

THE OBAMA PRESIDENCY



44th US President Barack H. Obama speaks with Ruby Bridges who, as a six-year-old, was the subject of the 1964 Norman Rockwell painting (background), "The Problem We All Live With." The painting was installed in the White House from July - October 2011. Today, Ruby Bridges is a civil rights activist and chair of the Ruby Bridges Foundation, which she formed in 1999 to promote "the values of tolerance, respect, and appreciation of all differences."

The Department of American Studies AMST 194-01 (4.0 credit hrs)

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COURSE OBJECTIVE & DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to develop one's skills in writing, critical thinking, oral presentations, and class discussions involving race and politics. We will do that by studying African Americans in the political system from an historical context and by asking the following questions:

- Did the election of the nation's first Black president change the face of African-American leadership and activism since the Civil Right and Black Power Movements?
- What are the historical dynamics that have shaped and continue to shape the relationship between African Americans and the American political system?
- Under what conditions have Blacks been able to exert influence on the political system?
- What exactly are Black political interests?
- What are the strategies of electoral politics versus social activism?

REQUIRED TEXTS

NOTE: To better manage the amount of reading assigned, students may use [Audible](#) to access books by Barack and Michelle Obama. Supplemental readings not listed here will be uploaded to Moodle.

Eric Foner. 1990. *A Short History of Reconstruction* (New York: Harper & Row).

Doug McAdam. 1999. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). Second edition.

Kwame Toure and Charles V. Hamilton. 1992. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*. (New York: Vintage Press).

Fredrick C. Harris. 2014. *The Price of the Ticket: Barack Obama and the Rise and Decline of Black Politics*.

Barack Obama. 1995. *Dreams of My Father* (New York: Random House)

Barack Obama. 2006. *The Audacity of Hope* (New York: Random House)

Michelle Obama. 2018. *Becoming* (New York: Random)

Melanye T. Price. 2016. *The Race Whisper and the Political Use of Race* (New York University Press)

Michael Eric Dyson. 2016. *The Black Presidency: Barack Obama and the Politics of Race in America* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)

COURSE EXPECTATIONS & RESOURCES

Class Attendance: This is not a lecture-based class, but one that emphasizes class discussion. Attendance is, therefore, required and will be taken each class. **Students are allowed one unexcused absence**; 5 points will be deducted from the final grade for every absence thereafter. Only approved and documented university excuses will be excused from this rule. Athletes are required to submit forms from the Athletic Department prior to their absence.

Academic Integrity: Macalester College has no tolerance for academic dishonesty. Cheating and plagiarism are prohibited. You must always properly cite and acknowledge your sources because they are not your ideas. Learn about Macalester's policies on academic dishonesty, we suggest you read and understand the definitions [here](#).

Classroom Etiquette: All cell phones must be turned off. Any devices used to listen to music or surf the internet are also prohibited in our class. Unless you have a documented disability, no earphones are allowed. Laptops are allowed for academic purposes only.

Disability Accommodations: Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. Students requesting accommodations should do so as soon as possible by contacting the Director of Disability Services to formally discuss accommodations. More information on the accommodations process can be found [here](#).

Campus Safety: For campus-related safety, visit these sites:

[Campus Safety and Security Act](#)

[Campus Safety Alerts](#)

[Emergency Procedures](#)

ASSIGNMENT DETAILS

Essay #1

A 5-7 page essay, double-spaced, 12 pt. font, cited in Chicago or MLA. Answer the following question:

According to Foner what are the forces that led to the collapse of Reconstruction? How did African Americans resist the onset of the collapse? How did their political fortunes turnaround? That is, according to McAdam, what were the social, economic, and political forces that led to the rise of the civil rights movement by mid twentieth century?

Potential outline:

- I. Introduction (approx. 1/2 page)
 - A. Thesis statement. "I will argue..."
 - B. Method. "In this paper I will make that argument in this way..."

- II. Reconstruction (approx. three pages)
 - A. According to Foner what are the forces that led to the collapse of Reconstruction?
 - B. How did African Americans resist the onset of the collapse?
 - C. How did their political fortunes turnaround?
- III. Transition Paragraph
- IV. Civil Rights Movement (approx. three pages)
 - A. According to McAdam, what were the social, economic, and political forces that led to the rise of the civil rights movement by mid twentieth century?
- V. Conclusion (approx. 1/2 page)

Essay #2

A 5-7 page essay, double-spaced, 12 pt. font, cited in Chicago or MLA. Answer the following question:

“Black Lives Matter” emerged during the presidency of the United States’ first Black president. What does this seeming contradiction tell us?

The following readings will be useful for the assignment:

- *The Audacity of Hope*: Chapter Nine, Family and the Epilogue
- *From #BLACKLIVESMATTER to Black Liberation*. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. Introduction, Chapters 2, 3, 6-7.
- Fredrick C. Harris (2014) [“Will Ferguson be a Moment or a Movement?”](#) Washington Post, August 22, 2014.

Final Paper

A 5-7 page essay, double-spaced, 12 pt. font, cited in Chicago or MLA. Write a review of the following book:

Michael Eric Dyson, The Black Presidency: Barack Obama and the Politics of Race in America

Here is an example of a [book review](#).

COURSE SCHEDULE & GRADING

Points for grading will be distributed as follows:

Essay 1 = 20%

Essay 2 = 20%

Final Paper = 20%

Class Discussion (Group assignment and regular contributions) = 40%

Late work: a half letter grade will be deducted for each day your work is late.

Extra Credit: Opportunities will be announced when/if they become available.

UNIT ONE: HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF BLACK POLITICS

Class #	Assignment DUE	In Class Discussion/Activity
1	<i>A Short History of Reconstruction</i> Foner: xi-xvi, Chapters 1-3	What is historiography? Extra Credit: Think about the 20 th Century; in what year was the March on Washington? Why?
2	<i>A Short History of Reconstruction</i> Foner: Chapters 4-6 Articles: Texas Textbook Vox: History Textbooks Podcast: Freedom's Promise, Episode 5	Continuation previous class, discussion of high school curriculum. Additional discussion questions: Benjamin F. Butler designated fugitive slaves as “contraband of war.” What is contraband of war? How did the political mobilization of New Orleans’ free Blacks force suffrage onto the center stage of politics? How did Reconstruction transform enslaved families into “free” Black families?
3	Historical Foundations Foner: Chapters, 7-9, 12, Epilogue	Andrew Johnson video Discussion questions: What is the significance of Andrew Johnson being dubbed a “poor white in the white house” in the post-Civil War era? What did Johnson mean when he said, “Damn the negroes, I am fighting the traitorous aristocrats, their masters.” (9:29)? Why is that significant? Johnson declared that Black people had “shown less capacity for government than any other people in the world, and when left to their own devices they exhibited a tendency to relapse into barbarism.” (11:30) What prejudices and privileges are represented here? How did they skew the narrative of Black power?

4	Article: Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African-American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom.	Documentary on Reconstruction (source to be provided)
5	<i>Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970</i> McAdam: Chapters 1-5.	Library research tutorial Form 1 & Form 2
6	<i>Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970</i> McAdam: Chapters 6-9.	Essay work

UNIT TWO: THE EMERGENCE OF BLACK POWER POLITICS, EXAMINING ELECTORAL POLITICS AND PROTEST

Class #	Assignment DUE	In Class Discussion/Activity
7	Read " Shitty First Drafts ", Anne Lamont	Essay work
8	Essay #1 due at 5pm Optional reading: Congressional hearing on slavery reparations	
9	<i>Black Power: The Politics of Liberation</i> Ture and Hamilton: Chapters 1-5	Ch 1. What is institutional racism? Ch2. Why do Ture and Hamilton criticize integration? Do you agree or disagree? Why? Ch 3. What are the grounds for viable coalition? Ch 4. Many people would argue that it is important for Black Americans to work within the Democratic Party (Macalester Alum, Walter Mondale). Some would point to the two successful elections of Barack Obama to the Presidency. Why did the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) strive

		<p>for an independent base of power?</p> <p>Ch 5. Ture and Hamilton make a case for the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, (LCFO). Can you explain why some Southern Blacks did not support their efforts?</p>
10	<i>Black Power: The Politics of Liberation</i> Ture and Hamilton: Chapters 6-8, Afterword	Watch Eyes on the Prize episode 6
11	<p>Watch Eyes on the Prize: Power!</p> <p>Come to class with one discussion question based on the video.</p>	<p>Discuss video and questions</p> <p>Who had agency in this story, and how did that contribute to it being silenced?</p> <p>How did this footage make you think differently about the way our society silences minority groups' narratives?</p>
12		<p>Watch:</p> <p>Shirley Chisolm Had Guts Run Jesse Run David and Goliath Speech</p>
13	<p><i>Historic Firsts</i> Evelyn Simien: Chapters 2-3</p> <p>Read How Obama's campaign changed how Americans view Black candidates</p>	Watch Chisolm video , Obama video , and Jackson video

UNIT THREE: BARACK HUSSEIN OBAMA IN HIS OWN WORDS

Class #	Assignment DUE	In Class Discussion/Activity
14	<p><i>Dreams of My Father</i> Introduction - Chapter 3 Read article on Black Voters & Establishment Candidates</p>	Barack Obama Discussion
15	<p><i>Dreams of My Father</i> Chapters 4-6</p>	<p>Malcolm X clip Discussion: Obama's concept of his Blackness</p>

<p>16</p>	<p><i>Dreams of My Father</i> Chapters 7-9</p> <p>Watch from 28:07-55:26 in this video (students may have trouble accessing it)</p>	<p>What is the significance of Ronald Reagan declaring his Presidential candidacy in Neshoba County?</p> <p>Some categorize Barack Obama as a "Liberal Democrat" similar to Edward Kennedy and Walter Mondale. This would be consistent with Obama supporting Richard Daley for Mayor of Chicago. Why did Barack Obama support Harold Washington?</p>
<p>17</p>	<p><i>Dreams of My Father</i> Chapters 10-12</p>	<p>Barack Obama writes: "What I doubted was that all the talk about self-esteem could serve as a centerpiece of effective Black politics." (194) He also says, "the continuing struggle to align word and action, our heartfelt desires with a workable plan--didn't self-esteem finally depend on just this? It was that belief which had led me to organizing, and it was that belief which would lead me to conclude, perhaps, for the final time, that notions of purity--of race and culture--could no more serve as the basis for the typical Black American's self-esteem than it could for mine" (204).</p> <p>Do you agree or disagree with Obama? More importantly, WHY do you think this?</p> <p>Watch For Colored Girls</p> <p>The class will be split into three groups to create discussion</p>

		questions for next week's readings
18	<i>Dreams of My Father</i> Chapters 13-14 Questions developed by Group 1	Discuss Group 1's questions
19	<i>Dreams of My Father</i> Chapters 15-16 Questions developed by Group 2	Watch Bill Moyers w/Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright Discuss Group 2's questions
20	<i>Dreams of My Father</i> (remainder) Questions developed by Group 3	Discuss Group 3's questions

UNIT FOUR: BLACK POLITICS IN THE AGE OF OBAMA

Class #	Assignment DUE	In Class Discussion/Activity
21	<i>The Price of the Ticket</i> Chapters 1-3	
22	<i>The Price of the Tickets</i> Chapters 4-6	Watch Frederick Harris interview
23	<i>Audacity of Hope</i> Chapters 1-2	Reading discussion
24	<i>Audacity of Hope</i> Chapters 3-4	Mock policy brief: Obama's values
25	<i>Audacity of Hope</i> Chapters 5-6	Mock policy brief: Obama's stance on religion
26	<i>Audacity of Hope</i> Chapters 7-9	Watch A More Perfect Union
27	<i>#BLACKLIVESMATTER to Black Liberation</i> Chapters 2-3 and 6-7	Lecture: Black Lives Matter
28		Essay work
29		Essay work
30		Black Lives Matter discussion
31	Essay 2 due at 5pm	NO CLASS

UNIT FIVE: BECOMING MICHELLE OBAMA

Class #	Assignment DUE	In Class Discussion/Activity
32	<i>Becoming</i> Part 1: Becoming Me	Who is the audience for this book? How does this book help us think about the role of the First Lady? How does Michelle's working-class background interact with "respectability"?

33	<i>Becoming</i> Part 2: Becoming Us	Watch Michelle Obama documentary
34	<i>Becoming</i> Part 3: Becoming More	Skype: Sam Ridders, Class of 1998

UNIT SIX: THE POLITICAL USE OF RACE

Class #	Assignment DUE	In Class Discussion/Activity
35	<i>Race Whisperer</i> Introduction and Chapter 1	Watch & Discuss Obama's 2013 Morehouse Commencement Speech
36	NO CLASS	
37	NO CLASS	
38	<i>Race Whisperer</i> Chapters 2-3	Watch Race: The Power of the Illusion
39	<i>Race Whisperer</i> Chapter 4 and Conclusion	Lecture: Black Feminist Politics from Kennedy to Trump
40		Guest speaker: Patrick Guarasci, Class of 2000
41		Closing remarks and course evaluations
42	Final paper due at 5pm	No Class