

## Introduction to African American Politics

Course Syllabus  
Spring 2012

This course provides an introduction to the political experience of African Americans. The course is contemporary in focus. Topics include African American political thought, voting and participation, urban politics, race and elected office, and issues of gender, class, age, and sexual identity at the intersections of black politics.

### Assessment

Three Beyond the Classroom Experiences (30%)

You MUST complete THREE (3) Beyond the Classroom Experiences (BTCE). Most must be written up in 700-1000 word essays. Together they count for 30% of your grade.

Midterm Exam (30%)

The midterm exam is a short answer exam take home exam.

Final Exam (30%)

The final exam is a take-home essay exam.

Class participation (10%)

Extra Credit: You may complete up to Five (5) additional BTCEs for extra credit.

### Required Texts

Readings marked with a \* are available as links from the course Blackboard website.

Books are all available through the university bookstore.

Lucius Barker, Mack Jones and Katherine Tate, *African Americans in the American Political System* (4th edition)

Michael Dawson, *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African American Politics*

Cathy Cohen, *Democracy Remixed*

Paul Frymer, *Uneasy Alliances: Race and Party Competition in America*

Katherine Tate, *Black Faces in the Mirror: African Americans and Their Representatives in the U.S. Congress*

Clarence Lusane, *Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice: Foreign Policy, Race and the New American Century*

Omar McRoberts, *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood*

Mazama and Asante, *Obama: Political Frontiers and Racial Agency*

## INTRODUCTION

### Week 1: Introduction

January 18

Introduction to course

No assigned readings.

**First Assignment:** Bring in a recent news story that deals with some aspect of contemporary African American politics.

### Week 2: Black Political Thought

January 25

Barker, Jones and Tate Chapters 1-3

\*King, Letter from a Birmingham Jail

\*Combahee River Collective, Black Feminist Statement

**BTCE:** Go to [www.americanrhetoric.com](http://www.americanrhetoric.com) and listen to two speeches by African Americans separated by at least one decade. Write a 700-1000 word essay response that compares or contrasts these two speeches

## IDENTITY

### Week 3: Black Linked Fate

February 1

Michael Dawson, *Behind the Mule*, Chapters 1-3, 8-9

\* Richard Shingles. Black Consciousness and Political Participation: The Missing Link *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 75, No. 1. (Mar., 1981), pp. 76-91.

\*Robert Brown and Todd Shaw. Separate Nations: Two Attitudinal Dimensions of Black Nationalism *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 64, No. 1. (Feb., 2002), pp. 22-44.

\*Darren Davis and Ronald Brown. The Antipathy of Black Nationalism: Behavioral and Attitudinal Implications of an African American Ideology *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 46, No. 2. (Apr., 2002), pp. 239-252.

**BTCE:** Review the 2000 U.S. Census Report “We the People: Blacks in the United States.” Write a 700-1000 word essay response that uses evidence from this census report to take a stand on whether black linked fate is grounded in an empirically sound evidentiary basis.

### Week 4: Complicating Black Identity: Gender and Sexuality

February 8

Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes and Black Women in America*. Introduction, Chapters 1, 4, 5

\*Cathy Cohen, Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics? *GLQ: Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. May 1997. Pp. 437-468.

\*Claudine Gay and Katherine Tate. Doubly Bound: The Impact of Gender and Race on the Politics of Black Women. *Political Psychology*, Vol. 19, No. 1. (Mar., 1998), pp. 169-184.

\*Kimberle Crenshaw. Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” in *Critical Race Theory: Key Writings that Formed the Movement*. Crenshaw, Peller, Thomas (editors) Free Press: 1995. pp. 357-383

**BTCE:** Visit the National Black Gay Men’s Advocacy Coalition website <http://nbgmac.org>  
Write a 700-1000 word essay on how manhood, masculinity, race and politics are defined and mobilized by this organization in pursuit of its goals.

### **Week 5: Complicating Black Identity: Age and Ethnicity**

February 15

Cathy Cohen, *Democracy Remixed*

\* Mary Waters. *Black Identities, West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities*. Chapter 3 “Racial and Ethnic Identity Choices”

**BTCE:** Visit the Black Youth Project site at <http://blackyouthproject.uchicago.edu/> Write a 700-1000 word essay explaining how age/generation complicates the idea of black linked fate.

### **WEEK 6: Black Politics on Film**

February 22

This is the day after Mardi Gras. Why do I think class attendance will be low? I am cancelling regular class and uploading several films to the website. Watch on your own and write 700-1000 words on it. This is NOT a BTCE. This is a class requirement to make up for having no class this date.

## **PUBLIC OPINION AND PARTICIPATION**

### **Week 7: Public Opinion**

February 29

\*Harris-Lacewell. Political Science and the Study of African American Public Opinion. Chapter 6 of *African American Perspectives on Political Science* (2007) Edited by Wilbur Rich.

\*Schuman, Steeth and Bobo *Racial Attitudes in America Trends and Interpretations*, Chapter 4

\*Sigelman and Welch. *Black Americans’ Views of Racial Inequality*. 1991. Chapter 5, Black Explanations of Racial Inequality.

