

# **HST 365: The Civil Rights Movement in the Modern US**

**School of History, Philosophy, and Religion, Oregon State University**

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- 4 Credits
- Spring 2014
- MW 2:00-3:50

**Prerequisites, Co-requisites, and Enforced Prerequisites:** None

## **Catalogue Description:**

An exploration of the “long civil rights movement” among African Americans and their allies during the 20<sup>th</sup> century United States, with attention to the structure of racial inequality, movement philosophies and strategies, white allies and opponents, relationships to other freedom movements, and the movement’s legacies.

## **Course Content:**

This course is centrally focused on African Americans’ struggle for freedom during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States, with a particular focus on the “long civil rights movement” era, from the 1930s through the 1970s; it will include some attention to movements among other marginalized ethnic/racial groups and their relationships to the African American struggle and will attend to the ways in which gender, class, and sexuality shaped race relations and activist campaigns. Students will explore the structure and manifestations of racial inequality in the United States; the broad historical forces that shaped opportunities and constraints for freedom struggles; the movement’s various philosophies, strategies, demands, and tactics; activism and ideologies of the movement’s allies and opponents; interactions between the black freedom movement and other movements challenging exclusion and discrimination; and the legacies of the movement. Students will explore these issues through reading in primary and secondary sources; viewing films and film clips; participating in interactive lectures and active course discussion and debates; completing several short writing assignments; and conducting a multi-faceted research project.

**WEEK 1: Theoretical Grounding and Context.** Students will explore the concept of “race” as a historically and socially constructed category and the concept of “white privilege” to provide the grounding necessary for contextualizing course content. They will examine the history of Reconstruction and the imposition of segregation and disfranchisement in the South through legal and extra-legal means in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century and the various philosophical and strategic responses from African American activists and ordinary people as an introduction to the various strands of black activism, including self-help/social work; labor activism; legal challenges; and black nationalism.

**WEEK 2: Radical Roots.** Students will investigate the appeal of radical political ideologies, including black nationalism and varieties of left-wing approaches such as socialism and communism, to some African American leaders and rank-and-file in the 1920s and 1930s. They will explore the context of these movements in the Great Migration of African Americans into northern and western industrial cities (and white responses to it) and in the rise of left-wing political movements and a robust Popular Front during the New Deal era.

**WEEK 3: The New Deal/Wartime State.** Students will examine the ways in which the New Deal and wartime state offered both opportunities for racial inclusion and inscribed new racial barriers to emerging concepts of social citizenship. The racialized structure of the New Deal welfare state – from labor regulations and social provision to federal housing policies – redrew racial boundaries while laying a foundation for challenging racial exclusion. American participation in World War II offered opportunities for African American and emerging Mexican American activists to challenge racial discrimination and mobilized larger numbers of civil rights activists than ever before, caused significant clashes between whites and people of color who were increasingly migrating to industrial centers, and created the potential for a significant shift in race relations.

**WEEK 4: Cold War Civil Rights.** The Cold War dramatically altered the possibilities for antiracist activists. Students will explore the growing language of “pluralism” and “interracial cooperation” that shaped a new ideal of “racial liberalism,” a commitment to gradual, cooperative change that portrayed the South as increasingly out of step with the nation’s progress. They will examine the ways in which this newly dominant concept shaped antiracist politics in the context of virulent anticommunism, muting socialist critiques and shifting attention to the most blatant forms of racial discrimination in the South and toward changing white attitudes rather than the structural bases for racial inequality.

**WEEK 5: Direct Action, Massive Resistance, and the South.** Students will explore the so-called “classical phase” of the Civil Rights Movement, from *Brown v. Board of Education* through passage of the Voting Rights Act, as activists throughout the South garnered white allies through dramatic acts of nonviolent direct action to dismantle de jure segregation and disfranchisement. Discussion will include the philosophy of nonviolent direct action alongside self-defense efforts; conflict within Southern black communities; the role of Northern activists; and the movement’s tense and complicated relationship with federal authorities.

