I prefer to think of it as a roadmap.

Let's presume momentarily that you're hoping for a "good grade" when this class ends in May. (Define "good" however you wish.) We'll call that desired grade your destination. The more closely you follow the expectations and suggestions laid out in the following document, the more

you increase your odds of ending up at your desired destination. The more you stray from the expectations and suggestions laid out here, the more you diminish those same odds.

I call it a roadmap because this is my attempt to show you how to reach that desired destination – how, in other words, to be successful in this class. Whether you choose to follow the guidelines is entirely up to you. Following every single instruction down to the letter doesn't in and of itself guarantee an *A* grade, but neglecting every single instruction almost assuredly guarantees something decidedly less than top marks. Again: your call on how you wish to proceed. I will help throughout the semester in any reasonable way possible. But ultimate ownership over the path you take lies with you.

Course Evaluation

A couple of notes on attendance:

1) We're all adults. Whether or not you come to lectures is ultimately up to you. But unless you already have a very expansive knowledge of African American social, cultural and political history, or possess a preternatural ability to pull data and insights about Black history out of thin air, you are not going to do well in this class if you skip consistently. This is not a threat, but rather an experience-based promise from watching students try and fail to have their cake (not come to class) and eat it too (get a good grade).

2) If you don't come to discussion sessions, you automatically render yourself ineligible to contribute to discussions, and therefore make yourself ineligible for a large portion of your final grade. I mean this seriously: if you get a perfect score on every single thing you turn in during the semester but blow off discussion section, it is not possible for you to earn higher than a C.

3) Your health is important, in both the physical and mental senses. Your TA and I will exercise grace should you need to miss class for any health issues, but please communicate with us about such needs as proactively as possible. You don't need to (indeed, should not) reveal private information to us about any health concerns you're dealing with, but please do let us know that you will be or recently were absent because of them.

Papers: Due dates for the papers are listed on the course schedule below. These essays will be evaluated for content, coherence, argument, and style. More on this below.

Exams: Specifics of the exam formats will be discussed closer to the time of the exams. Worth noting now is that they will focus far more on students interpreting and analyzing history (i.e. short essays) than in rote memorization (i.e. multiple choice). Exams are not graded for grammar, style, etc. The final exam is not cumulative.

Final grades will be calculated on a percentage basis. Each component's piece of the pie is broken down as follows; you will note that none of them are skippable:

Paper 1: 15%

Paper 2: 20%

Midterm exam: 15%

Final exam: 20%

Discussion section: 20%

Lecture attendance: 10%

The Writing Fellows Program

This semester, we will be working with the University's [Writing Fellows Program](#). If you're not familiar with the program, the basic premise is that it's a peer-to-peer tutoring program designed to help you improve your writing. Fellows are also undergraduate students here at UW, and they have been trained in the art and practice of writing tutoring.

My decision to work with the Writing Fellows Program this semester is rooted in two core beliefs: 1) that all of us (you, me, Pulitzer-winning novelists) can *always* improve as writers; and 2) that one of the most important aspects of improving as writers is through the process of *revising* our work. "Revising" here doesn't just mean fixing typos and improving the flow of our sentences, though it does mean that, too. Revising also means stepping back from a rough draft that we have written and thinking about the ideas we are presenting, how we are organizing those ideas, and how we are articulating them to the people reading our work. The Writing Fellows Program is designed especially to help you with that process of revision: the Fellows will read rough drafts of your two papers, meet with you (just the two of you) to discuss what you have so far, and talk through potential areas for revision.

This is beneficial to you on multiple levels. First and perhaps most immediately important to you, this will ensure that the final drafts papers that you turn in to me and Callie will be the strongest possible version of the vision you have for the paper. (In other words, doing this work with the Fellows before submitting the final draft to us will have the likely effect of improving your grade.) Second and thinking more long-term, doing this work will improve your writing stretching beyond this semester, and that's a skill that you will likely be using for the rest of your life, in your personal life and in whatever area of work eventually go into. (Not that you need an example, but if you want one: before I became a professor, I worked jobs in the restaurant industry, retail, business development, customer service, and construction. The last of these was the only one where I didn't have to write, though even there I would have had to if I'd risen through the ranks and become a contractor, etc.)

What will this look like for you? Honestly, it will probably end up making your life easier in the long run of the semester, because it spreads your writing process out over longer periods of time rather than allowing you to try to dash something together at the last minute that stresses you out and that you're ultimately not proud of. From a process standpoint, it looks like this:

1. You will see not one but two due dates on the below syllabus for each of the two papers, spread two weeks apart. The first due date is the date that a rough draft of your paper is due to your Writing Fellow, and the second due date is the date that a final draft of your paper is due to me and Callie.
2. Your first draft should be a *complete* draft, in that the ideas as they currently stand and the evidence that you're using to back them up are there. Those drafts can be messy, though; again, revision is part of the process. Do your level-best on these drafts, but understand and expect that what you produce that first round will look different than what you ultimately turn in.
3. On that note, it's important for you to know that Writing Fellows absolutely and positively do not grade your work in any way. They're there as a resource, peer, and tutor, not as an evaluator.

4. Once you turn in your first draft, your Writing Fellow will read it and the two of you will set up a meeting to discuss it. They will offer some written feedback, as well as some broader thoughts in your meeting with them.
5. After you meet with your Fellow, you will take their feedback and suggestions and revise your draft into the best possible finished paper you can compose.
6. Lastly, as part of this process, you will submit a very brief and informal note (a paragraph or so) with each version of your paper. The first of these will be submitted with your rough draft that you turn in to your Writing Fellow, and in that note, you should briefly explain what your core argument is, what you're hoping the paper conveys and accomplishes, and areas that you'd like to highlight as challenges, concerns, or points of possible improvement. The second of these notes (again, brief and informal) will be submitted with your final draft that you turn in to me and Callie. That note should briefly explain what revisions you made to the final version as a result of doing the rough draft and working with your Writing Fellow. In other words, in the second of these two, we would like to hear a bit about your revising process.

Please note that engaging with this process is not optional. Your rough drafts are not graded, but your participation in the process is. Failure to turn in a best-effort rough draft of your paper on time to your Writing Fellow, and/or failing to meet with them, will result in a 25% reduction of your grade for the assignment.

Course Credit Information

As a four-credit class, we meet as groups both big (lecture) and small (discussion) for roughly four hours per week. The class carries the expectation that you will spend two hours outside of class on course-learning activities (reading, writing, studying, etc.) for every hour of classroom time. In other words, you should allot roughly eight hours of work for this course per week *outside of the classroom*, in addition to the time you spend inside the classroom.

Notes on Classroom Etiquette, Technology, etc.

Part of being in a college classroom is getting yourself ready for standards of decorum and conduct that govern most post-collegiate employment settings. You're not in your dorm/apartment/the library once you step foot within the four walls of this classroom. You're in a place where you are expected to be attentive and to be respectful to everyone around you.

Q: So, what does that mean?

A: For one, it means being responsible with how you use technology. There are reams of data that show that students who take notes by hand retain information better and get better grades than students who take them on their laptop or tablet. (See [THIS](#) and [THIS](#) and [THIS](#), etc.) This makes sense – the internet is a temptation and attention-suck that humans have seldom before experienced *en masse*. I would like to tell you that you shouldn't use your laptop at all in class, but in accordance with my previous comment that “we're all adults,” I'll leave that to your discretion. Regardless, I will say that laptops are allowed in class for note-taking purposes only. Stay off TikTok. Stay off email. Stay off whatever new social media platforms have emerged in the days since I write this and which I'm far too old to be hip to. In short, use your computers appropriately, or don't use them at all. I reserve the right to transition to a computer-free classroom, if necessity warrants.

Q: Texting during class is cool, right?

A: No. *Cell phones are not allowed at all*. I draw the “we're all adults line” here. Laptops have a justifiable use in class. Phones do not unless students have an official accommodation with the

McBurney Center that warrants you using them. I'm a relaxed person and instructor, but if you want to know one sure-fire way to unrelax me in a hurry, be on your phone during class. It drives me absolutely nuts. I emphasize this at the outset because I have precisely *zero* patience for having to deal with it in any sort of recurrent way. If you can't stay off your phone for twenty-five straight minutes, do not come to class. If you're on it, I'll ask you to leave for the rest of the session and request that you meet with me privately to discuss a plan for how you're going to avoid doing it again.

Q: I'm tired and these chairs are comfortable. Is it OK to nap quietly during class?

A: Would you sleep at a job in front of all your coworkers?

Q: How should I interact with the people around me?

A: Simple. *Be good to each other*. Central to this course are issues of racism, sexism, political conservatism and political radicalism, discrimination, violence, struggle, power, failure, exploitation, and achievement. It's heady stuff, and will likely seem controversial in various ways to pretty much all of you. That's a good thing. College is meant to challenge you and the things you think you know and believe. Debate one another. Feel free to debate with me in office hours. I want everyone to feel free to express their opinions, so long as those opinions are well-informed and are delivered with honest intentions.

That does not come with a free pass, however. We're all – including me – in various stages of figuring our imperfect selves out, and it's important to respect one another. Controversial or contrarian arguments are welcome. Racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and the like are not. Think about what you're saying and how others might react to it before you say it. This is not about "having to be politically correct." It's about "being a functional adult in a pluralistic society."

Readings

Readings for this class will be a mix of secondary and primary sources. You will need to have access to three required books, which are listed below. All of them are available at UW Libraries, but in limited supply. You can purchase them, used or new, from Bookshop.org or Amazon (if you must) or wherever else you might find books. All readings besides these books will be available cost-free and as PDFs on Canvas. Reading must be completed by the time of your discussion section each week. The required books are as follows:

- 1) John Swanson Jacobs, *The United States Governed by Six Hundred Thousand Despots*, edited by Johnathan D.S. Schroeder (University of Chicago Press, 2024)
- 2) Danielle McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (Vintage Books, 2010)
- 3) Dan Berger, *Stayed on Freedom: The Long History of Black Power through One Family's Journey* (Basic Books, 2023)

Two Notes on Email

- 1) I do my best to respond to emails in a timely fashion, and usually do so. Understand, however, that responses to emails that you send in the evening or over the weekend may not be returned until the next business day. (For example, if you email me on Friday evening, please don't expect a response until Monday morning. If you'd consider the matter to be an emergency, please type URGENT in the subject line of the email.)
- 2) You should craft your own emails in a way that models professional courtesy. It's a good practice to be in. These are not text messages, and should include a salutation (i.e. "Dear

Professor Balto”) and a closing (i.e. “Sincerely, [your name]”). Very soon, you will be using email to communicate with potential employers, colleagues, etc. Start honing the skill now.

Academic Conduct

Students are expected to adhere to the University of Wisconsin’s policies concerning academic integrity. Cheating can lead to all manner of unpleasantness, up to and including expulsion from the university. Any student found to be cheating or plagiarizing will be held accountable according to UW’s standards. If you have *any question whatsoever* as to whether something you’re doing may constitute plagiarism, *please ask*. I will not hold it against you if you’re worried that you might be plagiarizing and want to check before turning something in. Once you turn it in, however, I’m contractually obligated to follow university procedures. Let’s opt for safe over sorry.

Because faculty approaches to how students use Artificial Intelligence (AI, such as ChatGPT) vary broadly, I want to be clear that I consider using AI for your papers to be a form of cheating, and if I determine that you’ve used AI to generate your writing (and your TA and I will run your submissions through software to check), it will be an automatic zero on that assignment. AI absolutely has an important and irreversible role to play in our world, and I fully acknowledge that in certain academic contexts it can be useful. I don’t think this is one of those contexts. Having it write for you – and more importantly, generate ideas for you – doesn’t do anyone any favors in a class like this. Your education is too important (and expensive) to offload your development as a thinker and writer to a bot. Your ideas must come from you, and you must write them out on your own.

For more information on the university’s academic conduct policies, the resources at the following page from the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards may be helpful: <https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-misconduct/>

Disability Services

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of disability or ongoing illness, please contact me as soon as possible. UW’s McBurney Center office coordinates services for students with disabilities; I will work collaboratively with the Center and students in need of accommodation to provide necessary accommodations. The McBurney Center’s website, including their contact information, is here: <https://mcburney.wisc.edu/>

The History Lab

The History Department at UW offers resources to students through the History Lab that are intended to help you write like a historian. It’s staffed by experienced graduate students who can help you form thesis statements and arguments, adopt correct citational practices, and so on. This would be a very, very good resource to tap into when you’re working on your paper later in the term.

Writing Center

You are also encouraged to utilize the services available to you via UW’s Writing Center, which offers wonderful resources and coaching for writers, regardless of self-perceived skill level. The Center (housed in Helen C. White, but with online options also available and satellite locations across campus) offers one-on-one consultation to students to help improve their abilities as writers. Consider consulting with them when planning and writing your papers. Services are free, and constitute a truly invaluable resource for everyone on campus. Visit the Center here for more information: <https://writing.wisc.edu/>

UW-Madison’s Institutional Statement on Diversity

Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW–Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals.

The University of Wisconsin–Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background — people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

Statement on Recording Lectures and other Classroom Content

My lectures for this class are protected intellectual property, per the policy of the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents. What does this mean? For one, it means that you are not authorized to record my lectures or other classroom content, whether by video or audio. The exception is if you are a student with a qualifying disability that requires accommodation as determined by the McBurney Center. It also means that you are not allowed to sell notes that you take in class; those are for your personal use only (or for collaborative study purposes with your peers who are also enrolled in this class). It means that you are not allowed to record classroom lectures or discussions and distribute them, whether by posting them online or selling them to any organization. Failure to comply with these guidelines constitutes copyright infringement and is susceptible to discipline under university policy.

Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change, depending upon our collective needs and the flow of the semester.

WEEK 1: Introduction

(T) 1/21: Course Introduction: Why Study African American History?
(TH) 1/23: Slavery, Abolition, and the Making of America

Reading for Week 1
None

WEEK 2: The Civil War

(T) 1/28: The Civil War and Black Revolution
(TH) 1/30: The Meanings of Freedom

Reading for Week 2
John Swanson Jacobs, *The United States Governed by Six Hundred Thousand Despots*, pp. xi – 27

WEEK 3: Reconstruction

(T) 2/4: Reconstruction and Its Promise
(TH) 2/6: The Fall of Reconstruction and the Triumph of White Supremacy

Reading for Week 3
John Swanson Jacobs, *The United States Governed by Six Hundred Thousand Despots*, pp. 28-73 (The remainder of the book, written by the editor Jonathan D.S. Schroeder, are not assigned reading but may be of interest to you if you are interested in a fuller story of Jacobs' life.)

