

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

University of Rochester  
Spring Semester 2024  
Harkness 210 • M-W 12:30-1:45

Instructor – James Johnson  
Office Hours • Harkness 312  
Friday 9:30-11:00 & By Appointment  
[jd.johnson@rochester.edu](mailto:jd.johnson@rochester.edu)

**Public Health Prologue** Many folks – including the University administration – seem to think Covid is “over.” That, I believe, is naïve and dangerous. Not only is the direct experience of contracting Covid dangerous, but we know little about the long-term and downstream implications. What we do know about such things tends to be disturbing. However, College and University policies insist that we engage in risky behavior. I (Professor Johnson) am part of an age cohort (old folks!!!) for whom Covid is especially dangerous. So please, if you feel even the faintest bit ill **stay away** from class. Feel free to mask and maintain as much social distancing as our classroom allows. I encourage you to do all three things. I will be broadcasting class sessions on zoom for those who stay away from class due to illness or suspected illness.

\*\*\*\*\*

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:** The course primarily will be lecture and discussion based. I will encourage participation and 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. In lectures I will not just cover assigned readings materials but incorporate research and writings not found on the list for the course.

**READINGS:** The required reading for this course is difficult, it is diverse, and there is a lot of it. Moreover, none of the reading is presented in predigested textbook form. In both senses the reading load for this course might seem totally unreasonable! It is. My excuse is that the problems we will be addressing are crucially important and complex. I also respect you students enough to not dumb the material down to the lowest common denominator. It is imperative that you do the reading and that you do so prior to class.

I have NOT ordered books (marked \*) at the University Bookstore. Nearly all (marked E) are available online via the University Library. All are readily available (typically used) from your preferred e-purveyor. I will make the other readings available via a course Blackboard page. A number of the assigned readings are, as is clear from the syllabus, available directly on line – I have indicated where this is the case.

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>

## Elders & Contemporaries: A Persistent & Neglected Theme in Contemporary African-American Freedom Struggle - Political-Economic Demands

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 4<sup>th</sup>). <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/beyond-vietnam>

Martin Luther King, Jr. 1967. "Where Do We Go from Here?," (Address Delivered at the Eleventh Annual SCLC Convention – August 16<sup>th</sup>).

<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/where-do-we-go-here>

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.

Benjamin Fong. 2023. "The Jobs & Freedom Strategy," *Catalyst* 7:46-81.

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).

## 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 13<sup>th</sup>). <https://www.epi.org/blog/the-racial-wealth-gap-how-african-americans-have-been-shortchanged-out-of-the-materials-to-build-wealth/>  
Cathy Cohen & Michael Dawson. 1993. "Neighborhood Poverty and African American Politics." *American Political Science Review*, 87(2), 286-302.  
Rebecca Solnit. 2007. "Detroit Arcadia," *Harpers* (July) 65-73.  
\*E Grace Lee Boggs. 2012. *The Next American Revolution*. University of California Press.  
Grace Lee. 2014. *American Revolutionary* [FILM] - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DV1YBgANZY8>

## Institutional Imagination

Roberto Mangabeira Unger. 2009. *The Left Alternative*. Verso. [Pages 1-83, 98=132].  
Amelie Rorty. 1983. "Imagination & Power," *Social Science Information* 22:801-16.  
Martin O'Neill. 2020. "Power, Predistribution, and Social Justice," *Philosophy* 95: 63-91.  
Joshua Cohen & Joel Rogers. 1986. *On Democracy*. Penguin. [Chapter 6].

## African-American (Political-Economic) Publics

\*E 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)

\*E 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](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. [Pages TBD].

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.jZaQP2.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/>

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/>

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.

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.

\*E Mehrsa Baradaran. 2015. *How the Other Half Banks: Exclusion, Exploitation & the Threat to Democracy*. Harvard UP.

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 Dicano. 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.cityrootsclt.org/>  
Genesee Land Trust (Rochester) - <https://www.geneseeandtrust.org/>

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

\*<sup>E</sup> Greta de Jong. 2016. *You Can't Eat Freedom: Southerners & Social Justice after the Civil Rights Movement*. UNC Press.

\*\*\*\*\*

**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.

**Musical Contributions:** According to political theorist Roberto Unger, the exploration of political possibilities "is not about blueprints, it is about pathways. It is not architecture, it is music." To honor this suggestion, I ask that you share music with your classmates. I expect each of you to make two contributions to the "Music" folder on the course Blackboard page. In addition to providing a link/audio

file, I expect you to offer 2-3 sentences about what strikes you about your offering and what you hope your classmates will “get” from listening. Your contribution to this enterprise is worth 10% of your final grade. On some days I will ask a student from the class to comment on one or more of the offerings in the Music folder. In other words, you’ll need to not just deposit tunes, but actually listen to what your classmates deposit as well. *You must make these contributions no later than week 8 of the course* (The week prior to Spring Break). Your performance on this ‘assignment’ will constitute 20% of your course grade.

**Class participation:** The course is small and will run - as much as is possible – as a seminar. 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.

**Writing assignment:** The primary 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 once one-on-one during office hours. You must discuss possible topics for your paper no later than the end of week eight (March 8th). Your final paper is due at noon on May 8<sup>th</sup>.

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 undertake. 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 50% of your course grade.

So, to summarize, for purposes of final grades:

Written Assignment:	50%
Class Participation:	30%
Music	20%
<hr/>	
TOTAL:	100%

## Semester Schedule

### *January*

17 - Introduction

22 – Gordon Nembhard (x2)

24 - DuBois,; Haynes; Baker; Payne

29 – MLK (x2); Rustin

31 – Randolph; Fong,

### *February*

5 - Melvin; Reed; M4BL

7 – Jones (x2); Cohen & Dawson; Solnit

12 - Boggs

14 – Boggs; Unger

19 - Unger

21 – Rorty; O’Neill; Cohen & Rogers

26 – Dewey (x2)

28 – Dewey (x2)

### *March*

4 – Glaude; Rogers

6 – Gordon Nembhard

11 XXX Spring Break (No Class)

13 XXX Spring Break (No Class)

18 – Gordon Nembhard; Thompson

20 – Akuno/Nangwaya;

Bonano/Duncan/Howard

25 – Dawson/Popoff; Polls (x3); Kelley

27 – Coates; Johnson

### *April*

1 – Katznelson; Gordon Nembhard

3 – Block; Baradaran

8 – Baradaran

10 – Gordon Nembhard (x2)

Dicamillo; Vande Panne

15 – NewKirk; Cohen/Lipman

17 – Davis (x3)

22 – DePhilippis, *et al* (x2)

24 – de Jong

29 – de Jong

***May 8 – Final Papers Due***

\*\*\*\*\*

## Course & Instructor Policies – The Fine Print (Spelled out at excruciating length because the University Counsel insists on this sort of legalistic stuff)

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.

Policy on Electronic Devices: My policy on electronic devices in class (meaning any screen connected to silicon chips) is restrictive. **No cell phones at all!** Turn them off and put them away when you get to class. Laptops or tablets are allowed solely for access assigned readings or notes. In general, you should disconnect from the social media and phone/text communication media. In fact, *if you have readings or notes you will need in class, you are better off getting them off of your devices and onto paper*. If I detect you engaged in social media during class, I will ask you to shut off your device and put it away. If this happens a second (or subsequent) time I will ask you to leave class. This will obviously impact your ability to participate in discussions and thereby your final grade.

Policy on classroom interactions: In order to create 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 you disagree with their views; (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 with the caveat that none – including the instructor's – is immune from scrutiny and debate; (v) 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. *There is no party line in the class*. So, whether or not you agree with the instructor has no bearing on your grade.

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 make yourself familiar with it. You can find that page here: <http://www.rochester.edu/College/honesty/>. 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. Very! I will refer any and all suspected instances of cheating or plagiarism 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.

### CALVIN & HOBBS





As a default, if you are unsure in any way about whether something is “allowed” just ask me.

**NOTE on “Technological Progress” - I consider using any sort of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool to produce your written work dishonest and will treat suspect instances accordingly.**

Students with Disabilities: If you have a documented disability of any sort that you believe will 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. In any case, we can make reasonable accommodation regarding the assignments. You can find them here: (<https://www.rochester.edu/college/disability/index.html>).

Religious Observances: If you need to miss class for or if assignments conflict with religious observances, please just let me know. We will make alternate arrangements.

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.