The Course

This interdisciplinary seminar will examine the speeches, sermons, and writings of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We will study King’s ideas as part of the larger discourse of non-violence and social justice that is foundational to King’s political action. King’s articulation of these ideas can be understood in several contexts: as part of a tradition of African-American political thought, as embedded in African-American Christian tradition, as a contribution to American civil religion, as an example of self-governing, vigilant citizenship expressed by The Federalist, and as part of an American tradition of optimism and eclectic liberal philosophy and action. We will look at King’s ideas in the context of the civil rights movement using historical assessments of the movement and its goals and through the lens of contemporary models of collective action, especially the dilemmas of coordinated, voluntary political participation. One of our goals will be to draw out the complexities of these ideas to see how they challenge the practice of democracy in the US and liberal political theory today. We will also look more broadly at the pan-African anti-colonial struggle with writings from three contemporaries of King, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, and Amilcar Cabral. The reciprocal influences of these writers help us add another dimension to our study of liberation, civil rights, and social justice as a global challenge. King challenges us to think about authority, government, and human connection in an unconventional way. His ideas were not wholly acceptable to any constituency in the twentieth century. His vision calls into question our ideas of “state” and “citizen” as well as “race” and “identity.” We have an opportunity to ask what this vision holds for the twenty-first century.

Readings are on e-reserves

The following books have been ordered for the course:
Franz Fanon. *Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press. 0802141323
All other readings are on e-reserve; e-reserves denoted below with an asterisk.

Course Requirements
This research seminar focuses on the political thought found in King’s writings. King’s writings and life give us a unique case study for looking at many questions combining American politics and American political philosophy, bringing under scrutiny a host of
modern concepts, including “the nation,” “the citizen,” and “rights.” In the global world of the twenty-first century we may also ask how these ideas (“western,” “American,” mid-twentieth-century expressions, that they are) apply in new contexts. The American public (including scholars) have understood these ideas in several contexts of public opinion. We see differences in the response of several opinion groups within African-American communities (men and women; nationalists and integrationists; generational differences) as well as regional, class, gender, and partisan differences in the responses of “white” Americans people of color in the US who do not identify with the African-American communities of the late-twentieth century and communities that may challenge race-based identities in a global world. These differences reflect the many ways Americans understood race, gender, sexuality, class, protest, citizenship, and government in the twentieth century and raise questions about our modes of identification in a so-called post racial America. Viewing King’s writings in a global context will give us was to think about “identity” that perhaps give new inflection to his views of nation and race. The twenty-first century contexts of global and local governance connection will also give us a field for examining theories of non-violence, police powers of government, and the basis of authority generally.

Your research papers will reflect this link between theory and practice. To aid your research, you will be asked to write discussion questions for each class (forums provided on moodle) and to post an analytical paper (3-5 pages maximum) covering an aspect of the readings that will offer a starting point for one class discussion, which you will lead. In this paper you will choose one theme from the reading to explore as your thesis for the paper. You must post your paper no later than 5:00 pm on the day prior to your assigned day for leading discussion. It is appropriate to bring your own research to bear on this analysis of King’s ideas.

You will hand your seminar research paper in at three points (reflecting work done on two major parts of the paper and the final work) and participate in a final presentation of our seminar’s works. Here’s how this paper writing works:

On the dates specified below you will hand in, in this order, your literature review, theoretical/analytical framework, and, ultimately, the final paper in which you have revised these two important parts of any research paper and completed the exposition of your thesis and drawn a conclusion (i.e. a finished, complete paper). These are each graded assignments. It may seem strange that we would “count” a final version of the paper as on par with two of its sections. But learning to write these sections of the paper will be some of the most important work of the class. The literature review and framework assignments are not meant to be drafts, although they may certainly be revised for the final paper. In short, the final paper is in a sense only as good as the way you’ve established your analysis.

Our paper presentations will also take a novel approach. Each of you will be teamed up with another seminar member to present your seminar colleague’s paper. To give an adequate presentation of a colleague’s work, you must study their work closely and present to the group the paper that the colleague may have wished to she or he had
written. This teamwork will help each of you produce an excellent paper. The timing of these presentations allows for revisions of the final project before the final date on which I will accept your papers.

