Graduate Center
City University of New York
Graduate History Program

Professor Clarence Taylor
History 75900-From Civil Rights to Black Power
Monday, 6:30:15-8:30 p.m. 3 credits


**Course Description**

The modern civil rights movement is the most important social protest movement of the twentieth century. The movement helped cultivate national leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Bayard Rustin, and Fannie Lou Hamer. It was responsible for eradicating the American Apartheid system known as Jim Crow and it was the major reason for the passage of some of the most important laws in twentieth century America, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. While prominent figures were important in shaping the civil rights struggles, the movement was also influenced by countless numbers of ordinary men and women who participated in civil rights campaigns throughout the nation, many whose names shall never be recorded in history books. Although some historians and others date the movement’s origin to the 1954 Brown decision, more recently, scholars in several disciplines contend that the civil rights struggle began much earlier. More recently scholars have been examining black and brown coalitions in the struggle for social and economic rights.

By the mid 1960s, the goals of the civil rights movement, including a fully integrated society were questioned by several national and grassroots leaders and activists who contended that empowering people of African origins in America should be the paramount objective of the black freedom struggle. On college campuses, among sports
figures, politicians, theologians, business owners, and union members, Black Power became the major objective. This course examines the origins and the impact that the Civil Rights and Black Power movements had on American society. The course scrutinizes several theoretical explanations of these movements and the assigned books and articles focus on the ongoing debate among scholars over periodization, geography, conceptualization, and leadership of civil rights and Black Power movements in America.

Assignments;

Feb. 1
Introduction

September 6, Labor Day, No Class

Feb. 8
The discussion will focus on the historiography on the Civil Rights movement and the debate among scholars over the “long civil rights movement”

Required Reading:

Suggested Readings:

No Class Fe. 15

Feb. 22
We will begin examine the various theories of social protest movements by focusing on resource mobilization Theory

Required Reading:
Morris, The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement
Feb. 29
By the 1980s civil rights scholars turned their attention to local struggles as a means of understanding the Civil Rights Movement. Local Protest struggles. This week we will examine the most studied civil rights campaign in the 1960s and one of the most important works on the Mississippi Freedom Struggle.

Required Reading: Payne, I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle

Suggested Readings: Ditmer, Local People; Fairclough, Race & Democracy: The Civil rights Struggle in Louisiana; Eskew, But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movement in the Civil Rights Struggle; Norrell, Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee; Thornton, Dividing Lives: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham and Selma; McWhorter, Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama

March 7
Recently, there have been a number of books and articles examining women in the civil Rights Movement. Belinda Robnett’s book offers a model for studying grassroots leadership. Danielle McGuire argues that black women launched the civil rights movement.

Required Reading, McGuire, At the Dark Side of the Street; Robnett, How Long, How Long

Suggested Readings: Jeanne Theoharis, Rosa Parks, A Rebellious Life; Crawford, Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazer and Torchbearers; Evans, Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement & the New Left; Allen, Black Women Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement; Ransby, Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision; Mills, This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer; Collier-Thomas and Franklin, Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement

March 14
The most recent scholarship of the civil rights movement has placed that movement in a transnational context. Mary Duziak is the leading figure in the transnationalizing of a
movement that has been too long seen only in a national context. This week we will examine Duziak’s Cold War Civil Rights thesis.


March 21
Robert Korstad’s Civil Rights Unionism places a labor struggle in the South into a civil rights context. Turning his attention to black tobacco workers and their struggle with the Reynolds Tobacco Company in the 1940s, Korstad notes the pivotal role of the Communist Party. Taylor turns to the Communist Teachers Union arguing that the TU forged a form of social unionism and a civil rights agenda. We will also discuss the debate among historians over the role of the Communist Party during World War II. Eric Arnesen’s “No ‘Graver Danger’: Black Anticommunism, the Communist Party, and the Race Question,” is a strong critic of recent “revisionist” literature on Communism and civil rights Manfred Berg, *Black Civil Rights and Liberal Anti-Communism: The NAACP in the Early Cold War*, The Journal of American History, June 2007, pp. 75-96.

Required Reading: Kortstad, Civil Rights Unionism


March 28
One of the major flaws of the civil rights literature is most of the books, articles, commercials and documentary films, and commemorative celebrations examine the South. Recently, historians have challenged the southern paradigm. This week we will examine the battle for civil rights in New York City.

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

**April 4**

David Lucander’s *Winning the War for Democracy* is part of the new focus on A. Philip Randolph. Lucander’s focus is on the March on Washington Movement and how it attempted to carve out a place in the early civil rights struggle.

Required Reading:
Lucander’s *Winning the War for Democracy*


**April 11**

Until recently, too many works on urban black communities have not examined the deep class divisions or the leading role the working class played in shaping the black freedom struggle. Historian Clarence Lang argues that it was the black working class agenda that was prominent in St. Louis’ black freedom movement from the Depression to the 1970s.

Required Reading:
Lang, *Grassroots at the Gateway*

Suggested Readings:

**April 18**

The Black Power Movement

Recently there have been a number of books examining the Black Power movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. Similarly to civil rights literature, black power scholars argue over periodization, geography, conceptualization and meaning of the movement. Tim Tyson’s widely acclaimed book, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert Williams and the Roots of Black Power* challenges works that argue that black power was the complete antithesis of
the civil rights movement. Instead, Tyson contends that black power has its roots in the civil rights movement, and had similar objectives.

Required Reading Radio Free Dixie; Murch, Living for the City

Suggested Readings:

April 25 Spring Break

May 2
The latest literature on civil rights examines the forging of black and brown coalitions for civil rights. These works usually explore alliances between blacks and Latinos.

May 9
Required Reading: Lee, Building a Latino Civil Rights Movement

Suggested Readings: Cynthia Orazaco, No Mexicans, Women or Dogs Allowed The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement:

One black and brown coalition that is receiving some attention is the one between Mexican farmworkers and African Americans. These works intertwine race and class Lauren Azaria’s To March for Others details how the major civil rights organizations worked with the United Farm Workers to build a social justice movement.

Required Reading: Azaria, To March for Others

Suggested Readings: Brian Behnken, The Struggle in Black and Brown: African Americans and Mexican Americans during the Civil Rights Era; Gordon Mantler, Power to the Poor: Black-Brown Coalition and the Fight for Economic Justice

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May 16
The most heated battles in the fight for racial equality in the late 1960s and early 1970s involved public schools. Recently a number of scholars argue that Black Power advocates’ struggle for community control led to the deterioration between teachers and the black community and Jews and black activists. While Podair argues that a clash of cultures was at the heart of the school crisis in 1968, Taylor turns to an earlier period to explain the confrontation of 1968 and the present crisis in public education.


Suggested Readings: