

African & African American Studies/Political Science 294(W) The Political Economy of African-American Communities

Instructor: James Johnson
Spring 2021 - M&W 9:00-10:15
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The purpose of this course is to explore what has been called “democratic community economics” (Jessica Gordon-Nembhard) and its relevance for addressing deep, persistent political-economic problems in African American Communities. The focus will be on a set of alternative institutional arrangements including producer and consumer cooperatives, community development credit unions and community land trusts and specifically their deep roots in African American politics, their various current manifestations, and their potential contemporary policy relevance for promoting inclusive sustainable, local, community development.

In the nature of the case, this course is somewhat experimental. Why? Because Gordon-Nembhard persuasively complains that democratic community economics generally is neglected in programs in African-American Studies (to say nothing of Political Science or Economics). While her challenge is our inspiration, we will be basically making things up as we go along.

Class Format: This is a strange time. It is an anxiety producing time. And a frustrating time. My aim in the class is to support you as you try to navigate the strangeness, anxiety and frustration so you can learn and move toward your degree. If *at any time* you need to rant or vent or just talk about the strangeness, anxiety and frustration, or *anything else*, we can arrange to do that. Reach out.

We will hold all group meetings remotely – via your favorite platform, Zoom. Why? Given my age I am in an especially susceptible population covid-wise. And while I am in the process of getting the vaccine, neither my partner nor our daughter are vaguely close to doing so. For now, social distancing still rules!

I hope to have our meetings be largely discussion based rather than lectures. We can talk about how to navigate that via Zoom at our early meetings. Here please note this:

On-Line Etiquette: Several things I will insist on.

- (1) Mute your mic except when speaking.
- (2) Cameras on! – No Avatars or blacked out screens, please.
- (3) Use the chat function to raise questions or get in the queue to speak.
- (4) Feel free to interrupt me if you need clarification or whatever.

If you are not in Rochester and have time-shift problems due to being in another time zone, let me know. I will record all the zoom sessions and upload them to Blackboard for your viewing pleasure. The bottom line however is that class attendance is not optional.

Required Readings

What follows is the assigned reading for the course. Books are marked * but are NOT on order from the UR Bookstore. (Because I have no idea where you are actually located!) They are readily available - often used - from your favorite e-purveyor. They also will be on reserve at Rush Rhees.

There is a totally unreasonable amount of disparate reading material here. None of it comes in pre-digested form. This is unavoidable given the nature of the subject. A rough (*aspirational!*) schedule for the semester is at the end of the syllabus. I expect you to do the assigned reading prior to coming to class.

Introduction

Jessica Gordon Nembhard. 2008a. "Alternative Economics - A Missing Component in the African American Studies Curriculum," *Review of Black Political Economy* 38:758-82.

Jessica Gordon Nembhard. 2008b. "Theorizing and Practicing Democratic Community Economics: Engaged Scholarship, Economic Justice, and the Academy." In *Engaging Contradictions*. Edited by Charles Hale & Craig Calhoun. University of California Press. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rochester/detail.action?docID=470852>

The Actual & the Possible

Janelle Jones, et. al. 2018. "50 Years After the Kerner Commission." Economic Policy Institute (February 26). <https://www.epi.org/publication/50-years-after-the-kerter-commission/>

Janelle Jones. 2017. "The Racial Wealth Gap." Economic Policy Institute. (February 13th). <https://www.epi.org/blog/the-racial-wealth-gap-how-african-americans-have-been-shortchanged-out-of-the-materials-to-build-wealth/>

Rebecca Solnit. 2007. "Detroit Arcadia," *Harpers* (July) 65-73.

Amelie Rorty. 1983. "Imagination & Power," *Social Science Information* 22:801-16.

Martin O'Neill. 2020. "Power, Predistribution, and Social Justice," *Philosophy* 95: 63-91.

* Grace Lee Boggs. 2012. *The Next American Revolution*. University of California Press.

Elders & Contemporaries: (Some) Themes in Contemporary African-American Political-Economic Thought

W.E.B. Du Bois. 1933 [1971]. "Where Do We Go from Here? (A Lecture on Negroes' Economic Plight)." In *A W. E. B. Du Bois Reader*. Edited by Andrew G. Paschal. Collier Books. Pages 146-63.

Curtis Haynes Jr. 2018. "From Philanthropic Black Capitalism to Socialism: Cooperativism in Du Bois's Economic Thought," *Socialism and Democracy* 32:125-145.

Ella Baker. 1972. "Developing Community Leadership." In *Black Women in White America*. Edited by Gerda Lerner. Pantheon Books.

Charles Payne. 1989. "Ella Baker and Models of Social Change," *Signs* 14: 885-899.

Martin Luther King, Jr. 1967. "Beyond Viet Nam," (Riverside Church, NYC - April 4th). <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/where-do-we-go-here-address-delivered-eleventh-annual-sclc-convention>

Martin Luther King, Jr. 1967. "Where Do We Go from Here?," (Address Delivered at the Eleventh Annual SCLC Convention – August 16th). <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/where-do-we-go-here-address-delivered-eleventh-annual-sclc-convention>

- Bayard Rustin. 1965. "From Protest to Politics – A Future for the Civil Rights Movement," *Commentary* (February). <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/from-protest-to-politics-the-future-of-the-civil-rights-movement/>
- A Phillip Randolph, et. al.. 1967. *A Freedom Budget for All Americans*. (Summary). A. Phillip Randolph Institute.
- Paul LeBlanc. 2013. "Freedom Budget: The Promise of the Civil Rights Movement for Economic Justice," *WorkingUSA: The Journal of Labor and Society* 16: 43–58.
- Terence Melvin, et. al.. 2016. "A Future for Workers: A Contribution from Black Labor," Coalition of Black Trade Unionists.
- Adolph Reed. 2016. "The Black-Labor-Left Alliance in the Neoliberal Age," *New Labor Forum* 25:28-34.
- Movement for Black Lives (M4BL). 2016. *A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom & Justice*. (August). <https://policy.m4bl.org/downloads/>

African-American (Political-Economic) Publics

- * John Dewey. 1927. *The Public & Its Problems*. Swallow Press.
- John Dewey. 1939. "Creative Democracy: The Task Before Us." In *The Pragmatism Reader*. Edited by Robert Talisse & Scott Aikin. Princeton University Press.
- Eddie Glaude. 2010. "The Problem of African American Public(s): Dewey and African American Politics in the 21st Century," *Contemporary Pragmatism* 7: 9-29.
- Melvin Rogers. 2018. "Democracy Is a Habit: Practice It," *Boston Review* (25 July). <http://bostonreview.net/politics/melvin-rogers-democracy-habit-practice-it>

Cooperative Thought & Practice in Black Political Economy (A Useable Past)

- * Jessica Gordon Nembhard. 2014. *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*. Penn State University Press.
- David Thompson. 2016. "A Little Co-Op Helped End Black Disenfranchisement," *The Post & Courier* [Charleston, SC] (14 February). https://www.postandcourier.com/opinion/a-little-co-op-helped-end-black-disenfranchisement/article_3da95a8f-f167-5703-b64c-de9ddd482e7c.html

Cooperative Thought & Practice in Black Political Economy (Present)

- * Kali Akuno & Ajamu Nangwaya, eds. 2017. *Jackson Rising: The Struggle for Economic Democracy & Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi*. Daraja Press.
- Jessica Bonanno, Violeta Duncan, and Ted Howard. 2016. *Rochester's Market Driven Community Cooperatives Corporation: A Feasibility Analysis & Implementation Plan*. Democracy Collaborative. <http://democracycollaborative.org/content/rochester-s-market-driven-community-cooperatives-corporation-feasibility-analysis>

Virtual Site Visits: Cooperation Jackson (Mississippi) - <https://cooperationjackson.org/>
 OWNROchester - <https://www.ownrochester.coop/>

Cooperative Thought & Practice in Black Political Economy (Three Institutional Alternatives)

(i) Reparations

- Michael Dawson and Rovana Popoff. 2004. "Reparations: Justice and Greed in Black and White." *DuBois Review* 1:47-91.
- Marist Poll. 2016. "Reparations for Slavery in the United States?" (10 May).
<http://maristpoll.marist.edu/510-reparations-for-slavery-in-the-united-states/#sthash.jZaQPal2.dpbs>
- Gallup Poll. 2019. "As Redress for Slavery, Americans Oppose Cash Reparations" (29 July).
<https://news.gallup.com/poll/261722/redress-slavery-americans-oppose-cash-reparations.aspx>
- AP-NORC Poll. 2019. "AP-NORC poll: Most Americans Oppose Reparations for Slavery" (25 October).
<https://apnews.com/76de76e9870b45d38390cc40e25e8f03>
- Robin D.G. Kelley . 2002. "A Day of Reckoning: Dreams of Reparations." In *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Beacon Press. Pages 110-34.
- Ta-Nehisi Coates. 2014. "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic* (June) 313(5):54-71.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>
- Ira Katznelson. 2006. "When Is Affirmative Action Fair? On Grievous Harms and Public Remedies" *Social Research* 73: 541-568.
- Jessica Gordon Nembhard. 2018. "African American Cooperatives and Sabotage: The Case for Reparations," *Journal of African American History* 103:65-90.
- Cedric Johnson. 2016a. "An Open Letter to Ta-Nehisi Coates and the Liberals Who Love Him," *Jacobin* <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/02/ta-nehisi-coates-case-for-reparations-bernie-sanders-racism/>
- Brian Jones. 2016. "The Socialist Case for Reparations," *Jacobin* <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/03/reparations-ta-nehisi-coates-cedric-johnson-bernie-sanders/>
- Cedric Johnson. 2016b. "Reparations Isn't a Political Demand," *Jacobin* <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/03/cedric-johnson-brian-jones-ta-nehisi-coates-reparations/>
- Virtual Site Visits: Soul Fire Farm - <http://www.soulfirefarm.org/>
Southern Reparations Loan Fund - <https://southernreparations.org/>

(ii) Community Development Credit Unions

- Fred Block. 2014. "Democratizing Finance," *Politics & Society* 42: 3-28.
- * Mehrsa Baradaran. 2015. *How the Other Half Banks: Exclusion, Exploitation & the Threat to Democracy*. Harvard UP. [Chaps
- Jessica Gordon Nembhard. 2013. "Community Development Credit Unions: Securing and Protecting Assets in Black Communities," *Review of Black Political Economy* 40:459-490.
- Jessica Gordon Nembhard. 2017. "Banking on the Difference." In *Seduced & Betrayed*. Edited by Milford Bateman & Kate Maclean. University of New Mexico Press. Pages 237-50.
- Nathan Dicomillo. 2018. "The Little Bank that Could," *New York Times* (April 13).
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/13/business/the-little-bank-that-could.html>
- Valerie Vande Panne. 2018. "Cooperative Banking for Black Lives," *In These Times* (27 February)
<http://inthesetimes.com/article/20918/cooperative-banking-for-black-lives>
- Virtual Site Visits: Genesee Coop FCU (Rochester) - <https://www.genesee.coop/>
Village Financial Cooperative (Minneapolis) - <https://villagefinancial.org/>
Lower East Side People's Credit Union (NYC) - <https://lespeoples.org/>

(iii) Community Land Trusts

- Vann Newkirk II. 2019. "The Great Land Robbery: The Shameful Story of How 1 Million Black Families Have Been Ripped from Their Farms," *The Atlantic* (September).
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/09/this-land-was-our-land/594742/>
- Film: Helen Cohen, Mark Lipman. 2016. *Arc of Justice* (New Day Films). [22 minutes]
<https://rochester.kanopy.com/node/254055>
- John Emmeus Davis. 2010. "A Guide to a New Model for Land Tenure in America (1972)." *The Community Land Trust Reader*. Lincoln Institute. Pages 113-22,184-93.
- John Emmeus Davis. 2010. "Interview with Charles Sherrod (1982)." *The Community Land Trust Reader*. Lincoln Institute. Pages 194-201.
- John Emmeus Davis. 2016. "Common Ground: Community-Owned Land as a Platform for Equitable and Sustainable Development," *University of San Francisco Law Review* 51: 1-50.
- James DeFilippis, Brian Stromberg, and Olivia R. Williams. 2018. "W(h)ither the Community in Community Land Trusts?" *Journal of Urban Affairs* 40: 755–769.
- James DeFilippis, et. al. 2019. "On the Transformative Potential of Community Land Trusts," *Antipode* 51: 795-817.

Virtual Site Visits: City Roots Community Land Trust (Rochester) - <https://www.cityrootsct.org/>

Problems of Implementation & Transition I – Resistance to Black Political-Economic Empowerment

- * Greta de Jong. 2016. *You Can't Eat Freedom: Southerners & Social Justice after the Civil Rights Movement*. UNC Press.

Problems of Implementation & Transition II – Class, Gender & Race

- Genna Miller. 2012. "'Gender Trouble': Investigating Gender and Economic Democracy in Worker Cooperatives in the United States," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 44:8–22.
- Genna Miller. 2011. "Gender and Participation in Decision-Making in Labor-Managed Firms," *Industrial & Economic Democracy* 32: 87–113.
- Jade Barker & Patricia Cumbie. 2017a. "Everyone Welcome? Examining Race & Food Coops," *Cooperative Grocer* (September-October) 24-26.
- Jade Barker & Patricia Cumbie. 2017b. *Everyone Welcome? Personal Narratives About Race & Food Coops*. CDS Consulting.
- Julie Guthman. 2008. "If They Only Knew": Color Blindness and Universalism in California Alternative Food Institutions," *The Professional Geographer* 60: 387–397.
- Craig Borowiak, et. al. 2017. "Navigating the Fault Lines: Race and Class in Philadelphia's Solidarity Economy," *Antipode* 50:577–603.

Grading: I do not care what grade you get in the course. By that I mean that while I would like you to do well, and hope that happens, whether you do so or not really depends on you. If you do the required work, it is extremely likely a good grade will follow; if not, it is almost certain that a good grade will not follow. The work here includes both participating in class discussion and writing a final paper.

Please note! There is no party line in the course, meaning I do not care if you agree or disagree with me, with one another, or with any (or all?) of the readings. I care about your willingness to stick your neck out, to think critically, and to articulate and defend *your* views clearly both orally and in writing.

Class participation: The course is small and will be discussion rather than lecture based. Given the nature of the undertaking it is imperative that everyone actively participate in class. That means that I expect you not only to keep up with the reading, but also to read with care and to demonstrate this in class discussions. In order to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate and that a small subset of the class does not dominate the discussion, I will call on students more or less at random. The regularity and quality of your participation and especially your willingness to stick your neck out in seminar discussion will constitute 30% of your final grade for the course.

Please Note! The topics we will be taking up are fraught: race, solidarity, social class, coalition politics, resentment, anger, inequality, contempt, economic hardship and so on. These substantive matters are central to contemporary politics and will surely elicit strong views and disagreements. They are unavoidably normative, meaning they involve tasks of criticizing, justifying, and assessing actions, practices and institutions. Those are central tasks for political theory. And our aim in this course is to learn to think like political theorists.

In order to sustain a classroom environment that supports respectful, critical inquiry through the open exchange of ideas, we will observe the following guidelines:

- (i) Treat every member of the class with respect, even if – indeed, especially if - you disagree with their views. Yes, every member;
- (ii) Recognize that reasonable persons can differ on any number of perspectives, opinions, and conclusions;
- (iii) Because constructive disagreement sharpens thinking, deepens understanding, and reveals novel insights, I do not just expect disagreement but encourage it;
- (iv) Welcome and listen to all viewpoints charitably with the caveat that none is immune from scrutiny and debate;
- (v) When scrutinizing and discussing the views of classmates, focus on the evidence (whether textual or empirical) they offer and the inferences they draw from it rather than on their motivations;
- (vi) There is a common saying that goes something like this: “You are entitled to your own opinion. You are not entitled to your own evidence or standards of reasoning.” That summarizes our operating premise;
- (vii) Your grade - to repeat - will be based on the quality of reasoning and evidence you bring to bear in presenting and defending your views whatever they happen to be.

I will encourage participation meaning I will not only welcome, but solicit questions and observations. That means that I expect you not only to keep up with the reading, but also to read with care and to demonstrate this in class discussions. I myself will not just address assigned materials but incorporate research and writings not found on the list for the course.

Once again - there is no party line in the course, meaning I do not care if you agree or disagree with me, with one another, or with any (or all?) of the readings. I care about your willingness to stick your neck out, to think critically, and to articulate and defend your views clearly both orally and in writing. So, whether or not you agree with the instructor has no bearing on your grade.

Writing assignment: The sole written assignment for the course is a final paper, focused on the work of some contemporary political association or thinker-activist and making explicit connections to the material we read and discuss in class. Here are some suggestions:

Baltimore Algebra Project - <https://www.baltimorealgebraproject.org/>
Black Socialists of America - <https://blacksocialists.us/>
James & Grace Lee Boggs Center for Community Leadership - <http://boggscenter.org/>
Coalition of Black Trade Unionists - <https://cbtu.org/>
Coalition of Immokalee Workers - <https://ciw-online.org/>
Cooperation Jackson - <https://cooperationjackson.org/>
Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund - <https://www.federation.coop/>
Food First, Institute for Land & Development Policy - <https://foodfirst.org/>
Highlander Research & Education Center - <https://www.highlandercenter.org/>
Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle - <https://lbsbaltimore.com/about-us/>
LeftRoots - <https://leftroots.net/>
Movement for Black Lives - <https://policy.m4bl.org/>
New Communities - <https://www.newcommunitiesinc.com/>
Next System Project - <https://thenextsystem.org/>
Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust - <https://www.northeastfarmersofcolor.com/>
Soul Fire Farm - <http://www.soulfirefarm.org/>

There is no specific length (number of pages) for this paper. But since that inevitably makes students anxious, think in the area of 20 double spaced pages (in 12-point font with one-inch margins). To prepare for this paper you **MUST** speak with me at least twice one-on-one during office hours. You must discuss possible topics for your paper no later than the end of week eight (March 24th). Soon thereafter I will want a progress report: you must meet with me again to discuss difficulties, ideas, questions no later than week thirteen (April 28th).

PLEASE NOTE: *If you fail to meet with me about your paper by these dates you will lose one third of a letter grade off the actual grade you make for the paper itself. (For example, if I would grade your paper as a B+ you will make only a B, etc.). This sanction applies to each meeting.*

What I am looking for in this assignment is for you to make connections between the topics we cover in readings & class discussions and the goals, activities and arguments that these associations and thinkers advance. The connections can be either positive (meaning the thinker or association exemplifies something in the readings) or contrastive (meaning the thinker or association seems to provide a counterexample). Your grade will reflect the quality of reasoning and evidence you bring to bear in presenting and defending your argument. Your grade on the final paper will constitute 70% of your course grade.

Course & Instructor Policies – The Fine Print

Policy on Attendance: Given the nature of the class *attendance is not optional*. If you need to miss class for some reason, please let me know.

Statement on Academic Honesty: I operate on the assumption that every student in the course is familiar with and abides by the College policies on Academic Honesty. If you are not familiar with those policies, please go to the Board on Academic Honesty web page and familiarize yourself. You can find that page here: <http://www.rochester.edu/College/honesty/>. Ignorance of the policy is no excuse.

I will provide specific instructions for each course assignment. In any event, I take a very dim view of cheating and plagiarism of any sort. It makes me very cranky. So, I will refer any and all suspected instances to the Board on Academic Honesty. The easiest way to avoid such unpleasantness is to not succumb to temptations to cheat, plagiarize, bend the rules, exploit loopholes, and so forth. As a default, if you are unsure in any way about whether something is “allowed” ask me.

Students with Disabilities: If you have a documented disability of any sort that might impact your ability to meet the expectations laid out in this syllabus I encourage you to speak with me in person as early in the term as is possible. If you are not comfortable speaking to me directly, you should contact the Office of Disability Services who can assist you in making your needs clear to myself and your other teachers. You can find them here: (<https://www.rochester.edu/college/disability/index.html>). In any case, we can make reasonable accommodation regarding any and all expectations & assignments.

Policy on late assignments: Except in the direst circumstances I very much frown upon late assignments. I will deduct one third of a letter grade for every day an assignment is late. (This means if your grade would have been a B+, one day late gets you a deduction to B, two days a deduction to B-, etc.). If you anticipate a problem getting an assignment in on time (due to, say, religious holidays, travel for athletic teams, etc.) please speak to me *in advance*. I will make reasonable accommodation to address such difficulties. In particular, I will gladly accommodate faith-based exceptions to any expectations or assignments laid out above.

Semester Schedule

Week One

Feb 1 - Introduction
Feb 3 - Gordon-Nembhard ((x2)

Week Two

Feb 8 - Jones, *et. al.*; Solnit
Feb 10 - Rorty; O'Neill

Week Three

Feb 15 - Boggs
Feb 17 - Boggs

Week Four

Feb 22 - DuBois; Haynes; Baker; Payne
Feb 24 - MLK (x2); Rustin; Randolph;
LeBlanc

Week Five

March 1 - Melvin *et. al.*; Reed; M4BL
March 3 - Study Break (No Class)

Week Six

March 8 - Dewey (x2)
March 10 - Dewey (cont); Rogers;
Glaude

Week Seven

March 15 - Gordon Nembhard
March 17 - Gordon Nembhard;
Thompson

Week Eight

March 22 - Akuno & Nangwaya
March 24 - Akuno & Nangwaya;
Bonanno, *et. al.*

Week Nine

March 29 - Dawson-Popoff; Kelley
March 31 - Coates; Katznelson;
Gordon Nembhard

Week Ten

April 5 - Johnson; Jones; Johnson
April 7 - Block

Week Eleven

April 12 - Baradaran
April 14 - Baradaran

Week Twelve

April 19 - Gordon Nembhard (x2);
Dicamillo; Vande Panne
April 21 - Newkirk; Cohen-Lipman;
Davis (x3)

Week Thirteen

April 26 - de Jong
April 28 - de Jong

Week Fourteen

May 3 - Miller (x2); Barker & Cumbie
(x2)
May 5 - Guthman; Borowiak *et. al.*

Week Fifteen -- May 10 - (Final Paper Due)