

WRITING ABOUT THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Political Science 4260

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After World War II, the civil rights movement had none of the advantages that successful interest groups in American politics generally try to have on their side. The most powerful members of Congress were sworn opponents of civil rights legislation. Neither party was willing to take any electoral risk in order to advance the cause of civil rights for African-American citizens. Presidential candidates largely ignored them. The bureaucratic agency that could have been in a position to help them, Federal Bureau of Investigation, was headed by a racist who was committed to discrediting the civil rights movement by finding links with the Communist Party. And perhaps most importantly, the institution of federalism required the federal government to defer to the states in the matter of civil rights. State governments in the South had long ago disfranchised most African-American voters, and consolidated the supremacy of white citizens by means of public policy, police oppression, and terror. The powerlessness of African American citizens was manifest in the thousands of lynchings that occurred between 1880 and 1960, many of which were accomplished openly, in daylight, with the complicity of local law enforcement.

In spite of the overwhelming obstacles, the civil rights movement succeeded in passing two significant pieces of legislation that changed the American political system itself. While the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 did not mean the end of racism or discrimination in American society, these laws did substantially change the rules of the game and create a different political framework for African-American participation in American politics. The primary purpose of this course is to understand how those laws were passed over the objection of previously undefeatable political figures. Understanding this unique event informs us about aspects of American politics that could not otherwise be revealed, as related to Congress, the presidency, bureaucracy, courts, political parties, and federalism.

A second goal of this course is to understand the effects of the Voting Rights Act, in particular, on the institutions of American politics. The national party system, local and state politics, Congress, and the presidency have all been deeply impacted by this revolutionary change.

Course Resources

The books available in the bookstore (in paperback, mostly used) are:

Halberstam. *The Children*.

McClymer. *Mississippi Freedom Summer*.

Carter. *The Politics of Rage*.

There will also be a number of readings available on the library's electronic reserve. Just go to <http://ares.wustl.edu/ares>. The readings are shared with the other section of this course, Poli Sci 426. This website will ask you to select 426 (by instructor or course number), and supply the course password, which is *movement*. The readings on your syllabus, other than the three required books, will be available on ares.

Ideally, you will read the materials for each class before class. This will enable you to get more out of the lecture, and will enable you to come to class with questions and comments.

While this course is not a history course, it will be necessary to learn a lot about the historical events between 1950 and 1972 in order to gain insight into the politics of the civil rights movement. One way to do this efficiently is through some of the excellent videos on the history of the civil rights movement. These, together with a close reading of the texts, should give you a good sense of the historical development of the movement.

I would like to encourage you to make comments and ask questions frequently. Questions and comments always help the class refocus on the material and help in learning and retention. The more the material can be developed through a multilateral discussion, rather than a unidirectional lecture, the better. My office is Siegle 287. My office hours are

Wednesday 4:30 – 5:30. Please feel free to make an appointment outside of office hours. My office phone is 5-5874. I prefer to be addressed as “Gary”.

Course Requirements

As a seminar, participation will be important to this course. Please come to class ready to discuss the material on the syllabus for that week. On ten Tuesdays, (those marked with * on the syllabus) I will ask you to turn in a 1-2 page memo on some aspect of the readings for that week; I will ask each of you, some time that week, about your memo. Participation will be 15% of the course grade.

The basic requirement in the course will be three papers. The first paper will be on a topic that I will hand out on Tuesday, Sept. 29. (See below.) The second and third papers will be on topics of your own choosing. You will need to turn in both a rough and a final draft each of the papers, with the final draft showing a response to editing comments by the instructor. I will occasionally ask you what your ideas are for your next writing project, and ask for suggestions from other class members. Some of you will also have a chance to read your drafts in class.

The first paper will count toward 25% of your grade, and the next two papers will each count 30%. My own expectation is that this seminar will be one in which everyone will earn a grade of at least a B or better, as a result of timely and conscientious writing efforts, and full participation in class. (Of course, I could be wrong.)

First writing project:

I will hand out the topic of the first writing assignment on Tuesday, Sept. 29. A rough draft will be due on Thursday, October 1. (You can think of it as an open book, open note, 48-hour take-home exam.) I will make comments on the rough drafts by the following Tuesday, and the final draft will be due Tuesday, Oct. 13.

These are topics that I might choose for the first writing assignment:

Compare the political strategies of the NAACP and SNCC. How did they see the world, and how was their world-view consistent with their political strategies?

Explain the political problems posed by the Freedom Rides, for either the JFK administration, Governor Patterson of Alabama, or both. How did the young SNCC volunteers manage to exert so much leverage over events?

Second writing project. Suggested length: 6-10 pages.

Your second draft could address differences within the civil rights movement: SCLC, different groups of SNCC organizers, the NAACP, etc.

Another important topic would be some aspect of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964—the role of President Johnson, the filibuster in the Senate, Dirksen's role, etc.

The second rough draft will be due Tuesday, November 10. I will try to have comments on these drafts by the end of the week. Your final draft should be turned in by Tuesday, Nov. 24.

Third writing project. Suggested length: 9-15pages.

You should think of this final paper as a full research paper, involving some research on your part outside of the readings on the syllabus. Recommended topics for the third paper include an analysis of the election of 1964. Or, you can take an institution in American politics—party system, Congress, presidency, or courts—and analyze how the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 has changed that institution. Or you can describe the political conflict among the civil rights organizations during the Selma campaign. Another topic might be the impact of the civil rights movement on party realignment.

The rough draft of the third writing project will be due Monday, December 7. I will try to return the rough drafts by Wednesday, and the final paper will be due Monday, Dec. 14.

Evaluation criteria

The papers will be evaluated both on writing style and on content—about 50% each. The writing style should first of all be consistent with the basic rules of writing in Strunk & White, *Elements of Style*, which we will go over in class. In addition, the paragraphs should be built in a coherent way around a topic sentence. The paragraphs should be organized in a logical way to support your argument.

The content should first of all be historically accurate. It should also incorporate topics and concepts from course material. For example, if you are writing about an election, the paper should not ignore any key ideas (such as two party competition) that have been developed in course as tools for understanding elections. I am primarily concerned that the papers be a means by which you can organize your thoughts and reactions to the material in class. The third paper should involve a certain amount of research on your part—for example, an extra book or a couple of papers. The paper should not leave obvious connections unmade, or obvious questions unasked. Of course, there will be a premium attached to breadth or depth of understand and originality of insight. The materials you use should be listed in a bibliography, and you should use some footnoting technique (for example, listing author and date in the text, in parentheses) to indicate which sources you are relying on for quotations, or particular facts or opinions.

You will receive a tentative grade for your rough draft and a final grade for your revised draft.

SECTION I FEDERALISM, COURTS, AND SOCIAL PROTEST

- Thu 8/27 The Civil War Amendment, Reconstruction, Disfranchisement
Read: Fairclough. *Better Day Coming*, Ch. 1 “Failure of Reconstruction”.
- Tue 9/01 Disfranchisement, the NAACP, and Scottsboro Boys
Read: Carter *Politics of Rage* pp. 35-41.
Fairclough, *Better Day Coming* Ch. 2: Ida B. Wells”, pp. 67-73, 133-140.
McClymer, “*Mississippi Freedom Summer* pp. 15-23.
- Thu 9/03 The Litigation Strategy, and the Brown decision
Video: [Eyes on the Prize; Awakenings]
Read: Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, Ch. 9, “NAACP”, Ch. 10 “1946-55”
Carter, *Politics of Rage* pp. 68-96
Kluger. “Arrival of the Superchief”.
- Tue* 9/08 Strom Thurmond, White Defiance,
Read: “Emmet Till”, ERES.
Tyson, “Robert F. Williams”. pp, 540-562.
- Thu 9/10 Montgomery and the Civil Rights Act of 1957
Read: Mann, “Half a Loaf”, (*Walls of Jericho*)
Evans and Novak, “The Johnson System”.
- Tue* 9/15 Little Rock 1957; Wallace vs. Judge Johnson
[Eyes on Prize: Fighting Back pt a]
Read: Carter *Politics of Rage* pp. 96-109.
- Thu 9/17 Formation of SNCC
Read: Halberstam, *The Children*, pp. 11-81.
- Tue* 9/22 Sit-ins and the 1960 Election
[Eyes on the Prize: Ain’t Scared of Your Jails Pt a]
Read: Halberstam, *The Children* pp. 90-148.
Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, pp. 241-252.
Tyson, “Robert F. Williams” pp. 562-570.
- Thu 9/24 Freedom Rides and the Kennedy Admin. 1961
[Eyes on Prize: Ain’t Scared of Your Jails pt. b]
Read: Halberstam. *The Children* pp. 237-348
- Tue 9/29 Mississippi Voter Registration
Read: Halberstam pp. 400-409.
McClymer, *Mississippi Freedom Summer* pp. 24-47.

