

The Civil Rights Movement

Professor Charles McKinney

Summer 2025 | Term II

Course Description

This course will examine the development of the American Civil Rights Movement from roughly the Reconstruction era through the early twenty-first century. The course will pay particular attention to the ways the movement unfolded in the American South, the region of the country that served as the tactical, political, and intellectual epicenter. In the semester, we will examine the social, cultural, political, and economic climate of the movement and consider how Black people and their allies navigated the titanic changes that occurred during a period many refer to as "The Second Reconstruction." Specifically, the course will focus on various individuals and organizations and the strategies they implemented to effect change; the tension between local and national initiatives; the impact of gender on the formulation of civil rights struggles; the significance of major events, such as World War II; *Brown v. Board of Education*; the founding of key organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC); legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964; and the continued quest for equality and self-determination in the contemporary moment. Additionally, we will grapple with the varied responses to the Black Freedom Struggle over the course of this continuous quest.

Course Readings

1. Carson, Clayborne, David J. Garrow, Gerald Gill, Vincent Harding, and Darlene Clark Hine, eds. *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader: Documents, Speeches, and Firsthand Accounts from the Black Freedom Struggle*. New York: Penguin Books, 1991.
2. Payne, Charles M. *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
3. Williams, Yohuru. *Rethinking the Black Freedom Movement*. New York: Routledge, 2016.

Supplemental Resources

1. SNCC Digital Gateway: <https://snccdigital.org/>
2. Civil Rights Movement Archive: <https://www.crmvet.org/>

Course Requirements

- Watch all course lectures

- Complete all course readings
- Submit five short papers (500 words each)
- Contribute to five discussion boards
- Participate in at least three Q&As
- Complete a 15-page (~3,750 words) research paper or project of appropriate rigor
- Complete a course evaluation (A survey link will be sent to your Gettysburg email during Week Five of the semester.)

Learning Objectives

1. Develop an understanding of the history of the Civil Rights Movement
2. Evaluate the relationship between local movements and national initiatives
3. Explore the work and legacies of Civil Rights leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., Ida B. Wells, and W. E. B. Du Bois.

Class Schedule

Week One: July 10

Master Narratives of the Civil Rights Movement

Readings

- Jennifer Frost, "Using 'Master Narratives' to Teach History: The Case of the Civil Rights Movement," *The History Teacher* 45, no. 3 (2012): 437–446. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- Jeanne Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), Introduction and Chapter 9.
- Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233–1263. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies," *Journal of African American History* 92, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 265–278. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))

Segregation and the Origins of the Movement

Readings

- Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York: NYU Press, 2009). ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- Yohuru Williams, *Rethinking the Black Freedom Movement*, Preface and Chapter 1.
- Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), Chapter 1.

Supplemental

- John David Smith, *When Did Southern Segregation Begin?* (Boston: Bedford/St.Martins, 2002), Introduction.

Assignments

- Discussion Board One: Introduce yourself to your group and list three potential topics for your final paper/project. Comment on one potential topic for each member of your group.
 - First post due: Friday, July 11
 - Second post due: Sunday, July 13
- Final paper/project research question due: Wednesday, July 16
 - In roughly 1–2 pages, outline the question your final paper or project will attempt to answer. This should include a description of the paper or project you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic, a brief description of your research plan, and a justification for why your particular paper or project is worth pursuing.
- Short Paper One due: Wednesday, July 16
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Week Two: July 17

Living with Lynch Law: Wells, Washington, and the NAACP

Readings

- Ida B. Wells, "Lynch Law in America," January 1900. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Two module.](#))
- Booker T. Washington, "Atlanta Compromise Speech," September 18, 1895. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Two module.](#))
- W. E. B. Du Bois, "Let Us Reason Together," September 1919. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Two module.](#))
- Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, Chapter 6.

- Darius Young, “‘The Saving of Black America’s Body and White America’s Soul’: The Lynching of Ell Persons and the Rise of Black Activism in Memphis,” in *An Unseen Light: Black Struggles for Freedom in Memphis, Tennessee*, ed. Aram Goudsouzian and Charles W. McKinney Jr. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2018), 39–60. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- John K. Bardes and K. Stephen Price, “‘There Is No God in Heaven’: Black Religion, Resistance, and the Police Power in Jim Crow New Orleans,” *Journal of African American History* 108, no. 2 (Spring 2023): 220–243. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))

World Wars

Readings

- Chad L. Williams, *The Wounded World: W. E. B. Du Bois and The First World War* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2023), Chapters 1–2.
- “‘Sir I Will Thank You with All My Heart’: Seven Letters from the Great Migration,” *Journal of Negro History* 4 (1919). ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Two module.](#))
- W. E. B. Du Bois, “Close Ranks,” *The Crisis* 16, no. 3 (July 1918): 111. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Two module.](#))
- Robert Saxe, “‘The Negro Is No Longer Sleeping’: African American Veterans and the Limits of Consensus” in *Settling Down: World War II Veterans’ Challenge to the Postwar Consensus* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 155.

