

Black Lives Matter: Race, Resistance, and Populist Protest
New York University
Fall 2015
Thursdays 6:20-9pm

Professor Frank Leon Roberts
Fall 2015 Office Hours: (By Appointment Only)
429 1 Wash Place
Thursdays 1:00-3:00pm, 9:00pm-10:00pm

From the killings of teenagers Michael Brown and Vonderrick Myers in Ferguson, Missouri; to the suspicious death of activist Sandra Bland in Waller Texas; to the choke-hold death of Eric Garner in New York, to the killing of 17 year old Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida and 7 year old Aiyana Stanley-Jones in Detroit, Michigan--. #blacklivesmatter has emerged in recent years as a movement committed to resisting, unveiling, and undoing histories of state sanctioned violence against black and brown bodies.

This interdisciplinary seminar links the #blacklivesmatter” movement to four broader phenomena: 1) the rise of the U.S. prison industrial complex and its relationship to the increasing militarization of inner city communities 2) the role of the media industry (including social media) in influencing national conversations about race and racism and 3) the state of racial justice activism in the context of a purportedly “post-racial” Obama Presidency and 4) the increasingly populist nature of decentralized protest movements in the contemporary United States (including the tea party movement, the occupy wall street movement, etc.)

Among the topics of discussion that we will debate and engage this semester will include: the distinction between #blacklivesmatter (as both a network and decentralized movement) vs. a broader twenty first century movement for black lives; the moral ethics of “looting” and riotous forms of protest; violent vs. nonviolent civil disobedience; the hyperbolic media myth of “black on black” crime; coalitional politics and the black feminist and LGBTQ underpinnings of the #blacklivesmatter movement; the similarities and differences between the blacklivesmatter movement and the U.S. civil rights movement; and the dynamics of political protest among the millennial and post-millennial generations.

Among the texts that we are likely to engage this semester include Cornel West’s *Democracy Matters*; Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*; James Cone’s *Malcolm, Martin, and America*; Osaygeko Sekou’s *Gods, Gays, and Guns*; Imani Perry’s *Prophets in the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* and Assata Shakur’s autobiography *Assata*. Our reading material will also be supplemented by a variety of guest speakers and media activists who have played important roles in the blacklivesmatter movement and in the movement for black lives.

Required Texts:

1. Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the War Against Imperialism*
2. Cornel West, *Black Prophetic Fire*
3. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the age of Colorblindness*
4. Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*
5. Osaygeko Sekou, *Gods, Gays, and Guns: Religion and the Crisis of Democracy*
6. Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*
7. Assata Shakur, *Assata*
8. Assorted Essays by Toni Morrison, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, Jayne Cortez, James Cone, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and Op-Eds by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometti, Black Lives Matter, and more.

***A Note on the Syllabus:**

You should approach this syllabus as a jazz composition—meaning there must be a willingness and expectation of improvisation. Like a jazz musician, we will occasionally rift, edit, and “trouble” the composition as needed. Any changes to the syllabus will be announced in a timely fashion.

Meeting Schedule

- **9/3** Overview and Course Introductions
 - **Watch:**
#LawForBlackLives Conferene Footage Clips:
Umi Selah, 2015 RadTalk,
Alicia Garza, 2015 RadTalk
- **9/10** **Black Prophetic Fire and the Unfinished Struggle for American Democracy:**
A Conversation with Dr. Cornel West

Read:

- Cornel West, *Black Prophetic Fire*
- Cornel West, “The Fire of a New Generation” (New York Times)
- Cornel West, “Democracy Matters” (Chapter 1)

Special Guest: Dr. Cornel West

- **9/17** **Between Black Lives Matter & The Movement for Black Lives: We The Protestors**
 - Read:
 - Ferguson Action, “Our Vision for a New America”
 - We The Protestors, “The Demands”
 - Deray McKesson, Brittney Packnett, Johnetta Elzie and Samuel Sinyangwe, “The Problem” and “Policy Solutions,” by Available at <http://www.campaignzero.org>
 - Watch:
 - Alicia Garza, “What Are Black Lives Matters Demands?” (MSNBC Interview)

Special Guest: Deray McKesson

- **9/24** **Black Lives Matter: The State of the Movement** (Perspectives)
 - Read:
 - Alicia Garza, “A Herstory of Black Lives Matter” (The Root)
 - Patrisse Cullors, “#BlackLivesMatter Will Continue to Disrupt the Political Process.” (Washington Post)
 - Danielle C. Belton. “The 5 Biggest Challenges Facing #BlackLivesMatter.” (The Root)
 - Watch:
 - Alicia Garza, RadTalk, #LawForBlackLives Conference
 - Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, Rev. Sekou, Et. Al. “State of Our Movements.” Law for Black Lives Conference Panel, Friday, July 31, 2015. Riverside Church.

Special Guest: Darnell Moore, Black Lives Matter New York

- **10/1** **Black Lives Matter and The Unfinished Struggle for American Democracy** (Part II)
 - Read:
 - Cornel West, Democracy Matters (continued)
 - J. Butler, “What’s Wrong With All Lives Matter”
- **10/8** **Shut It Down: Baltimore, Ferguson and The Ethics of Black Rage**

Read (Short Readings Less Than 150 pages total):

- Martin Luther King Jr. "The Other America," Speech, Stanford University, 1967.
- Malcolm X, "Revolution Like a Forest Fire" (Malcolm X Speaks)
- Carol Anderson, "Ferguson isn't about black rage against cops. It's white rage against progress." (Washington Post)
- Cornel West, "Malcolm X and Black Rage" (Race Matters)
- Mychal Denzel Smith, "The Rebirth of Black Rage: From Kanye to Obama, and back again." *The Nation*, August 13, 2015.
- Brittney Cooper, "In Defense of Black Rage: Michael Brown, Police and the American Dream" (Salon.Com)

- **10/15 The Movements within the Movement: Which #BlackLivesMatter? (Part I)**

Special Guests: [Michael Roberson, Center for Religion and Economic Democracy](#)
[Seven King, Filmmaker and Creator, Eden's Garden](#)

- **10/22 Beyond The New Jim Crow**

Read:

- Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*

- **10/29 Prison Reform or Prison Abolition?**

Read:

- Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*
- "The Abolitionist Toolkit," (Critical Resistance)

○ Watch:

Schomburg Dialogue

- **11/5**

Read:

- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*

- **11/12 The Liberation Theologies of Black Lives Matter**

Read:

O. Sekou, *Gods, Gays, and Guns: Religion and the Crisis of American Democracy*
James Cone, Chapter 1, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*

Special Guest: [O. Sekou](#)

- **#SayHerName: Listening to the Voices of Black Feminism**

11/19

Short Readings (Less than 150 pages total)

- Audre Lorde, Select Poems TBA
- Audre Lorde, "The Masters Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House," "Poetry Is Not a Luxury," and "The Transformation of Silence Into Language and Action"
- Jayne Cortex, "There It Is" (Poem)
- Angela Davis, "The Meaning of Freedom"
- Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality and Violence Against Women of Color"
- Toni Morrison, "A Knowing So Deep"

- **The Movement within the Movement: Which #BlackLivesMatter? (Part II) 12/3**

Read:

- **“It Is Our Duty to Fight for Freedom”: Political Prisoners and The Legacies of Assata Shakur 12/10**
Read:

Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography*