

Phil 190: Black Lives Matter

Spring 2017

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Course Description

This course explores several philosophical questions that are intimately connected to the #BlackLivesMatter movement. What, for instance, does it mean for a life to matter? What is the point of political protest? Is racism a permanent phenomenon? If so, how should the #BlackLivesMatter movement adjust its activities? Given U.S. racism, are black Americans obligated to obey the criminal law?

In answering these questions, we will read the work of several figures, including: Frantz Fanon, Derrick Bell, and Kimberlé Crenshaw.

Course Requirements and Grading

Student grades will be determined as follows:

70%: Three, five-page papers
30%: Class participation

The class participation score will be determined by student participation in weekly, in-class group discussions. To earn credit for participation, each group must submit a one-page summary of the discussion at the beginning of the class meeting following the discussion (usually a Monday). One group member will write the summary and the other members should sign as participants.

Statement on Americans with Disabilities Procedures:

Howard University is committed to providing an educational environment that is accessible to all students. In accordance with this policy, students in need of accommodations due to a disability should contact the Office of the Dean for Special Services for verification and determination of reasonable accommodations as soon as possible after admission to the University or at the beginning of each semester. The Dean of the Office of Special Student Services can be reached at (202) 238-2420.

Plagiarism and cheating:

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Evidence of dishonesty will be pursued, and confirmation will result in an "F" for the course. Students are responsible for knowing which actions constitute plagiarism. Please refer to the Howard University Student Handbook, p.114.

Texts:

Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform by Tommie Shelby
(Harvard University Press, 2016)
(available in the Howard Bookstore)

Additional readings will be posted to Blackboard

Course Schedule:

(Note that I may alter the reading schedule.)

Week 1: What does #BlackLivesMatter, mean?

Readings: "11 Major Misconceptions about the Black Lives Matter Movement,"
blacklivesmatter.com; "How to Explain Black Lives Matter to White People," Michael Harriot

"Black Lives Matter Doesn't Believe Its Own Slogan," Dave Carter, "The Blacker the Berry,"
Kendrick Lamar.

Week 2: Do black lives matter?

Readings: "I can't believe I have to say it: a human life is worth more than a Gorilla's," David
Bry; "The Black Man and Hegel," Frantz Fanon, from *Black Skin, White Masks*.

"7 Things Worth More Than a Black Life in America," Zak Cheney Rice.
"Exchange" from *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Karl Marx.

Week 3: What is Racism?

Readings: "The Heart of Racism," Jorge Garcia; "Is Racism in the 'Heart'?" Tommie Shelby

"Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation," Eduardo Bonilla-Silva

First paper topics distributed.

Week 4: White People and "All lives matter."

Readings: "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," Peggy McIntosh; "White
Fragility," Robin DiAngelo

"The Real Reason White People Say 'All lives matter,'" John Halstead

Week 5: Racial Realism

Readings: “Racial Realism,” “Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma” Derrick Bell

“Trump’s Win is a Reminder of the Incredible, Unbeatable Power of Racism,” Jenée Desmond-Harris

First paper due.

Week 6: What is the point of political protest?

Readings: “Self-Respect, Self-Esteem, and Protest,” from *Blacks and Social Justice*, Bernard Boxill; “Reflections on Boxill’s *Blacks and Social Justice*,” Tommie Shelby

“Why Street Protests Don’t Work,” Moises Naim; “Americans don’t like protests. But protests may work anyway,” Robert Shapiro

Week 7: Intersectionality

Readings: “Why intersectionality can’t wait,” Kimberlé Crenshaw; “Black lives matter—all of them,” Brittney Cooper

“#SayHerName: Why Kimberlé Crenshaw is fighting for forgotten women,” Homa Khaleeli

Week 8: Beyond Protest

Readings: “On Violence,” from *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon; “The Ballot or the Bullet,” Malcolm X.

“Race-Based Jury Nullification: Black Power in the Criminal Justice System,” Paul Butler

Second paper topics distributed

Week 9: Dark Ghettos

Readings: Part I, Chapters 1 and 2

Week 10: Dark Ghettos

Readings: Part 1, Chapter 3

Second paper due.

Week 11: Dark Ghettos

Readings: Part II, Chapters 4 and 5

Week 12: Dark Ghettos
Readings: Part II, Chapter 6

Week 13: Dark Ghettos
Readings: Part III, Chapters 7 and 8

Final paper topics distributed

Week 14: Dark Ghettos
Readings: Part II, Chapter 9 and Epilogue

Week 15: Catch up

Final paper due during exam period.