Thu 10/01 Mississippi 1962
[Eyes on the Prize: Fighting Back pt. b]

SECTION II
CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND THE 1964 ELECTION

Tue* 10/06 Mississippi 1962 and the Kennedy Administration
Read: McClymer, *Mississippi Freedom Summer* 47-81.
Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, [SNCC in Miss.]pp. 256-266.
Dittmer, *Local People* "Greenwood and Jackson" pp. 143-57.

Thu 10/08 Birmingham 1963
[Video: Eyes on the Prize: No Easy Walk pt. b]
Read: Halberstam: pp. 431-443.
Fairclough, *Better Day Coming* pp. 266-279.
Carter *Politics of Rage* ch. 4, "Threads Ran Through"(110-132).

Tue* 10/13 The Schoolhouse Door; JFK; Evers Murder 1963
[Video: Eyes on the Prize: Miss. pt a]
Read: Carter *Politics of Rage* ch. 5 "Defend Our Rights". (133-155).

Thu 10/15 March on Washington; Birmingham bombings; mock election
Read: Halberstam, *Children* pp. 444-455, 477-483.
Carter, *Politics of Rage*, ch 6 "All of Us Are Victims" (156-194).
McClymer, *Freedom Summer*, 84-101.

Tue* 10/20 House Passage of The Civil Rights Act 1964;
Presidential Primaries 1964; Freedom Summer
Read: Carter, *Politics of Rage* 195-218.
McClymer, *Mississippi Freedom Summer* 102-175.

Thu 10/22 Senate Filibuster, Final Passage,
[Eyes on the Prize: Mississippi pt. b]
Read: McClymer, *Mississippi Freedom Summer* 177-224.
Mann: "An Idea Whose Time Has Come" pp. 406-432.

Tue* 10/27 Republican and Democratic Conventions 1964
[Eyes on the Prize: Mississippi pt. c]
Read: Branch, Ch. 29, "Cow Palace Revolt".
McClymer, *Mississippi Freedom Summer* 177-207.

Thu 10/29 Wallace, Johnson, and Goldwater 1964
Read: Carter, *Politics of Rage*, pp. 195-225.

Tue* 11/03 Election Results.
Read: Carter, *Politics of Rage* 226-250.

SECTION III

THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965 AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Thu 11/05 Election Results 1964; looking toward Selma
[Eyes on the Prize: Selma a]
Read: McClymer, *Mississippi Freedom Summer* 207-223.
Halberstam, *Children*, pp. 483-498.

Tue 11/10 Selma 1965
[Eyes on the Prize Selma b]
Read: Carter *Politics of Rage* 250-263
Branch, *At Canaan's Edge* 68-194.
Halberstam, *Children*, 499-517.

Thu 11/12 Voting Rights Act 1965
Read: Mann, Ch. 23 "We Shall Overcome".
Carter, *Politics of Rage*, Ch. 9

Tue* 11/17 Black Power; King in Chicago; Election 1966
Read: McClymer, *Mississippi Freedom Summer* pp. 235-243.
Halberstam, *Children* 521-532.
Fairclough. "Rise and Fall of Black Power".

Thu 11/19 Vietnam and the Election of 1968
Read: Carter *Politics of Rage* Ch. 10-11.

Tue 11/24 Election of 1972
Read: Carter *Politics of Rage* Chs. 12-13

Wed–Sun 11/25-11/29 THANKSGIVING BREAK

Tue* 12/01 Party Realignment.
Read: Black, "Newest Southern Politics", *Journal of Politics*,.

Thu 12/03 The Changing Congress
Read: Hood, Kidd, and Morris. 2001.
"The Key Issue: Constituency Effects and Southern Senators".
Legislative Studies Quarterly 26.
Atlanta Journal Constitution, "Voting Rights Act" 2005.