

HIS 512:368

Civil Rights Movement

TU-TH 5, MU 210

Professor Steven F. Lawson

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this course is to study the growth and decline of the struggle for civil rights in the United States. The civil rights movement stands out as one of the most significant social and political developments of twentieth century American history. A grassroots black struggle, backed by an interracial coalition and the power of the federal government, broke down barriers to first-class citizenship of African-Americans. The movement was part of a longer black freedom struggle that went back into the nineteenth century. This course will focus on that portion of the struggle characterized by an organized mass movement(s) from World War II through the 1970s, highlighting the shift from protest to electoral politics.

The pursuit of equality by blacks was a long and perilous one. Wars, both hot and cold, and the New Deal's liberal response to economic depression helped erode the foundation of racial segregation, and the Brown v. Board of Education ruling in 1954 attacked the legal basis of separate and unequal treatment of the races. Fourteen years of strife and five civil rights acts followed as the South sought to delay the implementation of constitutional guarantees. As the South belatedly began to obey the mandates of federal law, the North exhibited its own brand of racial conflict, culminating in the urban rebellions of the 1960s. When cries for civil rights gave way to shouts for black power, the civil rights forces split apart leaving in their path a white backlash screaming for retrenchment.

Despite the tensions accompanying the freedom struggle, nearly all Americans share in the heritage of the civil rights movement. Not only did the participants transform themselves, but they also transformed society. They extended representative democracy to the disfranchised and served as a catalyst for the women's liberation movement and for the emancipation of other minorities who were dissatisfied with their material conditions and legal status in the United States. Because of the enduring significance of this struggle and its impact on American history, the civil rights movement warrants thoughtful study. This is particularly true in the contemporary period when appeals for affirmative action have been challenged with charges of reverse discrimination. In sum, we will try to place the civil rights movement within the context of American political, economic, and social institutions.

Departing from the traditional chronology that begins the movement in 1954 and ends in 1965, this course starts with the origins of the struggle in the 1930s and 1940s and concludes with the transformation of the movement beyond the 1960s and into the 1980s. Also moving away from the traditional lecture presentation, the course will revolve around the documentary film series, *Eyes on the Prize, Parts I and II*. After the first two weeks, I intend to show eleven episodes from this series, approximately one a week. Each week one class presentation will consist

of a lecture and discussion of the historical background for the film and the other meeting will consist of the screening of the film followed by a brief discussion of the episode.

The main questions posed by the course will deal with tactics such as nonviolence and self defense; the tensions between charismatic and group-centered leadership styles; the roles of white moderates and liberals; the impact of gender and class on racial goals; the connections between civil rights and black power; and the implementation of civil rights gains. Through an examination of these and other issues, we will assess the strengths and weaknesses of top down (national) and bottom up (local) approaches to studying the civil rights movement.

REQUIREMENTS

1. The books for the course are available at the Rutgers Bookstore on the College Avenue Campus. They consist of: Steven F. Lawson and Charles Payne, **Debating the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1968 2nd edition** (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Clayborne Carson, ed., *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader* (Penguin, 1991); and Peter J. Ling, *Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Routledge, 2002).
2. There will be two exams consisting of essays and short i.d.'s, each counting 25 percent of the grade.
There will be no make-up exams without special permission of the instructor in advance, which is granted only in unusual circumstances.
3. Students will write a weekly journal throughout the semester consisting of their reviews of and reactions to the films and reading assignments. The journals will be graded on how well you integrate material from films, reading assignments, and lectures. Journals compose the remaining 50 percent of the grade and will be collected twice during the semester and. **Failure to turn in the journal on time will mean a grade reduction for each day it is late. At the end of your last journal entry before turning it in each time write the following statement: "I understand what plagiarism means, and I have not engaged in it. This journal consists of my ideas and writing alone." Your signature should follow.**
4. Extra credit will be given for consistent class participation.

Office Hours

My offices are in the Aresty Research Center for Undergraduates, 1st floor Milledoler Hall and 305 Van Dyck, and I will hold regular office hours on Tuesday from 1:30-2:30 and Thursday from 1:30-2:30. I will also arrange appointments at other times. I urge you to take advantage of my office hours at least once during the semester. My office telephone numbers are (732) 932-5437 and (732) 932-7027 and my e-mail address is slawson@rci.rutgers.edu.

Code of Conduct

In the event that you miss a film, it is your responsibility to make-up the viewing at the Media Center on Livingston Campus or any other place you can find the episode. You must arrive on time to class. Chronic lateness will not be accepted. Read the *Code of Conduct* attached to this syllabus for an understanding of acceptable course etiquette (or you can find it on the History Department/Website: <http://history.rutgers.edu/undergrad/shortcode.htm>)

Schedule of Assignments

- September 5: Classes Begin, Introduction
- September 7: Lecture, Origins of the Civil Rights Movement
Reader: 1-34
- September 12: Lecture. Origins (cont.)
Lawson and Payne: 3-46, 115-155
- September 14: Lecture, Origins (cont.)
- September 19: Film, *Awakenings (1954-56)*
Lawson and Payne: 49-58; Reader: 35-60; Ling, MLK,10-62.
- September 21: Lecture and Discussion
- September 26: Film, *Fighting Back (1957-62)*
Lawson and Payne: 59-69; Reader: 61-64, 83-106;
- September 28: Lecture and Discussion
- October 3: *Ain't Scared of Your Jails (1960-61)*
Lawson and Payne: 159-60; Reader: 107-32; Ling, MLK,63-100
- October 5: Lecture and Discussion
- October 10: *No Easy Walk (1962-66)*
Reader: 133-65; Ling, MLK,101-175.
- October 12: Lecture and Discussion
- October 17: *Mississippi: Is This America? (1962-64)*
Lawson and Payne: 82-80, 163-65, 170-88, 199-209;Reader:
166-89, 200-03

JOURNALS DUE

- October 19: Lecture and Discussion
- October 24: EXAM #1
- October 26: *Bridge to Freedom (1965)*
Lawson and Payne: 90-100, 168-69; Ling, MLK: 176-207

- October 31: Lecture and Discussion
- November 2: *Two Societies (1965-68)*
Lawson and Payne: 101-03; Reader: 288-332; Ling, MLK:
208-241
- November 7: Lecture and Discussion
- November 9: *The Promised Land (1967-68)*
Lawson and Payne: 79-81, 104-13, 166=67; Ling, MLK: 242-315
- November 14: Lecture and Discussion
- November 16: *The Time Has Come (1964-65)*
Reader: 244-87
- November 21: Lecture and Discussion
- November 23: **Thanksgiving**
- November 28: *A Nation of Law (1968-71)* and an excerpt from *Power!*
(1967-68)
Reader: 500-39, 557-90
- November 30: *Keys to the Kingdom (1974-80)*
Reader: 591-611, 614-55
- December 7: Lecture and discussion
JOURNALS DUE
- December 12: Exam #2