

Theoretical Foundations of the Movement for Black Lives

(PHIL 4360-01/POLS 3930-01)

Instructor: Siddhant Issar
Email: siddhant.issar@slu.edu

Mon and Wed: 3:10-4:25
Xavier Hall 128
St. Louis University, Fall 2018

Course Description

This course aims to unearth and analyze the theoretical underpinnings of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) policy platform. Since its emergence, BLM has articulated an intersectional critique of anti-black violence in the United States (and, to a certain extent, globally). BLM and the larger M4BL coalition provide an in-depth analysis of the specific ways structures of oppression such as white supremacy, patriarchy, and racial capitalism affect Black populations. By historically and theoretically situating BLM and the M4BL policy platform in the context of Black radical thought, including but not limited to abolitionist thought, intersectionality, and conceptualizations of racial capitalism, we will trace the ways BLM and M4BL adopt and build on various lineages of theoretical critique to diagnose contemporary structures of anti-black violence.

Our semester will begin with a historical, philosophical, and socio-political inquiry into the concepts of “race” and white supremacy. Subsequently, we will ask: How does BLM understand anti-blackness and white supremacy? In what ways are the histories of Black enslavement and settler colonialism relevant to the present struggles for Black lives? Why are Black bodies disproportionately represented in the U.S. prison population? On what grounds does the M4BL policy platform suggest that “patriarchy, exploitative (global) capitalism, militarism, and white supremacy” are interlinked? What *universal* vision of liberation does BLM seek to enact? By asking such questions, we will explore the dynamic ways BLM and the M4BL policy platform have adapted existing political-theoretical frameworks, ranging from Black feminist thought to Black Marxism(s) to prison abolition, to reveal the historical and on-going structural violence impacting Black people. We will also examine the forms of resistance and transnational solidarity that have emerged from BLM’s on-the-ground struggles.

Course Objectives and Learning Goals

- Understanding core concepts developed by Black thinkers to analyze the specific relations of domination affecting Black populations in the United States.
- Identifying the historical, political, and intellectual context within which these interventions were (and are) made.
- Connecting theoretical and philosophical concepts and BLM’s contemporary political struggles against systems of inequality and oppression.
- Improving critical reading and comprehension skills by engaging with complex theoretical texts.
- Writing clear, well-formulated arguments and analyses that can explore continuities and discontinuities between theoretical ideas and concepts and practices of on-the-ground resistance.

- Engaging in thoughtful dialogue and debate through class discussions.
- Developing self-reflexivity and critical thinking about your own pre-conceived assumptions and political beliefs.

Required Texts

There are no required books to be purchased for this course. I will provide PDFs for all the readings. Please make sure you print the reading(s) for the day and bring them with you to class.

If you wish to buy books for the course, below is a list from which some of the readings have been drawn:

Collins, P. H. (1991). *Black feminist thought : knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York : Routledge, 1991.

Davis, A. Y. (2003). *Are prisons obsolete?* New York : Seven Stories Press.

Davis, A. Y. (2016). *Freedom is a constant struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the foundations of a movement*. (F. Barat, Ed.). Chicago, Illinois : Haymarket Books.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1998). *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (12.2.1997 edition). New York, NY: Free Press.

Mills, C. W. (1999). *The racial contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Olson, J. (2004). *The Abolition of White Democracy*. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press.

Robinson, C. (2000). *Black marxism : the making of the Black radical tradition*. Chapel Hill, N.C. : University of North Carolina Press.

Singh, N. P. (2004). *Black is a country : race and the unfinished struggle for democracy*. Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 2004.

Singh, N. P. (2017). *Race and America's Long War*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

Taylor, K. (2016). *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*. Haymarket Press.

Grading

The following components will determine your grade in this course:

1. Attendance and Participation (20%): Attending class meetings is mandatory. If you're sick, or in case you're faced by an emergency, please contact me at the soonest. Additionally, since this is a discussion-based seminar, I expect you to come to each class prepared and ready to engage in discussions about the readings at hand.

2. Weekly Reading Responses (20%): Each week you must post a written response (250-300 words) to the readings on Blackboard. Since our class meets twice a week, your post should address all the readings for one class session per week. This means that you can choose to respond to the readings for Monday or Wednesday. On weeks where we will only meet once, everyone will be expected to submit a response for that particular class.

Your reading responses should include a minimum of two discussion questions for our seminar. You must submit these responses no later than 11pm the day before our seminar meets.

No weekly responses will be required for the weeks when the take-home essay is due and/or you're a discussion leader.

3. Midterm Take-Home Essay (20%): A 6 page take-home essay in response to a prompt I will provide in advance. You will have a week to complete this assignment.
4. Discussion Leader (10%): Each seminar member will be responsible for facilitating a portion of class discussion at least once during the semester. During the first two weeks of class, I will ask you to sign up for a class meeting that you're interested in leading. You will be required to meet with me the week before you lead discussion.
5. Final Paper Project (30%): Your final assignment will consist of a 10-12 page essay. Your final essay is due on Dec. 12th no later than 5 pm. While I will not be handing out essay prompts, you will be expected to come and meet with me to develop a question that examines a particular aspect of BLM's relationship to the theoretical texts we have studied. I will begin working with you on developing your final essay topic after the mid-term essay is due. You will be expected to submit to a short paragraph outlining the questions you wish to explore and some of the literature you wish to engage.

Course Expectations, Policies, and Requirements

Class Discussions

All of us come to this class as learners, teachers, and thinkers. None of us, myself included, have the singular correct answer for all of the complex, important topics and ideas we will be discussing. Instead, we will seek to work collaboratively through these questions and issues in a critical, supportive, and dialogical manner. Students should come to class ready to interact with each other in a collaborative environment, and with a spirit of curiosity. Our classroom will be an open, creative, and supportive space for all. I expect, enjoy, and encourage a lively classroom discussion, but it must always be conducted in a respectful manner.

Technology Policy

Other than exceptions that we discuss individually, computers/tablets are not permitted in class. You must bring a hard copy of the readings to class. There are a few reasons for this. First, numerous studies indicate that students taking notes on computers learn information less effectively than those taking written notes. Second, many of us, myself included, find it difficult to pull ourselves away from email, social media, etc. especially when we have a screen open

right in front of us. In class we will do away with these distractions. Finally, and most importantly, this is a discussion-based class. I expect you to devote your full attention to your peers, the readings, and the ideas we are discussing.

Office Hours

I encourage everyone to come to my office hours to discuss the readings, get assistance and/or brainstorm writing assignments, and to talk about any issues or difficulties you might be facing in the course. If you cannot make it to office hours, please email me and I'd be more than happy to set up an appointment with you.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is honest, truthful and responsible conduct in all academic endeavors. The mission of Saint Louis University is "the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity." Accordingly, all acts of falsehood demean and compromise the corporate endeavors of teaching, research, health care, and community service via which SLU embodies its mission. The University strives to prepare students for lives of personal and professional integrity, and therefore regards all breaches of academic integrity as matters of serious concern.

The governing University-level Academic Integrity Policy was adopted in Spring 2015, and can be accessed on the Provost's Office website at:

https://www.slu.edu/academics/graduate/university-wide_academic_integrity_policy_final_6-26-15.pdf

Additionally, each SLU College, School, and Center has adopted its own academic integrity policies, available on their respective websites. All SLU students are expected to know and abide by these policies, which detail definitions of violations, processes for reporting violations, sanctions, and appeals. Please direct questions about any facet of academic integrity to your faculty, the chair of the department of your academic program, or the Dean/Director of the College, School or Center in which your program is housed.

Disability Accommodations

Students with a documented disability who wish to request academic accommodations **must** contact Disability Services to discuss accommodation requests and eligibility requirements. Once successfully registered, the student also **must** notify the course instructor that they wish to access accommodations in the course.

