

## **POLA 4020: Black Women's Political Activism**

Professor Melissa Harris-Perry  
Political Science

Anna Julia Cooper Project on Gender, Race, and Politics in the South

Fall 2012

This course uses the history of African American women's political activism to illuminate questions of participation in American politics. Examining the intersection and interaction of gender, race, sexuality, and class with politics in the United States, this course reconceptualizes both politics and political science. By moving black women from their historically marginal position in the curriculum to the center of our attention, we will begin to explore ways of transforming knowledge about American politics. Specific readings, discussion, and writing will explore topics such as feminism, labor activism, the Civil Rights Movement, black power, and contemporary cultural politics.

Critical to understanding black women's political activism is an appreciation for the ways that these women integrate political action and consciousness into their daily lives. To reinforce the notion of lived politics, this course will incorporate a final project that requires learning from an African American activist through research beyond the classroom.

**You will need to regularly visit the Blackboard Site for this course. On Blackboard you will find:**

1. Syllabus: Check regularly for updates.
2. Announcements: These announcements are the main form of communication between the professor and students outside of class time. You are expected to be responsible for any information posted there.
3. Discussion Forum: Students will post essays here.
4. Final Project: Updates, descriptions, expectations, etc.
5. Grades

## Required Texts

- Brown, Nikki. *Private Politics and Public Voices: Black Women's Activism from World War I to the New Deal*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.
- Brown, Ruth N. *Black Girlhood Celebration: Toward a Hip-Hop Feminist Pedagogy*. New York: Peter Land, 2009.
- Collier-Thomas, Bettye, and V. P. Franklin, eds. *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*. New York: New York University Press, 2001.
- Harris-Perry, Melissa. *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes and Black Women in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.
- James, Stanlie M., Frances Smith Foster, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, eds. *Still Brave: The Evolution of Black Women's Studies*. New York: Feminist Press, 2009.
- Marby, Marcus. *Twice As Good: Condoleezza Rice and Her Path to Power*. New York: Modern Times, 2007.
- McMurry, Linda E. *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life Ida B. Wells*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Richie, Beth. *Compelled to Crime: The Gender Entrapment of Battered Black Women*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Shakur, Assata. *Assata: An Autobiography*. Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill Books, 1987.
- Weisenfeld, Judith. *African American Women and Christian Activism: New York's Black YWCA, 1905-1945*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Readings marked with a \* can be found Blackboard

## **Assessment**

### **EIGHT (8) weekly online essays (60%)**

On Monday night by 8PM of each week, students will post a brief (500-700 words) essay discussing some aspect of that week's readings. The essay is meant to be a provocative thought piece, **not** a summary of the week's readings. We will use these as the basis of our discussions for the class. Each student must complete EIGHT (8) essays. Students can choose which 8 weeks they will write responses.

### **Final Project (30%)**

To be announced

### **Class participation and attendance (10%)**

### **Extra Credit**

Each week I will ask you to visit selected websites that supplement the readings, lectures, and class discussions. All websites will be linked from the course site. Bonus points can be earned by writing up responses to these web assignments that link the readings with the information on the sites.

**\*\*NOTE:** You will lose points if your papers or postings are late. 1/3 letter grade will be deducted for every 24 hours the assignment is late. No assignment will be accepted after 72 hours late without prior agreement.\*\*

### **Week 1: August 28**

#### **Introduction: Studying Black Women's Activism**

##### Assignment:

Identify one recent (last 6 months) news story about an African American woman in politics. The story can be at a national or local level or an international story. Politics should be very broadly defined. You can bring a story of a woman running for office, but it could also be someone in an issue advocacy role or even a cultural role. Just be prepared to discuss in class why this news article is an example of African American women's activism. **\*\*PRINT AND BRING TO CLASS\*\***

### **Week 2: September 4**

#### **The Foundational Activist, Ida B. Wells and the Anti-Lynching Campaign**

Chapters 2-4 and Chapters 9-12 of Linda McMurry, *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life Ida B. Wells*.

\*Giddings, Paula. "Chicago and the Wizard," in *Ida: A Sword Among Lions: Ida B. Wells and the Campaign Against Lynching*, 433-462. New York: Amistad, 2008.

