

McGill University
Department of Political Science
POLI 316: Black Lives Matter and American Democracy
Fall 2023
DRAFT AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE

CLASS: Tuesdays and Thursdays, Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2:35-3:55pm, ENGMD 276
INSTRUCTOR: Professor D. Thompson (Dr. T.)
CONTACT: Office Hours: (mostly) Wednesdays, 2-4pm and (sometimes) Fridays 2:30-4pm via zoom:
<https://mcgill.zoom.us/j/6080813108>
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McGill University is on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

L'Université McGill est sur un emplacement qui a longtemps servi de lieu de rencontre et d'échange entre les peuples autochtones, y compris les nations Haudenosaunee et Anishinabeg. Nous reconnaissons et remercions les divers peuples autochtones dont les pas ont marqué ce territoire sur lequel les peuples du monde entier se réunissent maintenant.

Course Description:

This course explores the ideological origins and contemporary politics of the Black Lives Matter movement in the American context. It is divided into three broad themes. First, **the Demands of/on Democracy** will explore how Black Lives Matter engages questions about the substance, breadth, ethos, and limits of American democracy, including its historical inheritance from nineteenth and twentieth century movements for Black liberation. Second, the **Devaluation of Blacks Lives** will explore how Black Lives Matter has exposed the ways that American society is characterized by and perpetuates anti-Black racism, in that Black lives are too often subjected to police brutality and violence, mechanisms of state surveillance, a blatantly racist criminal justice system, formidable obstacles to the accumulation of wealth, restricted access to dwindling social services and public goods, environmental hazards, ghettoization and gentrification, deteriorating public schools, and a host of other social ills that tend to systematically target and disadvantage African Americans. Third, **Reclaiming Black Futures** will explore the ideational basis of Black Lives Matter in ideological, fantastical, and emotive terrains that often remain hidden from or ignored by white, middle-class society, before turning to the potential for revolutionary change on university campuses and beyond. As a whole, the course seeks to answer the question of whether contemporary structures and strictures of American democracy can be reformulated to create a future in which African Americans have access to substantive and meaningful forms of social, political, and economic equality.

This is a reading and writing intensive course. The workload is heavy and the topic is uncomfortable; at times it can even be soul-destroying. This is the price of learning how to see the world differently.

Course Objectives:

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Analyze the nature of American democracy, including the robustness of democratic norms, key ideological concepts such as democratic suffering and reciprocity, and the extent to which the American Dream has been accessible to African Americans.
- Identify historic, institutional, and ideological roots of Black Lives Matter and compare the movement’s orientations, goals, and politics to those of its predecessors.
- Understand and utilize intersectional analysis to examine the ways that race, gender, class, and sexual orientation impact individual, ideological and institutional experiences of American democracy.
- Understand various public policies that have adversely affected Black individuals and communities, including the criminal justice system, drug laws, welfare policy, and police stops.

Course Materials:

There is one required book for this course, available for purchase at the James Bookstore:

- ❖ Deva Woodly (2022) *Reckoning: Black Lives Matter and the Necessity of Social Movements* (New York: Oxford University Press)

All other readings/media are posted on MyCourses or are available by searching the library database.

Course Requirements:

Assignment	Due Date	Weight
Conference Attendance & Participation	5 sessions – see course schedule	10%
Analytical Essays (x2)	October 15 by 11:59pm	30%
	November 19 by 11:59pm	30%
Final Reflections Essay	December 5 by 11:59pm	30%

N.B. The late penalty for any written work is one-third of a letter grade per day.

Conferences (10%)

Conference sessions with a teaching assistant will be held in-person. Students are required to register for one conference on Minerva before the add/drop period ends and attend each conference session as noted on the course schedule. Students can only attend the conference session in which they are enrolled. Attendance and active participation in conferences is mandatory and constitutes 10% of the final grade. There are **five** conference sessions during the semester, on the following dates:

1. Week 4 (week of September 18)
2. Week 6 (week of October 2)
3. Week 9 (week of October 23)
4. Week 11 (week of November 6)
5. Week 13 (week of November 20)

In addition, there are at least two extra-curricular learning events for which attendance is strongly encouraged, unless you have a scheduling conflict with another class. The dates, times, and locations are noted in the course schedule. Attendance at these events will count toward your conference participation grade.

