

# PSC 460: Black Politics

Professor Matthew Platt

Spring 2015

Office: Wheeler 305  
Office hr.: Th 12:00 - 2pm

Class: W 2:00 - 4:45pm  
Room: Wheeler 306

The election of Barack Obama has drawn new attention to the limits of black political representation. Obama's critics equate his perceived lack of action on behalf of black Americans as a symptom of the president's general weakness. Obama's supporters counter that (if he has not done enough on behalf of black Americans) he is restrained from being a "black president" by electoral and/or institutional considerations. Regardless of where one falls on the question of Obama's efficacy, black unrest around the issue of police violence is a clear indication that a black president in and of itself is not enough for black liberation. The aim of this course is to research the broader question of how black Americans can achieve greater levels of political, economic, and social equality. This semester we will focus on the essential role of racism in the development of American politics; the efforts of black political solidarity to combat that essential racism; the normative concerns of what a black policy agenda should entail; the efficacy of black representation and black protest as strategies for enacting a black policy agenda; and to understand how all of these factors may or may not have changed in the context of a black president. Our goal in this course is not only to be exposed to arguments and evidence on all sides of these questions about black politics, but more importantly, to conduct original research so that we might draw our own conclusions.

## Requirements

### Readings

Students are expected to complete the reading assignments each week. The course is intended to run as a seminar. As such, students are expected to participate in class discussions. Failure to complete the assigned readings makes for a less engaging discussion. There is only one required book for this course:

- Williams, Linda F. 2003. *The Constraint of Race: Legacies of White Skin Privilege in America*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University.

All of the other course readings are book chapters or articles from academic journals. The syllabus outlines when and which readings students are responsible for. All of these readings outside of the textbook are available in PDF format on the course Blackboard site.

## Weekly Assignment

Students are required to submit one of the following assignments each week.

- **Research Critique:** Offer a critical assessment of the research design used in one of the week's readings. These critiques should consist of the following elements:
  1. A concise statement of some flaw with the research design in terms of conceptual definitions, measurement, sources of data, statistical analysis, etc.
  2. A brief statement of how the problem affects the findings in the reading.
  3. Suggestions for how the research design can be improved.
- **Research Extension:** Offer an idea for how future research projects can build on one or more of the week's readings. These extensions should consist of the following elements:
  1. Concisely state a research question and how it relates to the readings.
  2. Write a hypothesis to address the research question.
  3. Briefly state how that hypothesis could be tested.

The assignments are due by **9pm on Tuesdays**. Students should upload their assignment to the "Research Extensions and Critiques" Discussions thread on the course site. This is a shared discussion board, so students are expected to read the assignments of their peers prior to class. These assignments are not to exceed one typed, double-spaced page with standard margins. Each weekly assignment counts for 3 pts (1.5% of the final grade). A separate handout on how weekly assignments are graded will be distributed during class in Week 1 and appears on Blackboard. The Course Schedule specifies which type of assignment is due for any given week.

## Research Project

Each student will write a 10-15 page research paper on a topic of their choice that relates to black politics, broadly defined. Final papers will be due by 5pm on the day of the final exam. These papers are expected to demonstrate a grasp of some segment of the literature, thorough investigation of an original question, and serious engagement with data. Students are required to schedule appointments with me and/or take advantage of office hours to discuss their projects. In order to facilitate completion of the research projects, students are required to complete the following assignments that will be due during the course of the semester:

1. **Research Question:** Students will submit no more than one page stating 1) the question to be investigated in their project and 2) how answering this question will contribute to our understanding of representation. **Due on September 11 by 11pm**
2. **Bibliography:** Students will submit an annotated bibliography that contains ten sources that are *not* included on the class syllabus. **Due on September 18 by 11pm.**
3. **Literature Review:** Students will submit 3-5 pages reviewing the literature that is relevant for addressing their research questions. **Due on October 9 by 11pm.**

4. **Research Design:** Students will submit 2-3 pages outlining how they plan to answer the research question and/or test any hypotheses that were developed as a result of the literature review. These papers should discuss the type of data and method of analysis that will be used for the final project. **Due on November 13 by 11pm.**
5. **Presentation:** Students will deliver an in-class presentation of their research project. These presentations should tell the audience why the question is important, state the student's contribution, and preview/discuss some preliminary results. **Presentations will take place during class on December 2.**
6. **Final Paper:** Students will submit the final 10-15 pages of their completed research paper. **Due according to the final exam schedule.**

Details for all of these assignments will appear on Blackboard. All assignments will be submitted through Blackboard.