**Grades** will be computed as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Maximum Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seminar Paper</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals of 3-part Assignment &amp; Presentation</td>
<td>80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literature Review Assignment</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theoretical/Analytical Framework Assignment</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Final Overall Paper (Lit/Framework/Analysis &amp; Exposition with Conclusion)</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Presentation of works in colloquium format</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion questions (weekly), paper &amp; presentation (once)</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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**Topics for Discussion and Reading Assignments**

**Part 1 Political Theory and Practical Politics:**

**Ideas Emerge and Develop**

Thurs Jan 3  

**Language and Perception: The Meaning of “Race”**


Tues Jan 8  

**Political Early Thought and Action**

I. *Writings of ML King—Approaches to Texts and History: Montgomery*

Read: *MLK original typescript: “Holt Street Church” December 5, 1955*  
*MLK “Desegregation and the Future [Address to the National Committee for Rural Schools]” December 1, 1956*  
*MLK “Statement by the President of the MIA,” original typescript, December 20, 1956 *  
*MLK “Comments on bus Company’s Decision to End Segregation on Its Lines,” transcription, April 24, 1956*  
*MLK “The Negro’s New Self Respect,” transcription, April, 27, 1956*  
*MLK, “Paul’s Letter to American Christians, a sermon preached in the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church,” November 4, 1956. *
*MLK, “The Death of Evil Upon the Seashore, a sermon preached at the Service of Prayer and Thanksgiving in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, NYC” May 17, 1956.*


II. Montgomery Context

Thurs Jan 10

*Writings of ML King—Approaches to Texts and Representation: Montgomery*
* “Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story,” Graphic Short Story, New York: Fellowship of Reconciliation circa 1957 *

A Sample from the renowned African American Journalist, Ted Poston. All stories are brief. Take a look.
"On the Appeal to the Supreme Court: Portraying the winner of a recent batch of antisegregation cases, which gave the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] one of its important gains on its anniversary," The Survey, 85,1 (January 1, 1949) 18–21.*

"This is Montgomery," Afro-American, Jul 14, 1956.*

"This is Montgomery: Separated by a 7-Foot Wall," Afro-American, Aug 04, 1956.*

"This is Montgomery: The White Citizens Councils," Afro-American, Aug 18, 1956.*

"This is Montgomery: No Hat in Hand," Afro-American Aug 25, 1956.*

"This is Montgomery: No Longer Afraid" Afro-American, Sep 01, 1956.*

"This is Montgomery: Separate and Unequal," Afro-American, Sep 15, 1956.*

"What they do for A Living in Montgomery: Anything Hot, Heavy, and Hard," Afro-American, Sep 08, 1956.*

ASSIGNMENT: Use ProQuest, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Historical Black Newspapers, and Readers’ Guide Retrospective to find at least TWO accounts of Montgomery Civil Rights activity 1955–1956 in a “mainstream” newspaper or magazine and two accounts of the same activity in an African American newspaper. POST The citation of these articles on our forum and upload the “page view” pdf of the article under “Assignment: Comparing “Mainstream” and African American News Coverage Montgomery.

Tues Jan 15

King’s Political Thought: The Ideas Develop

I. An Intellectual Context:

Everyone reads:


We divide these readings among groups for team reporting:


II. King’s Academic Writings

Everyone reads:


*Author Unknown; often attributed to MLK, but that is doubtful. 1951. “War and Pacifism,” in Clayborne Carson, ed. The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. V. 1: Called to Serve. Berkeley: University of California Press. 433–435.

The following are recommended readings:


**III. King on Nonviolence and Self-Determination: Challenging Views**

We divide these readings among groups for team reporting:


**EVERYONE READS:** “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence 1960”

**WED Jan 16 WORKSHOP: Literature Review and Analytical Framework**

**Thurs Jan 17**

**I. King on History and Social Progress**

**Obstacles to Success and the “New South” Concept**


**II. Context: “The New South” and the SCLC Founding**


Read: *MLK “Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience,” 1961 Fellowship of Reconciliation Address.* (Also in James, M. Washington, ed. *A Testament of Hope.*)


**Look at items on reserve: “Memorabilia From SCLC”**

**Tues Jan 22**

**King on Means-Ends and Organizing: SCLC, SNCC, Freedom Rides,**
and the “Communist Connection”


READ: *Folder: “Suffering and Faith” contains:
2) Holograph copy of the essay

READ: Folder: “Southern Christian Leadership Conference Founding” contains:


*MLK “To Amzie Moore 20 May 1958,” original Typescript*


READ: Folder “Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Founding” contains:

Familiarize yourself with these documents as examples of research materials:
Folder: “Kennedy and Nixon 1960” contains:

Familiarize yourself with these documents as examples of research materials:
Folder: “On Communism c. 1960” contains:

*2005 “From Harris Wofford, 1 April 1960,” in Clayborne Carson, ed. The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. V. 5: Threshold of a New Age, Berkeley: University of California Press. 403–405. *


Representations of Direct Action in North Carolina

Familiarize yourself with these documents as examples of research materials:


Thurs Jan 24 King on Justice and Faith—in Action
What Counts as A Failure?
A Problem in Theory?


AND

**“The Nation’s Future” transcript of a debate between MLK and James Kilpatrick (look up James Kilpatrick to see who he is). November 26, 1960

Then Read:

Problems in Organizational Structure?


**Considering the Albany Context**


Familiarize yourself with these articles as examples of research materials:

**Representations of Albany**

Take a Look at the News Coverage:
Turn in Literature Review Friday

MON Jan 28 WORKSHOP: Discuss Literature Reviews

Tues Jan 29  
**King on Civil Rights and American Constitutionalism**

**The Birmingham Context**


* Four letters from Fred Shuttlesworth regarding Birmingham: to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Wyatt T. Walker (15 March 1963); to Martin Luther King, Jr. (7 November 1963); to L.H. Pitts (11 December 1963) and to J.L. Ware (11 November 1963).*

**A Response to James Kilpatrick?**


*And in the form sold for 10¢ by the Friends Service Committee with King's signature*


Folder: *Selected Birmingham Police Reports on Mass Meetings 1963*

*Eugene "Bull" Connor Papers "Wire Tap of King Conversation 16 April 1963."

**Representations of Birmingham**

We will divide these short readings among groups for team reporting:


ASSIGNMENT: Use ProQuest, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Historical Black Newspapers, Readers’ Guide Retrospective, and Lexus Nexus to find at least one account of Birmingham Direct Action 1962–1964, in a “mainstream” US newspaper or magazine, one account of the same activity in an African American newspaper, and one account in a non-US newspaper or magazine (in any language that you can read, because you will discuss in class.) POST the citation of these articles on our forum and upload the “page view” pdf of the article under “Assignment: Comparing “Mainstream” US and US African American News Coverage to the Foreign Press Coverage of Birmingham.

Thurs Jan 31

**Change and Continuity in Message and Method**

I. The Southern Contexts: Mississippi, Florida, & Selma, Alabama


II. The Beloved Community as Political Community


**“Three Dimensions of a Complete Life 1959,” original typescript**

**“The Answer to a Perplexing Question 1963,” original typescript**

III. Civil Religion and Religion in the Civil Rights Movement

Tues Feb 5 NO CLASS MEETING
Let me make what will seem like an odd suggestion. Yes, there is reading below and you need to read it for Thursday 7 February. But I suggest that you take time over the weekend either to finish Garrow, Bearing the Cross or skip ahead to Part 3 of the course (beginning 12 February) and read either the short works by Albert Memmi or Frantz Fanon.

Thurs Feb 7 Is Direct Action Enough? (How Do We Evaluate that Question?)

I. King on Civil Rights Activism in a Federal Democracy

II. The “North”

Friday Feb 8 Turn in Analytical Framework (and as necessary revised Literature Review)
Part 3 Civil Rights and International Liberation Movements
A Word: Again, let me make a suggestion about your readings. Below is the order in which we shall discuss the readings. But that is not necessarily how you should read these
short books (or in the case of Cabral, the collection of speeches). Over the weekend I suggest that you read Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi (even if you read some parts quickly and re-read for class). You will have a much better sense of these authors as individuals while we discuss their works in tandem. The selections of Amilcar Cabral’s speeches are more straightforward (they are speeches after all), so you can read them for the day we discuss his work.

**Mon Feb 11 WORKSHOP Discuss Analytical Frameworks**

**Tues Feb 12**  
**On the Nation and the National Challenge**


**Thurs Feb 14**  
**Beyond the “National Community”**

**King on International Relations and Rights**


**Tues Feb 19**  
**Violence and Nationalism**

Read (Now for something completely different): *Jean-Paul Sarte. 1963. “Preface,” to Frantz Fanon, Wretched of the Earth. New York: Grove Press. 7–31*  

**Thurs Feb 21**  
**Colonial and Post-Colonial Culture, Orders and Disorders**

Read: Frantz Fanon. 1963. “Pitfalls of National Consciousness” and “On National Culture” *Wretched of the Earth* New York:
Fri Feb 22 Research Papers Due for Colloquium Presentations

Tues Feb 26 National Order and Disorder


Thurs Feb 28 Class Presentations
Tues Mar 5 Class presentations

Thurs Mar 7 Papers Due; Final Comments on our Seminar