Analytical Essays (2 x 30%):

The purpose of this form of writing is to enable students to make a persuasive argument that demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the course material. No outside research is required, but students will be expected to demonstrate a mastery of **the majority of readings in the relevant module**. In order to receive a grade of A, essays should: amend the research question to make it more nuanced, creative, engaging, and pertinent to the paper's argument and analysis; analyze arguments in relevant readings to support the development of a single, central thesis; identify a thesis that is creative, clearly stated at the outset of the essay, and draws an inference between two or more phenomena; use substantial evidence, including citations and empirical data, to support the main thesis and sub-arguments; be organized logically, with an introduction that states the thesis and frames the full response to the research question, body paragraphs that are ordered according to the logic of the thesis statement, and a conclusion that summarizes the discussion and considers further implications of the argument. Each essay should be 4-6 pages (1000-1500 words), double spaced, and must engage with the assigned readings and other learning material in the relevant module.

All writing assignments must be 12-point font with 1-inch margins and use proper citation format and style. Papers should be submitted via MyCourses. **Late papers will be penalized one-third of a letter grade per day**. For example, a paper that would have received a B+ if it were submitted on time will instead receive a B if it is submitted one day late. Papers that are more than one week late will receive a grade of zero.

Analytical Essay Prompts:

1. What is the relationship between race and democracy in America?
2. In what ways do conceptions of black criminality, the system of mass incarceration, the challenges of race-class subjugated communities and/or circumstances of police violence contribute to racial inequality in America?

Final Reflections Essay (30%)

For the final essay, you are required to engage in a reflective synthesis of your learning experiences throughout the semester. The purpose of this assignment is to provide students with the opportunity to reflect on and demonstrate your understanding of the course content, critically analyze the assigned readings and course material, and reflect on your personal growth (or stagnation? But hopefully not) from the semester in its entirety. In order to receive a grade of A, this essay should: summarize the main themes and concepts that you found to be the most important; discuss the key readings that most resonated with you and explain why, critically engaging with their strengths and limitations; analyze how course lectures helped clarify or expand upon the readings and note which ones stood out to you and why; reflect on your personal progress in achieving the course learning objectives and how your understanding of Black Lives Matter and the nature of American democracy has evolved over the course of the semester. This essay should be 4-6 pages (1000-1500 words), double spaced, and must engage with the assigned readings and other learning material throughout the course.

All writing assignments must be 12-point font with 1-inch margins and use proper citation format and style. Papers should be submitted via MyCourses. **Late papers will be penalized one-third of a letter grade per day.** For example, a paper that would have received a B+ if it were submitted on time will instead receive a B if it is submitted one day late. Papers that are more than one week late will receive a grade of zero.

The Fine Print:

Extraordinary Circumstances:

These are extraordinary times; we are *still* in the middle of a global pandemic. If you are a parent, caring for elders or family members, dealing with physical or mental health issues, working two jobs, experiencing food or financial insecurity, trying to extract yourself from any kind of toxic relationship, or have other extenuating circumstances that will impact your ability to learn and do well in this class, please speak with me as soon as possible. Humans have complicated lives, and I will not hold judgement. I don't even need to know the details. But what I will do is work with you to come up with appropriate alternate arrangements – but this is much more easily done in advance. In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Copyright of Lectures:

All slides, video recordings, lecture notes, etc. remain the instructor's intellectual property. As such, you may use these only for your own learning (and research, with proper referencing/citation) ends. You are not permitted to disseminate or share these materials; doing so may violate the instructor's intellectual property rights and could be cause for disciplinary action. **Recording lectures in whole or part is not permitted.**

Email Policy:

It is your responsibility to check your email every day. I may send you information on scheduling, corrections to lectures or readings, and other messages that you need to see. Once I have sent you a message, I assume that you have that information. Please note that I will respond to your emails within 48 hours, excluding weekends.

Language of Submission:

In accordance with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives.

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue).

Academic Integrity: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures" (see [McGill's guide to academic honesty](#) for more information). **In alignment with these expectations, the use of language learning models and artificial intelligence, such as Chat GPT or similar tools, is strictly prohibited and constitutes a violation of academic integrity.** This includes using these platforms to draft, edit, or generate significant portions of your assignments. The consequences of academic dishonesty include receiving a failing grade for the assignment, and, depending on the severity of the offense, failing the course. Should I suspect that language learning models, artificial intelligence, or other forms of plagiarism have been used in the

creation of your essays, I will ask students for evidence (i.e. planning notes, draft versions of the essay) that this is not the case and/or will require students to detail the development of their essay during an oral exam.

Planning for the Future: Please note that I only provide reference letters for students who receive a grade of A- or higher.