## Course Assessment

Requirement	Due Date	Points	Percent of Grade
Weekly Assignments	9pm Tuesdays	30 pts	15%
Research Question	September 11	10 pts	5%
Annotated Bibliography	September 18	10 pts	5%
Literature Review	October 9	30 pts	15%
Research Design	November 13	30 pts	15%
Presentation	December 2	10 pts	5%
Final Paper	TBD	80 pts	40%

Points	Percent Range	Letter Grade
200 - 193	100 - 97	A+
192 - 185	96 - 93	A
184 - 180	92 - 90	A-
179 - 174	89 - 87	B+
173 - 165	86 - 83	B
164 - 160	82 - 80	B-
159 - 154	79 - 77	C+
153 - 143	76 - 72	C
142 - 140	71 - 70	C-
139 - 134	69 - 67	D+
133 - 125	66 - 63	D
125 - 120	62 - 60	D-
119 - 0	59 - 0	F

## Course Policies

### Attendance

Below is the official attendance policy from the College:

Students are expected to attend each class meeting. Students with more than 3 unexcused absences will be referred to the Office of Student Success and may be administratively withdrawn from the course. Failure to meet minimum attendance requirements may result in the loss of the students financial aid in accordance with federal financial aid requirements.

Transportation and/or sleeping problems are not included as excusable absences. Of course, sometimes life happens. Medical emergencies, deaths in the family, family emergencies, official school business, military commitments, and court appearances have been deemed as excusable absences by Morehouse College. Upon request students are responsible for providing Professor Platt with verified absence documentation from the Vice President of Student Services within five days of the absence.

In the event of inclement weather, the College will announce any closures via the emergency notification system and/or through local news outlets. Absent an official closure, students are not excused from attending class due to weather and any absences will be considered unexcused.

### Tardiness

In compliance with the college's attendance policy, Professor Platt will take roll at the start of each class. Lateness is disrespectful to the professor and to other students. As such, it will not be tolerated. The door will be closed five minutes after the scheduled start time for class to begin. **Students will not be permitted to enter the classroom after the door has been closed, and they will be marked absent for the day.**

### Late Work

Students are expected to submit all assignments on their respective due dates. If there is some reasonable time conflict that a student can anticipate, then some accommodations may be made for earlier submission of assignments. Barring some personal emergency that incapacitates a student for an entire week, extensions for will not be offered for any assignments. In the unlikely event that an assignments is submitted after the specified due date, essays are penalized by 3.5 points (1% of the final overall grade) for each day the assignment is late.

Students are expected to take the in-class midterm and final exams on the dates that they are held. Missing an exam without verified documentation of an excusable absence will result in a score of 0 for that exam. Make-up exams for the midterm will be offered ONLY in the case of family/medical emergencies and bereavement. If students know of an excusable time conflict with the midterm or final exam, then Professor Platt will try to provide an earlier examination date in specific cases. There are no makeup exams offered for the Final Exam.

## Academic Integrity

The student handbook defines plagiarism:

The term plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the use by paraphrase or direct quotation, from the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment. It also includes the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers and other academic materials. In projects and assignments prepared independently, students must never represent the ideas or the language of others as their own.

The student handbook defines cheating:

Students must not engage in cheating in completing course work. Unless directed by the faculty member, students should neither give nor receive assistance on assignments or examinations. The term “cheating” includes, but is not limited to: 1) the use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests or examinations; 2) dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; 3) the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a member of the College faculty or staff.

In the unlikely event that a student is found to have plagiarized, cheated, or committed any other violations of academic integrity laid out in the student handbook, course catalogue, and/or Code of Conduct that student will automatically **receive a failing grade of ‘F’ for the course**. That penalty is the same for those who give answers/work as for those who take answers/work.

## EEO and Disability Statement

Morehouse College is an equal opportunity employer and educational institution. Students with disabilities or those who suspect they have a disability must register with the Office of Disability Services (“ODS”) in order to receive accommodations. Students currently registered with the ODS are required to present their Disability Services Accommodation Letter to faculty immediately upon receiving the accommodation. If you have any questions, contact the Office of Disability Services, 104 Sale Hall Annex, Morehouse College, 830 Westview Dr. S.W., Atlanta, GA 30314, (404) 215-2636.

## Disclaimer

A syllabus is not a contract between instructor and student, but rather a guide to course procedures. The instructor reserves the right to amend the syllabus when conflicts, emergencies or circumstances dictate. Students will be duly notified.

# 1 Course Schedule

## 8/19 Week 1: Who Cares about Black Politics?

1. Introduction to the class, go over the syllabus, and a brief lecture to answer the basic “so what?” question of black politics.

## 8/26 Week 2: What is black politics?

1. Walters, Ronald. 1992. “Two Political Traditions: Black Politics in the 1990s” *National Political Science Review* 3: 198-208.
2. Jones, Mack H. 2014. Knowledge, Power, and Black Politics: Collected Essays. Albany: SUNY Press. Chap. TBD
3. Walton, Hanes, Jr. 1997. African American Power and Politics: The Political Context Variable. New York: Columbia University Press. Chapter 1.
4. **Research Extension due by 9pm Tuesday.**

## 9/2 Week 3: What is black political solidarity?

1. Walton, Hanes, Jr. 1985. Invisible Politics: Black Political Behavior. Albany: SUNY Press. Chaps 2-3.
2. Dawson, Michael C. Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994.
3. Cohen, Cathy. 1999. *The Boundaries of Blackness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 2.
4. Reed, Adolph Jr. 2000. “The Curse of ‘Community’” in *Class Notes: Posing as Politics and Other Thoughts on the American Scene* New York: the New Press.
5. **Research Extension due by 9pm Tuesday.**

