

Black Political Thought*
PLPT 405
Draft

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Purpose and Scope

Politics has played a key role in the experiences of Black Americans in the United States. This course focuses on the various ideologies and strategies that have informed their quest for freedom and equality in the United States. As such, we will also consider the ways in which these strategies and ideologies form a rich philosophical vision of human fulfillment, self- and collective-identity, self-realization, and images of the good life. The aim of the course will be to 1) identify the key concerns that animate the thinkers under consideration; 2) locate those concerns within a wider historical context; and 3) explicate and investigate the various responses they offer. The key thinkers we will consider in this course include, among others: David Walker, Frederick Douglass, Martin Delany, Anna Julia Cooper, W. E. B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and Cornel West.

Required Texts

Howard Brotz ed., African American Social and Political Thought: 1850-1920
Manning Marable and Leith Mullings eds., Let Nobody Turn Us Around
W. E. B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk (Norton Edition)
James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time
Cornel West, Prophesy Deliverance!: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity
David Walker, Appeal In Four Articles
Martin Luther King, I Have A Dream: Writings and Speeches
King, Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?
Malcolm X, Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements
Toni Morisson, Beloved

Materials marked by an asterisk (*) are available in the “Resources” section of Collab.

Requirements

Writing:

Papers: There will be **2 papers of 5-7 pages and a final paper of 8-10 pages**. The “Resources” section of Collab will contain instructions on writing a political theory paper. I will post the questions for each assignment at least two weeks before the deadline. I will read your papers, write a critical evaluation of it, and record a grade. The point of the critical evaluation is to say

* Readings will be adjusted depending on meeting times. Currently, it is roughly structured for meeting twice a week.

what the paper's strengths and weaknesses are so that you can improve the quality of your work. The "Resources" section of Collab will also contain my policy on grading.

Extensions will only be granted on rare occasions and only with permission *in advance* (there is no guarantee that an extension will be approved). Late papers will be penalized **½ a letter grade per day**.

On Reading

While reading the assignments, keep asking yourself: "What are the concerns or problems to which the author responds?", "What does the author mean by that?", "Do the arguments logically cohere?", "Are there contradictions in the argument that call into question its viability?". (Do note that these are some of the same questions I will ask when reading your work.) When you find something in the readings that seems vulnerable to criticism, try to formulate the criticism precisely, but then try to imagine how the author might want to respond to your question or objection. Think about whether your criticism is internal to the argument—that is, directed at the way the author's argument holds together—or whether your criticism is based on external considerations that were not considered, but which could have made a difference.

Grading

Participation:	15%
Two 5-7 page papers:	50%
Final 8-10 page paper:	35%

Excuses

Assignments are due on the dates outlined in the syllabus. Although there may be times when something arises and you cannot turn in an assignment on time, these should be rare circumstances. You will have plenty of time, however, to prepare accordingly for your assignments. Nonetheless, things sometimes happen unexpectedly, and I am willing to work with you if a situation beyond your control arises.

Course Outline

Introduction

Historical and Philosophical Backdrop of Black Political Thought Week 1-2

- A. Cornel West, Prophesy Deliverance, chaps 1-2
Marable & Mullings, "Introduction: Resistance, Reform, and Renewal in the Black Experience," pp. xvii-xxv
- B. Bernard Boxill, "Two Traditions in African American Political Thought,"*

The Emergence of Black Political Thought: Slavery and Abolitionism Week 3-4

- A. David Walker, “Walker’s Appeal in Four Articles” (1829) [selections]
Henry Highland Garnet, “An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America” (1843)*
- B. Martin Delany, The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of The Colored People of the United States (1852), in Marable & Mullings, pp. 69-87
- C. Anna Julia Cooper, “Womanhood a Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race;” “The Status of Woman in America”*
- D. Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” (1852)
Dred Scott (1857), in Marable & Mullings, pp. 91-95
Douglass’ Reply, in Marable & Mullings, pp. 95-109
Lincoln, “Speech on Dred Scott Decision,” (1857)*; “Second Inaugural,” (1865)*

Post-Reconstruction: The Eclipse of Freedom and the Ambiguity of Identity
Weeks 5-7

- A. Alexander Crummell, “The Race Problem in America (1888), in Brotz, pp. 180-91
Douglass, “The Future of the Colored Race” (1886), in Brotz, pp. 308-11; “The Nation’s Problem” (1889), in Brotz, pp. 311-28
- B. Booker T. Washington, “The Atlanta Compromise” (1895), in Brotz, pp. 356-59;
“Democracy and Education” (1896), in Brotz, pp. 362-71; “The Fruits of Industrial Training,” (1907), in Brotz, pp. 406-17
- C. W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Conservation of the Races” (1897), in The Souls of Black Folk (1903) and Forethought, chaps. 1-3;
“The Souls of White Folk” (1920)*;
Dusk of Dawn (1920)* [selections]

Civil Rights and The Radical Democratic Impulse
Week 8-11

- A. Cornel West, Prophesy Deliverance, chaps 3-5
- B. Martin Luther King, “The Power of Nonviolence,” (1958), 29-33; “The Social Organization of Nonviolence” (1959), 49-53; “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,” (1960), 54-62; “The Rising Tide of Racial Consciousness,” (1960) 63-72; “The Time for Freedom Has Come,” (1960), 73-92, all in I Have A Dream

King, We Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community (1967)
- C. Malcolm X, “Message to the Grass Roots” (1963), “A Declaration of Independence” (1964), “The Ballot or the Bullet” (1964), “At the Audubon” all in Malcolm X Speaks

D. James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time (1962)

Working Through the Past: Race, Memory, and Democracy
Week 12-13

A. Toni Morrison, Beloved