\*Harris-Lacewell. *Barbershops, Bibles, and BET: Everyday Talk and Black Political Thought*. Chapter 1 and 3

\*Dawson, Michael. *Black Visions*, Chapter 1 and 2

**BTCE:** Read Katrina report by Dawson, Harris-Lacewell and Cohen. Write 700-1000 word essay on how our understanding of public opinion from the course readings might influence how we understanding of the findings in the Katrina data.

## **Week 8: Race and Elections**

March 7

Barker, Jones and Tate, Chapter 9

Dawson, Chapter 6

\*Keith Reeves, *Voting Hopes and Fears: White Voters Black Candidates and Racial Politics in America*, Chapters 4 and 5

\*Brian McKenzie. Religious Social Networks, Indirect Mobilization, and African-American Political Participation. *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 4. (Dec., 2004), pp. 621-632.

\*Angela Behrens, Christopher Uggen and Jeff Manza. Ballot Manipulation and the "Menace of Negro Domination": Racial Threat and Felon Disenfranchisement in the United States, 1850-2002. *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 109, No. 3. (Nov., 2003), pp. 559-605.

**BTCE:** Find two articles about President Barack Obama's reelection bid from two different print sources. Interpret whether the information contained in the article leads you to be optimistic or pessimistic about President Obama's chance of securing re-election. Write this in a 700-1000 word essay.

**\*\*SPRING BREAK\*\***

## **POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**

### **Week 9: Political Parties**

March 21

Barker, Jones and Tate Chapter 8

Paul Frymer, *Uneasy Alliances*, Chapters 1 2, 4, 5 and 7

\*Nancy Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, Chapter 10, *Why Blacks Became Democrats*

\*Tasha Philpot, *Race, Republicans, and the Return of the Party of Lincoln*, Chapter 1

**BTCE:** Visit Blacks for Bush at <http://blacksforbush.blogspot.com/> Read several entries and write a 700-1000 word essay that explains how this blog fits into your understanding of black partisan politics gained from the readings.

### **Week 10: Courts**

March 28

Barker, Jones and Tate Chapters 5 and 6

\*Gerry Rosenberg, *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change?* Intro, Chapter 2-3

**BTCE:** Find a court decision from the past 10 years that you believe makes a major impact on African American life (positive or negative by your own assessment). Use a 700-1000 word essay to give a brief description of the case and explain its relevance.

## Week 11: Presidency

April 4

Barker, Jones and Tate Chapter 11

*Obama: Political Frontiers and Racial Agency*. Edited by Mazama and Asante. Selections

\*Walters, Ron. Barack Obama and the Politics of Blackness, *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1, The Barack Obama Phenomenon (Sep., 2007), pp. 7-29

\*Randolph Burnside, Kami Whitehurst. From the Statehouse to the White House? Barack Obama's Bid to Become the Next President. *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1, The Barack Obama Phenomenon (Sep., 2007), pp. 75-89

**BTCE:** In a 700-1000 essay make a case for a president that you believe has been "The Best" or "The Worst" president for advancing the policy agenda of African Americans.

## Week 12: Congress

April 11

Barker, Jones and Tate Chapter 10

Katherine Tate, *Black Faces in the Mirror* Chapters 1,2,4,5,8

\*Kerry Haynie, *African American Legislators in the American States*. Chapters 1 and 2

\*Richard Fenno. *Going Home: Black Representative and Their Constituents*. Chapter 1 and 7

**BTCE:** Write a 700-1000 essay about any current member of the Congressional Black Caucus. You can include some biographical information, but focus on the policy agenda, successes and failures of the member.

## POLICY and COALITIONS

### Week 13: Policy

April 18

\*Cedric Herring, *African Americans and the Policy Agenda*, Chapters 1, 2, 6

Clarence Lusane, *Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice: Foreign Policy, Race and the New American Century*

**BTCE:** Write a 700-1000 word "policy memo" proposing a new policy or supporting or denouncing an existing policy that you believe is important to some element of an African American political agenda.

### Week 14: Policy and Intra-racial Coalitions

Omar McRoberts, *Streets of Glory*, all

**BTCE:** Write a 700-1000 word essay about a church in the city of New Orleans that is working toward policy, political or social goals with a specific focus on black empowerment

or interracial cooperation. Assess their efforts compared with those in the four corners churches discussed by McRoberts.

### **Week 15: Coalition Politics**

May 2

\*Claire Kim, Claire *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City*, Chapters 1,2, and 6

\* Karen Kaufmann. Cracks in the Rainbow: Group Commonality as a Basis for Latino and African-American Political Coalitions *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 2. (Jun., 2003), pp. 199-210.

\* Kenneth J. Meier; Paula D. McClain; J. L. Polinard; Robert D. Wrinkle  
Divided or Together? Conflict and Cooperation between African Americans and Latinos  
*Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 3. (Sep., 2004), pp. 399-409

**BTCE:** Write a 700-1000 word essay about a national organization or policy-based movement with a specific interest in bringing together more than one racial minority group. Assess its viability and effectiveness.