Course Schedule:

Week	Date(s)	Readings
Week 1: Invitation	Aug. 31	Review syllabus on MyCourses
PART I: THE DEMANDS OF/ON DEMOCRACY		
Week 2: Foundations	Sept. 5 & 7	Alicia Garza (2014) " A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement ," <i>Feminist Wire</i> Deva Woodly (2022), <i>Reckoning</i> , introduction & chapter 1, pp. 3-46. Tobi Haslett (2021) " Magic Actions ," <i>n+1 magazine</i> , issue 40 <u>Watch:</u> Where do we go from here? A fundraiser for Black lives (a discussion between Elizabeth Hinton, Robin Kelly, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Brandon Terry, Cornel West)
Week 3: Foundations (cont'd)	Sept. 12 CLASS CANCELLED SEPT. 14	Megan Ming Francis and Leah Wright-Rigueur (2021) "Black Lives Matter in Historical Perspective," <i>Annual Review of Law and Social Science</i> 17: 441-58. Sean Campbell (2022) "The Murky Finances of Black Lives Matter," <i>New York Magazine</i> , January 31. <u>Listen:</u> <i>Throughline</i> podcast, " The Real Black Panthers ," February 2, 2023.
Week 4: The American Dream Conference #1	Sept. 19 & 21	Nikole Hannah-Jones (2019) "The Idea of America," <i>1619 Project</i> , <i>New York Times Magazine</i> , pp. 14-26. Ta-Nehisi Coates (2012) "Fear of a Black President," <i>the Atlantic</i> , September. Ta-Nehisi Coates (2017) "My President Was Black," <i>The Atlantic</i> , January/February. Ibram X. Kendi (2021) "Progress," <i>The 1619 Project</i> (New York: One World), pp. 421-440. Nikole Hannah-Jones (2021) "Justice," <i>The 1619 Project</i> (New York: One World), pp. 451-476.

		<u>Listen:</u> <i>You're Wrong About</i> podcast, " Reconstruction with Jamelle Bouie ," December 5, 2021.
Week 5: Democratic Sacrifice	Sept. 26 & 28	Juliet Hooker (2016) "Black Lives Matter and the Paradoxes of U.S. Black Politics: From Democratic Sacrifice to Democratic Repair," <i>Political Theory</i> 44(4): 448-469. Joel Olson (2004) <i>The Abolition of White Democracy</i> , chapter 1, pp. 1-30. Astra Taylor (2019) <i>Democracy May Not Exist, But We'll Miss it When it's Gone</i> (New York: Metropolitan Books), chapter 3, pp. 77-125. <u>Listen:</u> <i>the Ezra Klein Show</i> podcast, " Why Ta-Nehisi Coates is Hopeful ," June 4, 2020.
Week 6: Democratic Necessity Conference #2	Oct. 3 & 5	Deva Woodly (2022), <i>Reckoning</i> , chapters 2-4, pp. 47-157. <u>Watch:</u> A brief chat with Deva Woodly (on MyCourses)
Week 7: FALL READING BREAK – NO CLASS OCT 10 AND 12. PAPER #1 DUE OCTOBER 15, 11:59PM. SUBMIT VIA MYCOURSES.		
PART II: THE DEVALUATION OF BLACK LIVES		
Week 8: Case Studies of the Carceral State *Oct. 16 – Dr. Joe Soss lecture, Arts 160, 3-5pm	Oct 17 & 19 Special guest stars: 10/17 Dr. Joe Soss 10/19 Dr. Tari Ajadi	Joshua Page and Joe Soss (2021) "The Predatory Dimensions of Criminal Justice," <i>Science</i> 374, pp. 291-294. Ajadi et al. (2022) <i>Defunding the Police: Defining the Way Forward for Halifax Regional Municipality</i> , introduction, pp. 1-18.
Week 9: The New Jim Crow Conference #3	Oct 24 & 26	Joe Soss and Vesla Weaver (2017) "Police are our Government: Politics, Political Science, and the Policing of Race-Class Subjugated Communities," <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i> 20: 55-591. James Kilgore (2015) "Mass Incarceration: Examining and Moving Beyond the New Jim Crow," <i>Critical Sociology</i> 41(2): 283-295. David Remnick (2020) " Ten Years After 'The New Jim Crow' ," <i>the New Yorker</i> , January 17. <u>Listen:</u> <i>the Ezra Klein Show</i> podcast, " Race, policing, and the universal yearning for safety ," September 14, 2020. <u>Listen:</u> <i>the Gray Area</i> podcast, " Behind the blue wall ," February 9, 2023.
Week 10: On Police Violence	Oct 31 & Nov. 2	Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2016) <i>From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation</i> , chapter 4, pp. 107-134.