Please contact Disability Services, located within the Student Success Center, at Disability_services@slu.edu or 314/977-3484 to schedule an appointment. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries. Once approved, information about the student's eligibility for academic accommodations will be shared with course instructors via email from Disability Services and viewed within Banner via the instructor's course roster.

Title IX

Saint Louis University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have encountered any form of sexual misconduct (e.g. sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic or dating

violence), we encourage you to report this to the University. If you speak with a faculty member about an incident of misconduct, that faculty member must notify SLU's Title IX coordinator, Anna R. Kratky (DuBourg Hall, room 36; akratky@slu.edu; 314-977-3886) and share the basic facts of your experience with her. The Title IX coordinator will then be available to assist you in understanding all of your options and in connecting you with all possible resources on and off campus.

If you wish to speak with a confidential source, you may contact the counselors at the University Counseling Center at 314-977-TALK. To view SLU's sexual misconduct policy and for resources, please visit the following web addresses: <https://www.slu.edu/general-counsel-home/office-of-institutional-equity-and-diversity/sexual-misconduct-policy>

Writing Center

I encourage you to take advantage of the writing services in the Student Success Center. Getting feedback benefits writers at all skill levels. Trained writing consultants can help with any writing, multimedia project, or oral presentation. During the one-on-one consultations, you can work on everything from brainstorming and developing ideas to crafting strong sentences and documenting sources. These services do fill up, so make an appointment early! For more information, or to make, change, or cancel an appointment, call 977-3484 or visit <http://www.slu.edu/writingservices.xml>

Other Policies/Notes

- If a student has a desired name that is not listed on the course roster, please let me know. Students are encouraged to notify me of their gender pronouns. I use he/him pronouns.
- If a religious holiday that you observe conflicts with an assignment, please let me know in advance so that we may discuss alternative options.
- All papers turned in late (whether response papers or your final paper/project) will be marked down by 1/3 grade per day, unless we made an alternative arrangement in advance.

Tentative Reading and Class Schedule

Part I: White Supremacy and “Race”

Mon, 8/27

Introductions and an exploration of BLM's statement—“*[w]hen Black people get free, everybody gets free.*”

Introduction (pg. 1-10) in Ransby, B. (2018). *Making All Black Lives Matter: Reimagining Freedom in the Twenty-First Century*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Wed, 8/29

Mills, C.W. (1999). *The racial contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. (pg. 1-40)

Recommended: Bonilla-Silva, E. (1997). Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation. *American Sociological Review*, 62(3), 465–480.

Mon, 9/3: LABOR DAY (no class)

Wed, 9/5

“Introducing the White Democracy” (pg. xi-xxix) and “A Political Theory of Race” (pg. 1-30) in Olson, J. (2004). *The Abolition of White Democracy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Recommended: Alcoff, L. M. (2005). *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*. New York: Oxford University Press.

“A Genealogy of Modern Racism” in West, C. ([1982] 2002). *Prophesy Deliverance!* Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press.

Mills, C. W. (2013). White supremacy as sociopolitical system: A philosophical perspective. In *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism* (pp. 35-48). Taylor and Francis.

Part II: Historically Situating Black Lives Matter

Mon, 9/10

“Rethinking Race and Nation” (pg. 15-57) in Singh, N. P. (2004). *Black is a country: race and the unfinished struggle for democracy*. Cambridge Mass. : Harvard University Press.

Wed, 9/12

“Introduction” and “A Culture of Racism” (pg. 1-50) in Taylor, K. (2016). *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*. Haymarket Press.

Recommended: Ransby, B. (2018). *Making All Black Lives Matter: Reimagining Freedom in the Twenty-First Century*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Lebron, C. J. (2017). *The Making of Black Lives Matter: A Brief History of an Idea* (1st edition). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Mon, 9/17

Murch, D. (2015). Historicizing Ferguson: Police Violence, Domestic Warfare, and the Genesis of a National Movement Against State-Sanctioned Violence, *New Politics* Vol. XV-3

BLM:

About Us: <http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>

Our HerStory: <http://blacklivesmatter.com/herstory/>

Guiding Principles (pdf on Blackboard)

Cobb, J. (2016). The Matter of Black Lives. *The New Yorker*. 26 March.