**WEEK 6: Uneven Development and the Limits of Racial Liberalism.** Students will examine the multiple ways that postwar development reshaped racial opportunities by fostering white suburban development, industrial relocation, and urban crisis. Despite adoption of formal nondiscrimination in employment and housing in many non-Southern states, metropolitan areas throughout the nation saw deepened racial disparities. Discussion will include political and legal battles over housing and public schooling, as African American and Latin@ activists and some white allies pursued access and opportunity and opponents developed new, “color-blind” defenses of white privilege and metropolitan inequity.

**WEEK 7: Urban Crisis and Wars on Poverty.** Students will explore longstanding notions of African Americans as psychologically and culturally “damaged” and the ways in which that idea

fueled liberal antipoverty efforts as well as civil rights demands for economic equality and black nationalists' emphasis on cultural nationalism. Discussion will also focus on activist responses to racially structured economic inequality, including proposals for massive federal investment from mainstream civil rights activists, demands for community control from Black Power activists, and organizing for "welfare rights" among poor women.

**WEEK 8: Civil Rights, Black Power, and Labor.** Students will examine activists' efforts to achieve equal opportunity in the labor market. Discussion will include the passage and contested implementation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; activists' various legislative, judicial, and protest strategies to achieve access to good jobs; the development of "affirmative action" for federal contractors; the role of Title VII in mobilizing Latin@s and women of various races to challenge their economic exclusion; and opposition to/conflict over affirmative action.

**WEEK 9: A Post-Racial Society?** What were the legacies of the "Civil Rights Movement," and what issues are antiracist activists tackling in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Students will examine both progress and continued racial disparities since the height of the movement in the 1970s. Discussion will include political battles over enforcement of civil rights laws/policies; the expansion of "civil rights" efforts to women and sexual minorities; and the ways in which racial politics have shaped debates over welfare reform, criminal justice, and immigration.

**WEEK 10: Student Projects.** Students will present the results of their web projects exploring "Race, Place, and Politics in Portland, Oregon," which will include collection of oral histories and research in the archives of the Urban League of Portland.

### **Course Specific Measurable Student Learning Outcomes:**

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- Explain race as a historically and socially constructed concept;
- Define and provide examples of institutional racism in the United States and explain its causes and consequences; explain the "de jure/de facto" distinction and how it shaped battles over racial inequality, and effectively critique the distinction with historical evidence;
- Describe and assess the impact of various movement strategies, including legal challenges, direct action, and community organizing, on racist policies and practices;
- Explain shifts in movement emphasis and strategy within the broader context of American history and describe the various philosophical, strategic, and political debates within the movement;
- Illustrate and explain both the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement and the fact of continued racial disparities in the United States;
- Effectively read and assess secondary sources: identify the scholar's argument/interpretation; assess sources and evidence; and understand the source in relation to broader historical literature;
- Write a clear, lucid, and historically accurate interpretative essay using both secondary and primary sources;
- Understand the benefits and limitations of oral histories and collect and process a half-hour oral history;

- Understand what an archival collection is and assess archival sources for the historical information they provide and the questions they pose.

### **Baccalaureate Core Category Learning Outcomes:**

As part of the Baccalaureate Core's Difference, Power, and Discrimination category, students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- Explain how difference is socially constructed.
- Using historical and contemporary examples, describe how perceived differences, combined with unequal distribution of power across economic, social, and political institutions, result in discrimination;
- Analyze ways in which the interactions of social categories such as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and age are related to difference, power, and discrimination in the United States.

HST 365 fulfills the Difference, Power, and Discrimination (DPD) requirement in the Baccalaureate Core. The DPD requirement engages students in the intellectual examination of the complexity of the structures, systems, and ideologies that sustain discrimination and the unequal distribution of power and resources in society. The unequal distribution of social, economic, and political power in the United States and in other countries is sustained through a variety of individual beliefs and institutional practices. These beliefs and practices have tended to obscure the origins and operations of social discrimination such that this unequal power distribution is often viewed as the natural order. Examination of DPD course material will enhance meaningful democratic participation in our diverse university community and our increasingly multicultural U.S. society.