Web Assignment for Extra Credit:

Visit WithoutSanctuary.org and watch the movie. Write 250 words on the link between Wells' activism and the information on this site.

**Week 3: September 11**  
**Black Feminist Thought**

All of Section I of *Still Brave: The Evolution of Black Women's Studies*

The Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement," 3-12.

Clark, "Lesbianism: an Act of Resistance," 12-22.

Walker, "Womanist," 22-23.

Lourde, "The Uses of Anger," 23-31.

hooks, "Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory," 31-45.

Brown, King & Ransby, "African American Women in Defense of Ourselves," 45-47.

Awkward, "A Black Man's Place in Black Feminist Criticism," 47-64.

From Section IV of *Still Brave*

Brown, "What Has Happened Here?" 283-300.

Griffin, "That the Mothers May Soar and the Daughters May Know Their Names: A Retrospective of Black Feminist Literary Criticism," 336-358.

Web Assignment for Extra Credit:

Try this: Do a Google search on black feminism. What do you get? Now try one on feminism. How is it different? Play around with various combinations of black woman, women, etc. Try it in Scholar, News and general Google. Write 250 words on what you found.

**Week 4: September 18**  
**Black Women as Citizens**

Melissa Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen*

Web Assignment for Extra Credit:

Find a political blog written by an African American woman or group of African American women. What are the primary topics covered on this blog? How much do issues of race and gender explicitly influence the political commentary found here? Write 250 words.

**Week 5: September 25**  
**Civil Rights Activism**

Chapters 2-9, *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*.

Web Assignment for Extra Credit

Watch Fannie Lou Hamer's speech to the 1968 DNC Convention.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-RoVzAqhYk> Write 250 words connecting this speech to black women's civil rights activism.

**Week 6: October 2**

**FILM: Civil Rights and Black Power**

*Reflections Unheard: Black Women in Civil Rights*

Film in Class

No Web Assignment and no essays this week

\*\*I will take attendance in class\*\*

Event: The creator and producer of *Reflections Unheard*, Nev Nnaji, is coming to Tulane to discuss her documentary with you. She will be leading a screening and discussion on Monday, October 8<sup>th</sup> at 7:00pm in Room 117 of Richardson Building. Please plan to attend.

**Week 7: October 9**

**Black Power**

Chapters 10-13, *Sisters in the Struggle*

Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography*

Web Assignment for Extra Credit

Visit the Hands Off Assata webpage. <http://www.assatashakur.com/>. Write 250 words connecting this effort to the Black Power movement.

**Week 8: October 16**

**Race and Christian Activism**

Chapters 1-3 and 6 of Judith Weisenfeld, *African American Women and Christian Activism: New York's Black YWCA, 1905-1945*.

\*Humez, Jean M. "In Search of Harriet Tubman's Spiritual Autobiography." *NWSA Journal* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 162-182.

\*McFadden, Grace J. "Septima P. Clark and the Struggle for Human Rights," in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*, edited by Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline A. Rouse and Barbara Woods, 85-97. Brooklyn: Carlson Pub., 1990.

Web Assignment for Extra Credit

Visit the YWCA of New Orleans website. Write 250 words comparing the work and efforts of this modern, local organization to the history of New York's YWCA in the Weisenfeld book. <http://www.ywca.org/site/pp.asp?c=fulSI6OYH&b=66890>.

## **Week 9: October 23**

### **Health Activism**

- \*Chapters 4-6 in Smith, Susan L. *Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired: Black Women's Health Activism in America, 1890-1950*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995.
- \*Grayson, Deborah R. "Necessity was the Midwife of Our Politics': Black Women's Health Activism in the 'Post'-Civil Rights Era," in *Still Lifting, Still Climbing: African American Women's Contemporary Activism*, edited by Kimberly Springer, 131-149. New York: New York University Press, 1999.
- \*Reynolds, Sean. "Bar None: The Health of Incarcerated Black Women," in *The Black Women's Health Book: Speaking for Ourselves*, edited by Evelyn White, 193-198. Seattle, Wash.: Seal Press, 1990.
- \*Gomez, Jewelle L. and Barbara, Smith. "Taking the Home out of Homophobia: Black Lesbian Health," in *The Black Women's Health Book*, 198-214.
- \*Ross, Loretta J. "African-American Women and Abortion: 1800-1970," in *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*, edited by Stanlie M. James and Abena P.A. Busia, 141-160. Hoboken: Taylor & Francis Ltd., 1993.
- \*Obbo, Christine. "HIV Transmission: Men are the Solution," in *Theorizing Black Feminisms*, 160-182.
- \*Barbee, Evelyn L. and Marilyn Little. "Health, Social Class and African-American Women," in *Theorizing Black Feminisms*, 182-203.