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/03/14/where-is-black-lives-matter-headed>

Part III: Black Global Protests, Black Feminist Thought, Intersectionality

Wed, 9/19

Hesse, B., & Hooker, J. (2017). Introduction: On Black Political Thought Inside Global Black

Protest. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 116(3).

Combahee River Collective. ([1977] 1983) “A Black Feminist Statement.” In *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, by Barbara Smith, 264–73. New York: Kitchen Table--Women of Color Press.

“Introduction” (pg. 1-14) in Taylor, K. (Ed.). (2017). *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*. Chicago, Ill: Haymarket Books.

Mon, 9/24

“The Politics of Black Feminist Thought” and “Defining Black Feminist Thought” (pg. 3-40) in Collins, P. H. (1991), *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, New York : Routledge.

Wed, 9/26

“Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory” and “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression” (pg. 1-33) in hooks, bell. ([1984] 2000). *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (2nd edition). Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Mon, 10/1

Crenshaw, K. (1991). “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99.

Part IV: Slavery, Mass Incarceration, Prison Abolition

Investigating M4BL Policy Platform’s Demand 1—End the War on Black People

Wed, 10/3

Read closely: <https://policy.m4bl.org/about/> & <https://policy.m4bl.org/end-war-on-black-people/>

Wacquant, L (2002). “From Slavery to Mass Incarceration,” *New Left Review*, II, no. 13: 41–60.

Recommended: Camp, J. T. (2016). *Incarcerating the Crisis: Freedom Struggles and the Rise of the Neoliberal State*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

Mon, 10/8

“Race, War, Police” (pg. 35-73) in Singh, N. P. (2017). *Race and America’s Long War*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

Wed, 10/10

“Political Prisoners, Prisons and Black Liberation” (pg. 27-43) in Davis, A. Y. (Ed.). (2016). *If They Come in the Morning...: Voices of Resistance* (Reissue edition). Verso.

“#BLACKLIVESMATTER and Global Visions of Abolition: An Interview with Patrisse Cullors” in Camp, J. T., & Heatherton, C. (Eds.). (2016). *Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter*. London ; New York: Verso.

Recommended: Gilmore, R. W. (2007). *Golden gulag: prisons, surplus, crisis, and opposition in globalizing California*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Thurs, 10/11: Midterm take-home essay prompts will be emailed to students. Midterm essays due on 10/19 by 5 pm.

Mon, 10/15

“Introduction—Prison Reform or Prison Abolition?” and “Slavery, Civil Rights, and Abolitionist Perspectives Toward Prison” (pg. 9-39) in Davis, A. Y. (2003). *Are prisons obsolete?* New York: Seven Stories Press.

Davis, A. Y., & Rodriguez, D. (2000). The Challenge of Prison Abolition: A Conversation. *Social Justice*, 27(3 (81)), 212–218.

Recommended: “Introduction” and “The Rebirth of Caste” from Alexander, M. (2012). *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press.
Wacquant, L. (2009). *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (First edition, paperback issue edition). Durham NC: Duke University Press Books.

Wed, 10/17

13th (Documentary)

Recommended: <https://www.aaihs.org/mass-incarceration-and-its-mystification-a-review-of-the-13th/>

Fri, 10/19: Midterm essays due at 5 pm

Fall Break: 10/22-10/23; no class 10/24

Part V: Slavery, Colonialism, Racial Capitalism

Investigating Demand 2 & 4—Reparations and Economic Justice

Mon, 10/29

“The Black Worker,” “The White Worker,” and “The Planter” (pg. 3-54) in Du Bois, W. E. B. (1998). *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (12.2.1997 edition). New York, NY: Free Press.

