

English/Southern Studies 236: The Civil Rights Movement

The dominant version of the Civil Rights Movement in American popular discourse portrays it as a nonviolent uprising with a set of charismatic leaders who systematically asserted their legitimate demand for social equality to a mostly sympathetic audience outside the South. This version typically places Martin Luther King at the center of the movement, suggests that the movement had identifiable beginning and end points, and allows for the possibility that the South was the locus of a national sin that has been redeemed.

While none of these assertions are completely wrong, none of them are completely right either. In this course, we will examine a set of events and individuals—the murder of Emmett Till, Freedom Summer, the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church, and the career of John Lewis—from multiple

perspectives, and we will discuss how the movement is portrayed in memory and in imagination. In addition to our classroom discussions, we will visit key sites in Birmingham and Atlanta and participate in a community discussion series.



Bill Hudson, "Birmingham police dogs attacking Walter Gadsden," 1963

Professor

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Course Objectives

- To study the social, historical, and cultural aspects of the civil rights movement by discussing scholarly, literary, and experiential sources.
- To cultivate essential skills in reading comprehension, analysis, and critical thinking.
- To practice oral and written communication.

Course Requirements & Grading Policies

English 236 is a discussion-based course that uses a modified seminar format. Your success in this course depends upon attending every session fully prepared to contribute to our mutual understanding of the topic. Attendance constitutes 19% of your course grade. Attendance grades are computed according to the following scale:

Absence	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Grade	100	97	93	85	75	60	40	20	0	Failure

Entering class after attendance has been taken will count as a tardy, and three tardies will count as an absence. Missing class for a verifiable family emergency, participation in a university-sanctioned athletic event, or religious holidays will not result in a deduction from your final grade, but it is your responsibility to inform me of your absence.

During the semester I will administer seven unannounced quizzes that will cover the reading assigned for the day of the quiz. Quizzes constitute 21% of your course grade. You may replace up to two quizzes by writing replacement assignments. The replacement assignment requires that you write a seven hundred word synopsis of the reading assignment due the day of the missed quiz. Replacement assignments should be submitted on the day of the second class meeting after the missed quiz. Any missed quizzes beyond the two replacement assignments will factor into your quiz grade as a zero.

Other assignments will allow you to practice research skills and to develop a significant level of expertise on the topic. You will deliver an eight-minute presentation on a topic directly relevant to the day's reading assignment. The presentation will constitute 10% of your course grade. One week after the presentation, you will submit an eight-hundred word encyclopedia entry on your topic. The entry will constitute 10% of your course grade. You will also write a brief analytic paper, which will constitute 10% of your course grade. At midterm, you will complete a take-home exam, which will constitute 12% of your course grade, and at the end of the semester you will complete a take-home final exam, which will constitute 18% of your grade.

Papers and exams will be submitted to my email, davis_da@mercer.edu, by 6:00 pm on the due date. I will grade the paper electronically in Microsoft Word and return it with embedded comments. Papers will be returned to the initiating address, so be sure to send the paper from your own email account.

You may rewrite and resubmit written assignments—the encyclopedia entry and the paper—after they have been graded. Revised papers should be submitted at the beginning of the class meeting immediately after original papers have been returned. Revised papers should be accompanied by a self-critical analysis that explains how the paper has been improved. In cases of revision, the revised grade will be added to the original grade and averaged into the overall paper grade. Keep in mind that revising means more than correcting minor errors. In fact, a cursory revision could result in a lower grade. Papers submitted after the due date will automatically receive an F, but they may be revised to improve the final grade. The midterm and final exams are not eligible for revision.

This course requires your participation in out of class events, a community book discussion series, and a weekend trip to Birmingham and Atlanta. Mercer will subsidize the cost of the trip, but you are expected to contribute \$30 and to pay the cost for your food during the trip. After the trip, you will write a brief reflection paper worth 5%, and your participation in other events will be worth another 5% of your grade. If you cannot participate in an event or in the trip for a legitimate, excusable reason, you will be expected to complete a replacement assignment.

The students of Mercer University have a proud tradition of honorable conduct, and I expect all students in this class to continue that tradition. Cheating, plagiarism, or other acts of academic misconduct will result in prosecution from the honor court, who may censure, suspend, or expel a guilty student. If you ever have any concerns about plagiarism, please consult me, and I will be happy to discuss your situation confidentially.

Students with a documented disability should inform the instructor at the close of the first class meeting or as soon as possible. If you are not registered with Disability Services, the instructor will refer you to the Student Support Services office for consultation regarding documentation of your disability and eligibility for accommodations under the ADA/504. In order to receive accommodations, eligible students must provide each instructor with a Faculty Accommodation Form from Disability Services. Students must return the completed and signed form to the Disability Services office on the 3rd floor of the Connell Student Center. Students with a documented disability who do not wish to use accommodations are strongly encouraged to register with Disability Services and complete a Faculty Accommodation Form each semester. For further information please contact Disability Services at 301-2778 or visit the website at http://www.mercer.edu/stu_support/swd.htm.

In an ongoing effort to improve the quality of instruction, each student enrolled in this course is required to complete an end-of-semester course evaluation, to be administered on blackboard

during the last week of class. Students failing to submit the evaluation by May 11 will be assigned the grade of “Incomplete,” which will automatically turn into an “F” if the evaluation is not submitted by the midterm of the very next semester.

As a final note, I realize that you are busy and that unexpected crises sometimes arise, but as a general rule I do not give extensions on any assignments. I also do not excuse absences. If you have a major emergency or extended illness, you should contact Associate Dean Ed Weintraut to intervene on your behalf. I do not ever give extra credit assignments.

Schedule

January 12	Course introduction	
January 14	Jacquelyn Hall, “Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of Memory”	
January 17	MLK Holiday	
January 19	Hank Klibanoff, <i>The Race Beat</i> , Chs. 1-3	
January 21	Juan Williams, <i>Eyes on the Prize</i> , Ch. 2	
January 24	Klibanoff, Ch. 7	
January 26	Bebe Moore Campbell, <i>Your Blues Ain't Like Mine</i> , 1-75	
January 28	Campbell, 76-151	
January 31	Campbell, 152-215	<i>Mississippi Burning</i>
February 2	Campbell, 216-284	
February 4	Campbell, 285-354	
February 7	Campbell, 355-433	
February 9	Class visit by Hank Klibanoff	Klibanoff reading
February 11	Rebecca Mark, “Mourning Emmett”	
February 14	Williams, Ch. 7	
February 16	Klibanoff, Chs. 20-21	
February 18	No class	
February 21	Alice Walker, <i>Meridian</i> , 1-39	
February 23	Walker, 40-79	
February 25	Walker, 80-120	
February 28	Walker, 121-152	
March 2	Walker, 153-198	
March 4	Walker, 201-242	Midterm due
March 7	Spring Break	
March 9	Spring Break	
March 11	Spring Break	
March 14	Williams, Ch. 6	

March 16	Klibanoff, Ch. 18 and 19	
March 18	<i>Civil Rights Reader</i> , 147-160 (Birmingham)	
March 21	Class visit by Dean Lake Lambert	<i>4 Little Girls</i>
March 23	Tony Grooms, <i>Bombingham</i> , 1-45	
March 25	Grooms, 47-99	
March 28	Grooms, 101-144	
March 30	Grooms, 145-204	
April 1	Grooms, 205-255	
April 2	Birmingham Civil Rights Institute	
April 3	King National Historic Site	
April 4	Grooms, 257-304	
April 6	Class visit by Tony Grooms	Grooms Reading
April 8	No class	Reflection paper due
April 11	John Lewis, <i>Walking with the Wind</i> , I	
April 13	Lewis, II	
April 15	Lewis, III	
April 18	Lewis, IV	
April 20	Lewis, V	
April 22	Good Friday	
April 25	Lewis, VI	
April 27	Lewis, VII	
April 29	Leon Litwack, "The Legacy of the Civil Rights Movement"	

Assignments

Presentation

You will sign up at the beginning of the semester to give an eight-minute presentation on an assigned topic related to a day's class discussion. After class on the day of your presentation, I will give you a brief critique on the four key criteria of a presentation: structure, content, delivery, and interest. A good presentation has a clear structure with a discernible beginning, middle, and end, and it demonstrates a significant depth of research far beyond a mere Wikipedia entry. You should deliver your presentation effectively with a clear voice, direct eye contact, and confident body language. Most importantly, your presentation should be interesting, since your classmates have to listen to it—whether they want to or not.

Encyclopedia Entry

Seven days after your presentation, you will submit an eight hundred word entry on your presentation topic for *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. Your entry should demonstrate

significant research, it should cite sources in MLA style, and it should include a list of about five sources for further information. Keep in mind for the entry that you are an expert writing for a general audience. Exemplary entries will be published online.

Paper

The Atlanta Journal Constitution is running a retrospective series on the civil rights movement. You have been assigned an episode to describe. In a 1,000 word article, explain the incident your editor assigned in a way that the paper's readership can understand. Remember that good newspaper articles usually tell stories from the perspective of a specific individual and that they strive to consider as many different opinions as possible.

Reflection

After the trip to Birmingham and Atlanta, write a five hundred word reflection paper. How did the trip change your imagination of events in the movement? The reflection is due April 8.

Midterm

At the midpoint of the semester you will complete a take-home exam. I will invite you to write interpretive discussion questions for the exam, and I will tweak these questions and give you a set to answer in short essays. The midterm is due March 4.

Final

At the end of the semester, you will complete another, slightly longer, take-home exam. I will again invite you to write interpretive discussion questions for the exam, and I will tweak these questions and set to answer in short essays. The final is due May 2.