POLA 4020: Black Women’s Political Activism

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

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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


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.

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*
Awkward, “A Black Man’s Place in Black Feminist Criticism,” 47-64.

From Section IV of *Still Brave*
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 Fanny 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 8th 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

Week 8: October 16
Race and Christian Activism


Web Assignment for Extra Credit
Week 9: October 23
Health Activism


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](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*.


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


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

**Week 13: November 20**
Prisons


**Web Assignment for Extra Credit**
**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**


*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.