

CIVIL RIGHTS: TWENTIETH CENTURY UNITED STATES
Fall 2008, Skidmore College

Professor: Winston Grady-Willis
Times: T/Th 12:40-2:00pm
Location: Tisch 202
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Office: Tisch 328
Hours: W 4:00-7:00pm
T/Th by appointment
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Course Description and Objectives

This course will chart and examine twentieth century struggles to attain full democratic citizenship rights within the United States. The primary focus of the course is on African American freedom struggles against institutionalized forms of white male supremacy, such as segregation, disfranchisement and terrorism. A key theme in this regard is the often contested interplay between grassroots on-the-ground activism and the formulation of groundbreaking formal public policy. The course will also shed light on less-discussed protest struggles, such as those waged by indigenous peoples of the American Indian Movement and Mexican Americans of the Chicano/a Movement. Through lecture-discussions, readings, documentary films and an extended research essay project, students will meet the following objectives: gain knowledge about twentieth century US society; understand the concepts of civil rights, coalition building, human rights, institutional racism, public policy, self-determination and state political repression; examine ways in which groups have responded to mainstream social institutions; underscore the centrality of women to such struggles, both as established and grassroots activists; complicate our understanding of key figures, particularly Martin Luther King, Jr.; and develop research and writing skills utilizing primary sources. Throughout the course students will be placed at the center of the learning experience and attempts will be made to establish meaningful dialogue.

Required Texts

Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City*

Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*

Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson*

Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power*

Enriqueta Vasquez, *Enriqueta Vasquez and the Chicano Movement: Writings from El Grito Del Norte*

Each book should be available for purchase at the Skidmore Shop by 15 September. Every effort also will be made to have the texts available on reserve in the Lucy Scribner Library. Students can expect occasional handouts and other supplementary assignments throughout the semester.

Evaluation

- 1) Class preparation, discussion, performance on quizzes, and attendance at specific outside-class events of relevance to the course, will constitute **20** percent of each student's grade.
- 2) Performance on the midterm and final examinations will constitute a combined **45** percent of the grade, with the midterm comprising 20 percent and the final examination 25 percent. Each exam will be a combination of short answer and extended essay questions.
- 3) A fifteen-page semester-long research essay project will constitute **35** percent of the class grade.

Attendance

Although attendance is extremely important, there may be instances when absences are unavoidable. Nevertheless, students with more than two unexcused absences from class sessions will receive a *one-half letter-grade* deduction for the course. An effort will be made to conduct roll at the beginning of each class session. A student not present 10 minutes after class has begun will be considered late. Being late three times constitutes one absence.

Class Meetings

Most classes will be conducted according to a lecture-discussion format. For that reason, it is very important that students prepare themselves by reading the necessary material before coming to a given class session. Stimulating class discussions result from informed participation. Food is not permitted during class time. Cellular telephones should be turned off or silenced prior to the start of each class session. (If this poses a problem, however, please notify the professor prior to a given class.) Text messaging during class time is unacceptable. Students using laptop computers to take notes should not engage in other computer related activities, such as Web-surfing, instant messaging or email. Any student considered to be disrespectful or disruptive during a given class session will forfeit their right to remain in class that day. In turn, however, it is the obligation of the professor to be respectful, prepared, organized, and punctual. If a student has concerns about the conduct or performance of the professor, they should express those concerns to Professor Gregory Pfitzer, chair of the Department of American Studies.

Research Essay Project

This assignment is designed to acquaint students with one of the most important tasks performed by scholars: using both primary and secondary sources to interpret a specific event, person's life, or trend. The essay will also serve as a three-phase project that underscores that good writing involves a process of revision.

(1) Early in the semester students will comb through library archives and microfilm collections in search of primary sources, those documents that record the actual words of a participant in or witness to a given historical occurrence. Such sources include autobiographies, court transcripts and decisions, municipal records, and newspapers. Once a topic has been approved, students will write a 3-page summary-analysis of the primary source.

(2) Students will then begin researching secondary sources, those books and essays that are interpretations written by scholars and journalists who have investigated earlier primary sources. These books should compliment the primary source research already begun. Students will hand in a first draft of the essay (12 pages minimum), due after the midterm. While no draft will be graded, students will receive comments regarding research, analysis, and writing.

(3) The final phase of the project will be a polished essay (15 pages) that integrates primary and secondary sources and demonstrates a clear command of prose style. Students may consult any number of stylebooks, including Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* and *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Disability and Accessibility Accommodations

Students with disabilities should provide their semester memorandum of accommodations to me as soon as possible. Those students who do not have accommodations, but who believe that they may be in need of them, should arrange a meeting with Mr. Jamin Totino, Coordinator for

Students with Disabilities, in the Office of Student Academic Services, located in the Starbuck Center (580-8150). Students should speak with the professor one week prior to any given exam date to ensure full use of testing accommodations.

Academic Integrity

Students should uphold the Skidmore Honor System and the policies outlined in the *Student Handbook* and *Student Academic Handbook* regarding academic integrity. As noted in the 2008-2009 Skidmore Course Catalog: “Skidmore not only promotes intellectual honesty vigorously but responds severely to such offenses as plagiarism and cheating on exams. Any Honor Code violation may affect the student’s graduate school or transfer recommendations and the student’s eligibility for academic prizes and awards, for Dean’s List or graduation honors, and for membership in Skidmore or national honor societies.” (For a full discussion, see http://www.skidmore.edu/catalog/200809/academic_standards_and_review1.htm#the_honor_code.)

COURSE SCHEDULE (Always Subject to Revision!)

- September 4 - **Introducing the Course and Syllabus**
- September 9 - **Domestic Apartheid Structures**
- September 11 - **Impact of Domestic Apartheid: Emmett Till**
Documentary: “Awakenings,” from *Eyes on the Prize I*

STRANGE CAREER OF JIM CROW

- September 16 - **Northern Troubles**
Biondi, Prologue-Chapter 6
- September 18 - **World War II and Northern Organizing**
Biondi, Chapter 7-Epilogue
- September 23 - **Rural Grassroots**
Moody, Part 1
- September 25 - **A Coming of Age**
Moody, Part 2

CRUCIBLE OF STRUGGLE

- September 30 - **Montgomery [Primary Source Summary-Analysis Due]**
Robinson, entire book
- October 2 - **Northern Critique: Nation of Islam**
Documentary: “The Hate that Hate Produced”

- October 7 - **Sit-in Movement and Emergence of SNCC**
Documentary: "Ain't Scared of Your Jails," from *Eyes on the Prize I*
Moody, Part 4
Barbara Ransby, "Mentoring a New Generation of Activists: The Birth of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee," in *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*: 239-272
- October 14 - **Southern Critique: Robert F. Williams**
Tyson, Prologue-Chapter 5
- October 16 - **Violence and Awakening within the Crucible**
Grady-Willis, "Bridges," in *Challenging U.S. Apartheid: Atlanta and Black Struggles for Human Rights, 1960-1977*: 59-78
- October 21 - **MIDTERM EXAMINATION**

RADICALIZATION

- October 23 - **Freedom Summer and Selma**
Tyson, Chapter 6-Conclusion
- October 28 - **Cities Ablaze**
Grady-Willis, "Neighborhood Protest and the Voices of the Black Working Poor," in *Challenging U.S. Apartheid*: 114-140
- October 30 - **Black Power**
- November 4 - **Atlanta Project of SNCC**

MARTIN LUTHER KING: THE LATTER YEARS

- November 6 - **Contradictions in Chicago**
- November 11 - **Vietnam War**
Speech: "My Declaration of Independence from the War in Vietnam"
- November 13 - **Memphis Sanitation Strike**

REDEFINITIONS

- November 18 - **American Indian Movement [First Drafts of Research Essay Due!]**
Documentary: "*Alcatraz Is Not an Island*"
- November 20 - **Chicano/a Movement**
Vasquez, ix-Part IV

- December 2 - **Grassroots Labor Organizing [Final Drafts of Research Essays Due!]**
Vasquez, Part V
- December 4 - **LGBTQ Activism**
- December 9 - **Larger Visions**
Ransby, "A Freirian Teacher, a Gramscian Intellectual, and a Radical Humanist: Ella Baker's Legacy," in *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*: 357-374
Vasquez, Conclusion
- December 15 - **Final Examination**
6:00-9:00pm