		<p>United States Department of Justice (2016) <i>Investigation of the Chicago Police Department</i>, Executive Summary, pp. 1-16.</p> <p>Mariame Kaba and Andrea J. Ritchie (2022) <i>No More Police: A Case for Abolition</i>, chapters 2 (We are survivors) & 3 (Re-Form), pp. 71-139.</p> <p><u>Listen:</u> <i>Radiolab Presents: More Perfect</i> podcast, “Mr. Graham and the Reasonable Man,” November 29, 2017.</p>
<p>Week 11: Black Rage/White Grievance</p> <p>Conference #4</p>	<p>Nov. 7 & 9</p>	<p>Audre Lorde (1984) “The Uses of Anger,” in <i>Sister Outsider</i> (NY: Ten Speed Press).</p> <p>Melissa Phruksachart (2020) “The Literature of White Liberalism,” <i>Boston Review</i>, August 21.</p> <p>Juliet Hooker (2017) “Black Protest/White Grievance: On the Problem of White Political Imaginations Not Shaped by Loss,” <i>South Atlantic Quarterly</i> 116 (3): 483-504.</p> <p>Ta-Nehisi Coates (2017) “The First White President,” <i>The Atlantic</i>, October.</p> <p><u>Listen:</u> <i>Throughline</i> podcast, “The Modern White Power Movement,” June 2, 2022.</p> <p><u>Listen:</u> Black Rage, Lauryn Hill</p>
<p>Week 12: Black Lives Matter, Everywhere</p>	<p>Nov. 14 & 16</p>	<p>Sandy Hudson and Rodney Diverlus (2020) “The Origin Story of Black Lives Matter Canada,” <i>Until We Are Free: Reflections on Black Lives Matter in Canada</i>, eds. Rodney Diverlus, Sandy Hudson, and Syrus Marcus Ware (Regina: University of Regina Press), 3-15.</p> <p>Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Rinaldo Walcott, and Glen Coulthard (2018) “Idle No More and Black Lives Matter: An Exchange,” <i>Studies in Social Justice</i> 12(1): 75-89.</p> <p>Larnies Bowen et al. (2017) “A Hemispheric Approach to Contemporary Black Activism,” <i>NACLA Report on the Americas</i>, 49(1): 25-35.</p> <p><u>Listen:</u> <i>Code Switch</i> podcast, “The Protests Heard Round the World,” September 15, 2020</p> <p><u>Listen:</u> <i>In/equality</i> from the Policy Options podcast, “Inequality and Criminal Justice, with Akwasi Owusu-Bempah,” April 5, 2023.</p>
<p>PAPER #2 DUE NOVEMBER 19, 11:59PM. SUBMIT VIA MYCOURSES.</p>		
<p>PART III: RECLAIMING BLACK FUTURES</p>		
<p>Week 13: Abolition Democracy</p>	<p>Nov. 21 & 23</p>	<p>Deva Woodly (2022), <i>Reckoning</i>, chapter 5 & conclusion, pp. 160-216.</p>

<p>Conference #5</p>		<p>Mariame Kaba and Andrea J. Ritchie (2022) <i>No More Police: A Case for Abolition</i>, chapter 7 (Experiment and build), pp. 240-269.</p> <p>El Jones (2022) “We Gon Be Alright: On Activism, Death, and Survival,” <i>Abolitionist Intimacies</i> (Halifax: Fernwood Press), pp. 157-160.</p> <p><u>Listen:</u> <i>the Gray Area</i> podcast, “Imagine a Future with No Police,” January 2022.</p>
<p>Week 14: Freedom Dreams</p>	<p>Nov. 28 & Dec. 5 (Note that Nov. 30 follows Monday schedule)</p>	<p>Robin D. G. Kelley (2016) “Black Study, Black Struggle,” <i>The Boston Review</i>.</p> <p>Robin D.G. Kelley (2022) “Twenty Years of Freedom Dreams,” <i>The Boston Review</i>.</p> <p>Kelly Hayes and Mariame Kaba (2023) <i>Let This Radicalize You</i> (Chicago: Haymarket Books), conclusion, pp. 226-232.</p> <p><u>Listen:</u> <i>Radiolab</i> podcast, “Debatable” March 10, 2016.</p>
<p>FINAL REFLECTIONS PAPER DUE DECEMBER 5, 11:59pm. SUBMIT VIA MYCOURSES</p>		