Supplemental

- Euell Dixon, “The Double V Campaign (1942–1945),” BlackPast.org, July 1, 2020. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Two module.](#))
- “Why Should We March?” From Library of Congress, *A. Philip Randolph Papers*. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Two module.](#))

Assignments

- Discussion Board Two: Post three potential sources (a mixture of primary and secondary) for your final paper or project. Suggest an additional primary or secondary source for each of the members in your group and explain why you chose that source.
 - First post due: Friday, July 18
 - Second post due: Sunday, July 20
- Revised question and annotated bibliography due: Wednesday, July 23
 - Revise your initial proposal to incorporate your section professor’s feedback, AND

- Create an annotated bibliography containing at least five sources. Each of these sources should be followed by a short paragraph describing the source and what it will contribute to your final paper/project.
 - Short Paper Two due: Wednesday, July 23
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week Three: July 24

The Beginnings of a Movement

Readings

- Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, Introduction–Chapter 4.
- Carson, *The Eyes on the Prize*, Chapter 1 and all documents.
- Browse the SNCC Digital Gateway: <https://snccdigital.org/>.
- Browse the Civil Rights Movement Veterans website: <https://www.crmvet.org/>.

Violence, Leadership, and “Ms. Baker”

Readings

- Carson, *The Eyes on the Prize*, Chapter 3.
- Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, Chapters 5–7.
- “Ella Baker,” SNCC Digital Gateway, <https://snccdigital.org/people/ella-baker/>.
- Select one of the interviews with Ella Baker from the Civil Rights Movement Archive: <https://www.crmvet.org/nars/narshome.htm>.

Supplemental

- *Negroes with Guns: Rob Williams and Black Power*, directed by Sandra Dickson and Churchill Roberts (2004). ([A link to this film can be found in the Week Three module.](#))

Assignments

- Discussion Board Three: Post an outline of your final paper/project.
 - Sunday, July 27
- Paper/project preview due: Wednesday, July 30
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first five pages of your final paper.
 - Project: Submissions of the project preview will differ from project to project according to type. Determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in.

- Discussion Board Four: Post a 200-word abstract for your final paper/project. Submit the first five pages of your paper (or the portion of your final project submitted to your section professor) to your group members for peer review.
 - Due Wednesday, July 30
 - Short Paper Three due: Wednesday, July 30
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week Four: July 31

Moving on Mississippi

Readings

- Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, Chapters 8–10.
- Carson, *The Eyes on the Prize*, Chapter 5, Documents 1–5.
- Williams, *Rethinking the Black Freedom Movement*, Chapter 2.
- "Sam Block," SNCC Digital Gateway. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Four module.](#))
- "Summer 1964: Freedom Summer," SNCC Digital Gateway. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Four module.](#))

King in Context

Readings:

- Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, Chapters 11–12.
- Karuna Mantena, "Showdown for Nonviolence: The Theory and Practice of Nonviolent Politics," in *To Shape A New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King*, ed. Tommie Shelby and Brandon M. Terry (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2018), 78.
- Martin Luther King Jr., "Where Do We Go From Here?" in *The Radical King*, ed. Cornel West (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 161.
- Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream," August 28, 1963. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Four module.](#))
- Martin Luther King Jr., "Unfulfilled Dreams," March 3, 1968. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Four module.](#))
- Select three to four readings by King from *The Eyes on the Prize*.
- "Martin Luther King, Jr.," SNCC Digital Gateway. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Four module.](#))

Supplemental

- “MLK Now,” *Boston Review*, September 10, 2018. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Four module.](#))

Assignments

- Discussion Board Five: Return peer reviews to group members as attachments on the discussion board.
 - Due Wednesday, August 6
 - Short Paper Four due: Wednesday, August 6
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week Five: August 7

Music and Culture

Readings

- Williams, *Rethinking the Black Freedom Movement*, Chapter 4.
- Chris Goertzen, “Freedom Songs: Helping Black Activists, Black Residents, and White Volunteers Work Together in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, during the Summer of 1964,” *Black Music Research Journal* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 59–85. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- Julius B. Fleming, Jr., “Transforming Geographies of Black Time: How the Free Southern Theater Used the Plantation for Civil Rights Activism,” *American Literature* 91, no. 3 (September 2019): 587–617. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- Ingrid Monson, “Monk Meets SNCC,” *Black Music Research Journal* 19, no. 2 (Autumn 1999): 187–200. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- Charles L. Hughes, “Freedom Songs: Building a Civil Rights Playlist,” in *Understanding and Teaching the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Hasan Kwame Jeffries (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2019), 209–224.
- “Freedom Singing” SNCC Digital Gateway. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Five module.](#))
- “Free Southern Theater,” SNCC Digital Gateway. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Five module.](#))

Supplemental

- “Playlist for the Movement” Podcast. ([A link to this podcast can be found in the Week Five module.](#))

The Limits of Social Change

Readings

- Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, finish.
- Carson, *The Eyes on the Prize*, Chapters 7–8.
- Aram Goudsouzian and Charles Wesley McKinney, "If the March Cannot Be Here, Then Where? Memphis and the Meredith March," in *An Unseen Light: Black Struggles for Freedom in Memphis, Tennessee* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2018) ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin, "How the Civil-Rights Movement Aimed to End Poverty," *The Atlantic*, April 2, 2018.
- Fannie Lou Hamer, "I Question America," August 22, 1964. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Five module.](#))

Assignments

- Short Paper Five due: Wednesday, August 13
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week Six: August 14

Black Power

Readings

- Williams, *Rethinking the Black Freedom Movement*, Chapter 3.
- Carson, *The Eyes on the Prize*, Chapter 7.
- Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton, "Black Power: Its Need and Substance," in *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967), 34–56.
- Ashley D. Farmer, "The Black Revolutionary Woman, 1966–1975," in *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 50–92. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- Malcolm X, "Message to the Grassroots," December 10, 1963. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Six module.](#))

Supplemental

- Black Panther Ten Point Program. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week Six module.](#))
- *Emory Douglas: Art and Revolution*, The Museum of Modern Art. ([A link to this exhibition can be found in the Week Six module.](#))

Civil Rights and Black Lives Matter

Readings

- Donna Murch, "Toward a Black Working-Class History of the Long 1980s," *Journal of African American History* 108, no. 3 (Summer 2023): 425–446. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- George Derek Musgrove, "'There Is No New Black Panther Party': The Panther-Like Formations and the Black Power Resurgence of the 1990s," *Journal of African American History* 104, no. 4 (Fall 2019): 619–656. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), Chapters 1–4.

Assignments

- Final Draft due: Wednesday, August 20
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Course and Program Policies

It is the responsibility of students to know, understand, and abide by course and program policies.

For a full overview of program policies, review the Gettysburg College–Gilder Lehrman Institute Student Handbook.

Course correspondence

Correspondence with faculty and administrators should be formal. Include a subject line, addressee, and closing. Put the name and number of your course in the subject line.

Plagiarism and AI

This program uses Turnitin to check for instances of plagiarism and AI. Plagiarism and papers composed fully or in part by AI will not be tolerated. This includes self-plagiarism. A student caught plagiarizing or composing papers with AI for the first time may receive a zero on the assignment. A student caught plagiarizing or composing with AI for a second time may be permanently removed from the program.

Your section professor will set the policies for use of AI for research or purposes other than composing your papers.

Late work

Assignments should be submitted no later than 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time on the due date unless otherwise specified by your section professor. If you think you will be unable to submit an assignment on time, it is your responsibility to contact your section professor to ask for an extension before the assignment's due date. Late assignments will be docked 5%

if less than a week late, 10% if one week late, and an additional 10% for each subsequent week.

Grading scale

Letter Grade	Number Grade	Grade Points
A	95%–100%	4
A-	90%–94%	3.67
B+	87%–89%	3.33
B	84%–86%	3
B-	80%–83%	2.67
C+	77%–79%	2.33
C	74%–76%	2
C-	70%–73%	1.67
D+	67%–69%	1.33
D	64%–66%	1
D-	60%–63%	.67
F	0%–59%	0

Group Work

This course requires students to work in groups assigned at the beginning of the semester. Groups will interact on discussion boards focused on final papers/projects.

Peer Review (discussion boards four and five)

This two-part assignment requires that you a) post an abstract and the first five pages of your final paper/project to your group discussion board and b) review and add track changes to the first five pages of the other members' final papers/projects.

Assignment Descriptions

Short Papers (25% of grade – 5% per short paper)

Students will complete five short papers. Each should be approximately 500 words long. The purpose of these papers is not to merely summarize weekly readings but to demonstrate that you have read them analytically and contextually. Students have the option of responding to a prompt created by their section professor or to one of their own design. Prompts should reflect the themes discussed in course readings. If you need help getting started, you can complete one of the options listed below.

Complete a thesis identification - Select one of your assigned readings and focus on identifying the thesis as well as the evidence the authors use to support that thesis.

Complete a primary source evaluation - Evaluate a primary source from the Gilder Lehrman Collection or elsewhere. Primary sources must be relevant to that week's readings. Keep the following questions in mind:

- Who is the author of this document?
- Who was their intended audience?
- How might both author and audience impact the content of the document?
- For what reason was this document created?

Complete a book review - Focus on one of the secondary sources assigned in this course and critique it. Keep the following questions in mind:

- What is the author's argument?
- Does the author adequately support their argument?
- Are you convinced of their argument? If not, why not?
- How does this source fit into the larger discussion of its topic?

Discussion Board Posts (20% of grade – 4% per discussion board)

Students will interact in five discussion boards in this course. Discussion boards are led by section professors, who will provide specific instructions for participation in their section. You are required to make at least one post to each discussion board and respond to **at least two other students**.

Question-and-Answer Sessions (15% of grade – 5% per reaction)

Throughout the semester the lead professor of each course will conduct four Q&As. Students **MUST** attend at least three of these sessions for each course they are taking. **In order to receive credit for attending each Q&A, you must complete a 1–2-paragraph Q&A Reaction within 24 hours of participation.** Note: If you cannot attend three of the five Q&As, you may receive credit by viewing archived Q&As and completing a 500-word review of topics covered for each missed Q&A. **Makeup assignments must be completed within two weeks of the missed Q&A.**

Final Project/Paper (40% of grade)

For the final assignment of each course, you will choose to complete either a research project or 15-page research paper. Research projects are a public-education tool designed for the general population, teachers, and/or students of varying ages. Sample projects include (but are not limited to) vodcasts and podcasts, documentary editing and transcription, websites, annotated readers, walking tours, or museum exhibits. Lesson plans *will not* be accepted. A 5-page paper narrative must accompany the project. Your section professor must approve research projects.

The research paper can be a traditional position paper that uses original research to prove a thesis statement or a historiography paper that critically examines how American historians have interpreted the same event differently and why shifts in historical debates may have occurred.

Both final assignment options require you to ask an open-ended historical question (something that does not have an easy yes or no answer) that you do not yet know the answer to. You will then use the research process (pulling from a variety of resources, mostly primary source documents) to explore that question and create a thesis-driven answer. Regardless of whether you choose to pursue a project or paper, finals are scaffolded throughout the semester. This method breaks up a large grade into smaller constituent grades and allows time to incorporate instructor feedback into assignments.

Scaffolded Assignments

- Final Project/Paper Proposal (2%)

In roughly 1–2 pages, you should outline the main question, topic, or purpose of your final project or paper. This should include a description of the project or paper you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic (answer the questions who, what, where, and when), a brief description of your research plan (this does not need to be super specific, but should outline how many weeks you plan to research, if you need to schedule research trips or if your sources are published or available digitally, and when you plan to begin writing) and a justification for why your particular project or paper is worth pursuing (what is the significance of this topic? What does it add to our historical knowledge? Are you filling a gap that other historians have overlooked such as considering race, ethnicity, or gender?)

- Revised Proposal and Annotated Bibliography (4%)

This assignment will give you the opportunity to incorporate the feedback you received on the first draft of your proposal. In addition to incorporating your section professor's comments, you will also submit a proposed bibliography listing five sources you plan on utilizing in your research for your final product. Each of these sources should be followed by a brief summary (3–5 sentences) of the source and what it will contribute to your research process.

- Project or Paper Preview (10%)

This will give you the opportunity to show the progress you have made on your final project or paper and get some early-stage feedback from your section professor. For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in. For a final paper, this should be roughly the first five pages of what will ultimately be your final submission.

- Final Product (24%):

Final Project: Much like the final paper option, a final project is meant to prove that you have mastered the content covered by this course. We encourage you to be creative in your approach to this project, though it should be equivalent in rigor and workload to a final paper.

Final Paper: Final papers should be at least fifteen pages in length. These can take the form of research papers or historiography papers.