#### Web Assignment for Extra Credit

Watch Rae Lewis-Thorton's emotional discussion of being ejected from Delta Sigma Theta sorority. Write 250 words about the power, class and activism issues evoked in this controversy. <http://www.the-savvy-sista.com/2012/05/delta-sigma-theta-rescinds-honorary.html>

## **Week 10: October 30**

### **Labor and Welfare Rights**

Chapters 1-4 of Nikki Brown, *Private Politics and Public Voices: Black Women's Activism from World War I to the New Deal*.

- \*White, Deborah Gray. "Making a Way Out of No Way," in *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*, 212-256. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999.
- \*Hunter, Tera W. "'Washing Amazons' and Organized Protests," in *To Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War*, 74-98. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- \*Tait, Vanessa. "'Workers Just Like Anyone Else': Organizing Workfare Unions in New York City," in *Still Lifting, Still Climbing*, 297-325.
- \*Landry, Bart. "Black Families: A Challenge to the Traditional Family Paradigm," in *Black Working Wives: Pioneers of the American Family Revolution*, 32-56. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

#### Web Assignment for Extra Credit:

Learn what you can from the web about Thyra Edwards. Write 250 words about her life and work.

**Week 11: November 6**  
**NO CLASS this week.**

It's Election Day! Go vote!!

**Week 12: November 13**  
**Sexual and Domestic Violence**  
**Guest Lecturer: Dr. Trimiko Melancon, Professor of English at Loyola University & Anna Julia Cooper Project Visiting Scholar**

- \*Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241-1299.
- \* White, Aaronette M. "Talking Black, Talking Feminist: Gendered Micromobilization Processes in a Collective Process against Rape," in *Still Lifting, Still Climbing*, 189-219.
- \*Rushing, Andrea B. "Surviving Rape: A Morning/Mourning Ritual," in *Theorizing Black Feminisms*, 127-141.
- \*Hine, Darlene C. "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, edited by Beverley Guy-Sheftall, 379-387. New York: New Press, 1995.
- \*Canaan, Andrea R. "I Call Up Names: Facing Childhood Sexual Abuse," in *The Black Women's Health Book*, 78-82.
- \*Hollies, Linda. "A Daughter Survives Incest: A Retrospective Analysis," in *The Black Women's Health Book*, 82-92.
- \*White, Evelyn C. "Love Don't Always Make it Right: Black Women and Domestic Violence," in *The Black Women's Health Book*, 92-98.

Extra Credit Assignment

Attend the Bi-Partisan Summit. Write 250 words about the panel(s) you attend.

**Week 13: November 20**  
**Prisons**

Beth Richie, *Compelled to Crime: The Gender Entrapment of Battered, Black Women*.

- \*Smith, Jennifer E. "ONAMOVE: African American Women Confronting the Prison Crisis," in *Still Lifting, Still Climbing*, 219-240.

Web Assignment for Extra Credit

Visit <http://vote-nola.org/> or <http://www.fflic.org/>. Write 250 words about how this local organization addresses issues of incarceration.

**Week 14: November 27**  
**Foreign Policy**

Marcus Marby, *Twice As Good: Condoleezza Rice and Her Path to Power*. (selections TBA)

Web Assignment for Extra Credit

Read two different online assessments of Secretary Rice, one that considers her tenure as Secretary of State a failure and one that considers it a success. Write 250 words that compare the basis for the two assessments.

**Week 15: December 4**  
**Contemporary Cultural Politics**

\*Chapters 3-5 in Morgan, Joan. *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip-Hop Feminist Breaks it Down*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999.

Ruth Nicole Brown, *Black Girlhood Celebration: Toward a Hip-Hop Feminist Pedagogy*.

Web Assignment for Extra Credit

Write 250 words explaining which artist, song, or album you think is the best example of feminism in hip-hop.