Recommended: Du Bois, W.E.B. “Marxism and the Negro Problem”

Wed, 10/31

Hartman, S. (2016). The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women’s Labors. *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture & Society*, 18(1), 166–173.

“Removing Indians, Managing Slaves, and Justifying Slavery: The Case for Intersectionality” (pg. 101-114) in Roediger, D. (2017). *Class, Race and Marxism*. London; New York: Verso.

Mon, 11/5

Read closely: <https://policy.m4bl.org/reparations/> and <https://policy.m4bl.org/economic-justice/>
Pay particular attention to the use of the term “racial capitalism” in the demand for reparations. Why do they use this term and not simply capitalism?

“Introduction” and “Racial Capitalism: The Nonobjective Character of Capitalist Development” (pg. 1-5 and 9-28) in Robinson, C. (2000). *Black Marxism: the making of the Black radical tradition*. Chapel Hill, N.C. : University of North Carolina Press.

Recommended: Chakravartty, P., & Silva, D. F. da. (2012). Accumulation, Dispossession, and Debt: The Racial Logic of Global Capitalism—An Introduction. *American Quarterly*, 64(3), 361–385.

Wed, 11/7

Bonds, A., & Inwood, J. (2016). Beyond white privilege: Geographies of white supremacy and settler colonialism. *Progress in Human Geography*, 40(6), 715–733. (Specific sections)

Johnson, W. “To Remake the World: Slavery, Racial Capitalism, and Justice”
<https://bostonreview.net/race/walter-johnson-slavery-human-rights-racial-capitalism>

Simpson, L. “An Indigenous View on #BlackLivesMatter”
<https://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/indigenous-view-black-lives-matter-leanne-simpson>

Part VI: Empire, Transnational Solidarity, Resistance

Investigating Demand 3—Invest-Divest

Mon, 11/12

Carefully read: <https://policy.m4bl.org/invest-divest/>.
Focus on sub-demands 5 and 6.

“Introduction: The Long War” (1-34) in Singh, N. P. (2017). *Race and America’s Long War*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

Wed, 11/14

“White Power: The Colonial Situation” in Ture, K., & Hamilton, C. V. ([1967] 1992). *Black Power : The Politics of Liberation*. New York: Vintage.

“Black Lives Matter: A Movement, Not a Moment” (pg. 153-190) in Taylor, K. (2016). *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*. Haymarket Press.

Mon, 11/19

Selections from Davis, A. Y. (2016). *Freedom is a constant struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the foundations of a movement*. (F. Barat, Ed.). Chicago, Illinois : Haymarket Books.

Read Statement on Black-Palestinian Solidarity:
<http://www.blackpalestiniansolidarity.com/about.html>

Break: 11/21-11/24

Part VII: Resistance, Political Power, Democracy

Investigating Demand 5 & 6—Community Control and Political Power

Mon, 11/26

Closely read: <https://policy.m4bl.org/community-control/> and <https://policy.m4bl.org/political-power/>

A Case Study of Local Resistance in Jackson, Mississippi—The Jackson-Kush Plan.

“Build and Fight: The Program and Strategy of Cooperation Jackson” by Kali Akuno in *Jackson Rising: The Struggle for Economic Democracy and Black Self-Determination*.

Wed, 11/28

Whose Streets (Documentary)/Sorry to Bother You

Mon, 12/3

Hooker, J. (2016). Black lives matter and the paradoxes of U.S. black politics: from democratic sacrifice to democratic repair. *Political Theory*, (4), 448.

“Black Power: Its Need and Substance” in Ture, K., & Hamilton, C. V. ([1967] 1992). *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*. New York: Vintage.

Wed, 12/5

Lebron, C. J. (2012). The Agony of a Racial Democracy. *Theory & Event*, 15(3). Retrieved from <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/484430>

Thompson, D. (2017). An Exoneration of Black Rage. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 116(3).

Mon, 12/10

Concluding Discussion: The Future of Black Lives Matter

Wed, 12/12: Final essays due by 5 pm