

## Phil 192-01 **The Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4:30-5:45pm, Miner 225



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In this seminar, we will study Martin Luther King Jr. as a political philosopher. We will take up King's understanding of the civil rights movement—why it was necessary and what it aimed to achieve. Specifically, we will study his ideas about the political and economic organization of white supremacy, the impact of racial ideologies, and the importance of racial integration and the right to vote. We will investigate King's philosophy of civil disobedience and nonviolence as well as a set of values he relates to that philosophy: dignity, self-reflection, self-improvement, love, hope, and freedom. We will relate these values to King's understanding of justice. Our investigation will encompass King's remarks on the Vietnam War, and the global elements of his vision of justice. Critical responses to King's thought will be considered, including his lack of attention to gender justice.

Readings will be from King's speeches and writings and from a recent volume of essays by philosophers and political theorists. In addition to the themes described above, these essays address the intellectual context of King's work in relation to the teachings of W. E. B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Mahatma Gandhi.

The class will include a number of guest speakers, as indicated below.

### **Books:**

Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Gift of Love* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012)

Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010)  
Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Trumpet of Conscience* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011)  
Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010)  
Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011)  
Winfred Rembert with Erin I. Kelly, *Almost Me: An Artist's Story from Cotton to Leather*. Unpublished Manuscript.  
Brandon M. Terry and Tommie Shelby, *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2018)

### **Schedule of readings and guest speakers:**

**January 17:** Brandon M. Terry and Tommie Shelby, "Introduction: Martin Luther King, Jr., and Political Philosophy"

**January 22:** Brandon Terry, "Requiem for a Dream: The Problem-Space of Black Power"

Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here?*, Chs. 1-2

**January 24: class will meet in CHAT, 48 Professors Row**

**4:30-5pm** Conversation with guest speaker **Brandon Terry**

**5-7pm** Brandon Terry lecture, "Reading Martin Luther King, Jr. Now: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Civil Disobedience."

**January 29:** Winfred Rembert with Erin I. Kelly, *Almost Me: An Artist's Story, from Cotton to Leather* (Intro-Chapter 6)

**January 31:** Winfred Rembert with Erin I. Kelly, *Almost Me: An Artist's Story, from Cotton to Leather* (Chapters 7-10)

Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait*, Ch. 3

**February 5:** Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom*, Chs. 2-5  
*Browder v. Gayle* (1956)

**February 7:** Bernard R. Boxill, "The Roots of Civil Disobedience in Republicanism and Slavery"

Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom*, Chs. 6-8

**February 12:** Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom*, Ch. 9  
*Why We Can't Wait*, Chs. 4-6

**February 14:** Robert Gooding Williams, "The Du Bois-Washington Debate and the Idea of Dignity"

W. E. B. Du Bois, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others"

**February 19:** Derrick Darby, “A Vindication of Voting Rights”  
Martin Luther King, Jr, *Where Do We Go from Here?* Chs. 3-4.

**February 21:** No class (Monday schedule).  
**First paper due** (5 pages).

**February 26:** Tommie Shelby, “Prisons of the Forgotten: Ghettos and Economic Injustice”  
Martin Luther King, Jr, *Where Do We Go from Here?*, Chs. 5-6.

**February 28:** Conversation with **Tommie Shelby, 4:30-5:30**  
**5:45pm** lecture by Tommie Shelby, “The Uses and Abuses of Incarceration: Dehumanization, Slavery, and Profit”

**March 5:** Danielle Allen, “Integration, Freedom, and the Affirmation of Life”  
Martin Luther King, Jr. “The Ethical Demands for Integration”

**March 7:** Ronald Sundstrom, “The Prophetic Tension between Race Consciousness and the Ideal of Color-Blindness”  
Martin Luther King, Jr, *A Gift of Love*, Chs. 1-3

**March 12:** Martha C. Nussbaum, “From Anger to Love: Self-Purification and Political Resistance”

**March 14:** Martin Luther King, Jr, *A Gift of Love*, Chs. 4-6, 11  
**Second paper due** (5 pages).

**March 16-24:** Spring Break

**March 26:** Shatema Threadcraft and Brandon Terry, “Gender Trouble: Manhood, Inclusion, and Justice”

**March 28:** Shatema Threadcraft, *Intimate Justice: The Black Female Body and the Body Politic*, selections  
Conversation with **Shatema Threadcraft** at CHAT (48 Professors Row)

**April 2:** Karuna Mantena, “Showdown for Nonviolence: The Theory and Practice of Nonviolent Politics”  
Mahatma Gandhi, *Satyagraha*, excerpts.

**April 4:** Martin Luther King, Jr, *A Gift of Love*, Chs. 11-16

**April 9:** Laurie Balfour, “Living ‘in the Red’: Time, Debt, and Justice”

**April 11:** Paul Taylor, “Moral Perfectionism”

**April 16:** Martin Luther King, *The Trumpet of Conscience*.

**April 18:** Lionel McPherson, “The Costs of Militarism, Geopolitics, and Accountability.”  
Conversation with **Lionel McPherson**

**April 23:** Michele Moody-Adams, “The Path of Conscientious Citizenship”  
Martin Luther King, *The Trumpet of Conscience*.

**April 25:** Cornell West, “Hope and Despair: Past and Present”  
Jonathan Walton, “Dignity as a Weapon of Love”

**May 7:** Final paper/project due.

### **Course requirements**

- class attendance and participation
- 20% first paper (5 pages)
- 20% second paper (5 pages)
- 60% final paper or capstone project

### **Capstone project for PJS/CVS students**

This course is an integrative seminar for students majoring in Peace and Justice Studies or Civic Studies. The final piece of work for the course (and the major) is a research project on a topic of your choice related to your coursework in PJS or CVS. You can choose any topic that allows you to focus on something you have learned and cared about in the major, whether or not it takes up the central themes of this seminar.

Most capstone projects will take the form of a research paper of about twenty pages, the form most likely to connect with the skills and interests you have developed in the major. However, it is also possible to develop a final project through the creative arts, including theater, film, music. If you prefer a project that takes a creative arts form, you should be prepared to write an accompanying essay explaining how and why the project took this form. What were the issues that you were wrestling with? Why did you do it in this genre?

The capstone paper itself will have two readers. I will act as an advisor/reader for all the papers, and you should select a second reader from the specific area in which you are working. Please do so as soon as possible. Within the next few weeks, please let me know who that will be. While I will be responsible for grading the papers, the second reader will be a content expert. Anyone who chooses a project in the creative arts must have a faculty sponsor with creative arts expertise.

Finally, you will have an opportunity to share an aspect of your capstone project in class during the month of April. Please choose an aspect of your project that you can relate to

the life and thought of Martin Luther King, Jr. Your presentation should be about twenty minutes long.

### **Final paper for students not majoring in PJS**

Students who are not seniors in PJS or CVS should plan to write a final paper (12-15 pages) on a topic related to the course. I will distribute final paper topics for you to choose from.

### **Electronics Policy**

Laptops are distracting in classrooms, not only for the students who use them but also for others. Laptops cannot be used during class.

### **Learning Objectives**

1. How to think abstractly and concretely about questions of justice.
2. How to read, analyze, and articulate philosophical ideas.
3. How to develop and defend a point of view, both in writing and orally, with respect to problems that have occupied both historical and contemporary political philosophers.
4. How to anticipate and even welcome objections to one's views, how to apply the principle of charity to others' opinions, and how to address objections and competing views effectively and respectfully in one's writing.

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