## 9/9 Week 4: What are black interests?

1. Shelby, Tommie. *We Who are Dark*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University. Chapter 4.
2. Hamilton, Dona C. and Charles V. Hamilton. 1997. *The Dual Agenda: the African American Struggle for Civil and Economic Equality*. New York: Columbia University Press. Chapter 1.
3. see if Dawson, Cohen, or Tate have an updated black public opinion thing
4. **Research Extension due by 9pm Tuesday.**

### **9/16 Week 5: How does race shape American domestic policy?**

1. Williams, Linda F. 2003. *The Constraint of Race: Legacies of White Skin Privilege in America*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University. Chaps Intro, 1, 2, 3, and 7.
2. **Research Extension due by 9pm Tuesday.**

### **9/23 Week 6: What is the black agenda?**

1. Hamilton, Dona C. and Charles V. Hamilton. 1997. *The Dual Agenda: the African American Struggle for Civil and Economic Equality*. New York: Columbia University Press. Chapter 3 and 9.  
Platt, Matthew. 2014. "Defining the Black Agenda."
2. **Research Critique due by 9pm Tuesday.**

### **9/30 Week 7: What is the role of representation in black agenda setting?**

1. Smith, Robert C. 1996. *We Have No Leaders: African Americans in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. Albany: SUNY Press. Chapters 7 and 8.
2. Minta, Michael D. and Valeria Sinclair-Chapman. 2012. "Diversity in Political Institutions and Congressional Responsiveness to Minority Interests" *Political Research Quarterly*
3. Baker, Andy and Corey Cook. 2005. "Representing Black Interests and Promoting Black Culture: The Importance of African American Descriptive Representation in the U.S. House." *Du Bois Review* 2: 227-246.
4. Minta, Michael D. 2009. "Legislative Oversight and the Substantive Representation of Black and Latino Interests in Congress." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 34: 193-218.
5. **Research Critique due by 9pm Tuesday.**

### **10/7 Week 8: What is the role of protest/participation in black agenda setting?**

1. Gillion, Daniel Q. "Protest and Congressional Behavior: Assessing Racial and Ethnic Minority Protests in the District." *The Journal of Politics* 74, no. 04 (October 2012): 95062.
2. McAdam, Doug. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*. Second. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. Chaps 3 and 7.
3. **Research Critique due by 9pm Tuesday.**

### **10/14 Week 10: What is new about the "new black politics"?**

1. Smith, Robert C. 1990. "Recent Elections and Black Politics: The Maturation or Death of Black Politics?" *PS: Political Science and Politics* 23: 160-162.
2. McCormick, Joseph P. and Charles E. Jones. 1993. "The Conceptualization of Deracialization: Thinking Through the Dilemma." In *Dilemmas of Black Politics*. Georgia A. Persons ed. New York: Harper Collins. 66-84.

3. Gillespie, Andra. 2012. *The New Black Politician: Cory Booker, Newark, and Post-Racial America*. New York: New York University Press. Chapter 1.  
Platt, Matthew. "Paradox of Ambition."

4. **Research Extension due by 9pm Tuesday.**

### **10/21 Week 11: Does the existence of a black president matter?**

1. Harris, Fredrick C. 2012. *The Price of the Ticket*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapters TBD.
2. **Research Critique due by 9pm Tuesday.**

### **10/28 Week 12: Politics of Mass Incarceration**

1. Weaver, Vesla M. 2007. "Frontlash: Race and the Development of Punitive Crime Policy." *Studies in American Political Development* 21: 230265.
2. Fortner, Michael Javen. 2013. "The Carceral State and the Crucible of Black Politics: An Urban History of the Rockefeller Drug Laws." *Studies in American Political Development* 27: 1435.
3. Wilson, David C., Michael Leo Owens, and Darren W. Davis. 2015. "HOW RACIAL ATTITUDES AND IDEOLOGY AFFECT POLITICAL RIGHTS FOR FELONS." *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 12: 7393.

### **11/4 Week 13: Research Workshop**

### **11/11 Week 14: Is symbolism enough?**

1. Bobo, Lawrence and Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr. 1990. "Race, Sociopolitical Participation, and Black Empowerment." *American Political Science Review* 84: 377-393.
2. Washington, Ebonya. 2006. "How Black Candidates Affect Voter Turnout." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 121: 973-998.
3. Gay, Claudine. 2002. "Spirals of Trust? The Effect of Descriptive Representation on the Relationship between Citizens and Their Government." *American Journal of Political Science* 46: 717-732.
4. **Research Critique due by 9pm Tuesday.**

### **11/18 Week 15: What is the future of black politics?**

- Dawson, Michael C. 2011. *Not in Our Lifetimes: The Future of Black Politics* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters TBD

### **11/25 Week 16: Thanksgiving Break – no class**

### **12/2 Week 16: Student Presentations**