### **Evaluation of Student Performance:**

Students will earn their grades in the course by completing the following assignments:

- Two 1,500 word (5 pages, double-spaced) essays in response to specific questions related to course material (40%). Essay questions will ask broad, thematic questions and require students to analyze, synthesize, and assess both secondary and primary sources in light of class lecture and discussion. For example: How did the American system of federalism shape the politics of race in the United States (in a particular time period)? What strategies did African Americans employ in response to racist ideologies and practices (in a particular time period)? How did the nation's global relations shape the Black Freedom Struggle (in a particular time period)? How did opposition to the Black Freedom Movement change (over a specific time period)? How have class and gender shaped activist strategies and/or opposition? What is "Black Power," and what effect did it have? How did postwar economic and spatial development reshape the politics of racial inequality? How useful is the distinction between "de facto" and "de jure" segregation, and how has that distinction shaped responses to racial inequality?
- Four 750 word (2-3 pages, double-spaced) response papers on weekly reading assignments (10%);
- "Race, Place, and Politics in Portland Project" (group project) which will include students working as a group to collect, transcribe, and summarize one half-hour oral history; collect, digitize, and write a short description of a primary source from the Urban League

of Portland archives; collect, digitize, and write a short description of at least three newspaper articles; and write a short (500-word) essay that offers context for and analysis of the sources and how they illuminate the history of race relations and racial politics in Portland (30%);

- Civil Rights Act Debate, which will require students to read testimony from Senate debate on the Civil Rights Act and present a particular point of view/argument during an in-class debate (10%);
- Participation, which includes attending class regularly; being prepared for class; and engaging actively with the course material by asking questions and contributing thoughtfully to class discussion (10%).

**Learning Resources:** The course will use historical monographs, primary sources, and film to introduce information and ideas and to stimulate discussion.

**Primary sources:** Most primary sources will be short (speeches, manifestoes, letters, judicial opinions, journalistic accounts, oral histories) and will be drawn from various readers and the web; many primary sources from the Civil Rights Movement have been digitized and are available on-line. In addition, students will read (in whole or in part):

- Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967).
- Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).
- Anne Moody, *Coming of Age In Mississippi* (New York: Dial Press, 1968).

**Secondary sources:** Students will read several historical monographs as well as articles from edited collections and peer-reviewed journals. Books will include:

- Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2012).
- Laurie B. Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).
- Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).
- Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).
- Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton University Press, 2003).
- Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill, 1999).

**Films:** There are many documentaries that detail aspects of the Civil Rights Movement. The course will include excerpts from various documentaries to illustrate specific points and to give students a visual and aural feel for the history. Film clips will be drawn from documentaries including:

- *4 Little Girls*, produced and directed by Spike Lee, 1997.
- *The Black Power Mixtape*, directed by Göran Hugo Olsson, produced by Annika Rogell, 2011.
- *Chicano! History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*, NLCC Educational Media, 1996.
- *Eyes on the Prize*, produced by Blackside, *American Experience*, 1987.
- *Freedom on My Mind*, produced and directed by Connie Field and Marilyn Mulford, Clarity Productions, California Newsreel, 1994.
- *Freedom Riders*, produced and directed by Stanley Nelson, *American Experience*, 2010.
- *Negroes with Guns: Rob Williams and Black Power*, California Newsreel, directed by Sandra Dickson and Churchill Roberts, produced by the Documentary Institute, California Newsreel, 2005.
- *The Untold Story of Emmett Till*, produced and directed by Keith Beauchamp, 2005.

**Statement Regarding Students with Disabilities:** Accommodations are collaborative efforts between students, faculty and Disability Access Services (DAS). Students with accommodations approved through DAS are responsible for contacting the faculty member in charge of the course prior to or during the first week of the term to discuss accommodations. Students who believe they are eligible for accommodations but who have not yet obtained approval through DAS should contact DAS immediately at 737-4098.

**Expectations for Student Conduct:** In order to benefit from this course, you must do original work. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating are serious infractions and will not be tolerated. Students will receive a zero for any assignment that unlawfully copies material from another source. If you are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism or have questions about how to cite material, please consult the instructor. The minimum penalty for plagiarizing in this class is a “zero” on the assignment and the filing of an official report with Academic Affairs. Students should be aware of OSU’s policy on academic honesty, which is available at <http://oregonstate.edu/studentconduct/http://%252Foregonstate.edu/studentconduct/code/index.ph>