WEEK 4: Jim Crow

(T) 2/11: The World Jim Crow Made

(TH) 2/13: Navigating Jim Crow in Turn-of-the-Century America

Reading for Week 4

Excerpts from Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (on Canvas)

Excerpts from W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (on Canvas)

WEEK 5: Racial Violence and the Exodus

(T) 2/18: Lynching, Racial Terrorism, and the Anti-Lynching Movement

(TH) 2/20: Voting with Their Feet: The Great Migration

Reading for Week 5

Excerpts from Ida B. Wells, *The Red Record* (on Canvas)

Excerpted poems from Eve L. Ewing, *1919* (on Canvas)

WEEK 6: Life in the Great Migration

(T) 2/25: “New Negroes” and Race Radicals

(TH) 2/27: “When Affirmative Action Was White”: Black Life in the Great Depression and New Deal

Reading for Week 6

Alain Locke, “The New Negro”

Selections from Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White*

FIRST DRAFT OF PAPER #1 DUE by 5:00 PM on Friday, 2/28. The paper will ask you to identify and discuss three key arenas or strategies of Black freedom struggle discussed so far in lectures and readings, as well as thinking about the broader contexts in which people waged those struggles. Further instructions will be distributed in early February.

WEEK 7: The History of Urban Inequality

(T) 3/4: Red-lined and Rendered Second-Class: Why Cities Look Like They Do

(TH) 3/6: The Second Great Migration

Reading for Week 7

Visit the “[Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America](#)” website, and explore the maps of three different cities. More specific instructions (re: what to look for, how to navigate the maps, etc.) will be offered in lecture.

An interview by Sean Illing of Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor:

<https://www.vox.com/identities/2019/12/4/20953282/racism-housing-discrimination-keeanga-yamahatta-taylor>

WEEK 8: In the War's Wake

(T) 3/11: "Half-American": World War II and Fighting for Black Citizenship

(TH) 3/13: "Un-American": The Cold War and Black Radicalism

Reading for Week 8

[Excerpts from the Civil Rights Congress "We Charge Genocide" petition](#)

[Excerpts from Paul Robeson's HUAC testimony](#)

FINAL DRAFT OF PAPER #1 DUE by 5:00 PM on Friday, 3/14.
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WEEK 9: Midterm week

(TH) 3/18: The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement

(TH) 3/20: **Midterm Exam**

Reading for Weeks 9 & 10

How you choose to divide your reading load between weeks 9 and 10 is up to you, but you should come back from Spring Break having read up at least through pp. 159 (including the prologue) in Danielle McGuire's *At the Dark End of the Street*.

NOTE: No discussion sections this week

WEEK 10: SPRING BREAK

Continue Reading!

WEEK 11: The Local Movement(s)

(T) 4/1: The Local People: SNCC and the Organizing Tradition, pt. 1

(TH) 4/3: The Local People: SNCC and the Organizing Tradition, pt. 2

Reading for Week 11

McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*, pp. 160-284

WEEK 12: The National Movement

(T) 4/8: The National Stage, pt. 1

(TH) 4/10: The National Stage, pt. 2

Reading for Week 12

Berger, *Stayed on Freedom*, Intro and Part I

<i>FIRST DRAFT OF PAPER #2 DUE by 5:00 PM on Wednesday, 4/9. Paper will relate to Danielle McGuire's book, primary sources, civil rights lectures, and the larger history of black women's freedom activism in America. Further details will be provided closer to the due date.</i>

WEEK 123: Transitions

(T) 4/15: Black Power

(TH) 4/17: New Movements of the 1970s

Reading for Week 13

The Combahee River Collective statement

Berger, *Stayed on Freedom*, Part II

WEEK 13: “Power Anywhere There’s People”

(T) 4/22: Black feminism and AIDS activism

(TH) 4/24: The L.A. Riots and the Clinton Years

Reading for Week 14

Berger, *Stayed on Freedom*, Part III and Epilogue

<i>FINAL DRAFT OF PAPER #2 DUE by 5:00 PM on Wednesday, 4/23.</i>

WEEK 15: “It’s Like That, And That's the Way It Is”

(T) 4/29: “This Is America”: BLM, 2020, and the Lessons of African American History

(TH) 5/1: In-class final exam

Reading for Week 15

None

Note: No discussion section this week, but part of the final exam will ask you to reflect on *Stayed on Freedom*. Be sure you read it fully.