Syllabus: The Struggle for Civil Rights, 1877 to present.

American Studies, Charles University

Winter term, 2013

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The Civil Rights movement usually is considered to begin with the U.S. Supreme Court decision, BROWN VS. THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, in 1954. In reality, there was a free black community seeking rights for themselves and those enslaved dating from the colonial era. This course will focus on the era after the end of Reconstruction, the period which officially ended the Civil War with the withdrawal of Union troops from the South. The struggles, which continued then for more than a century, took place in all 50 states. It was a unequal struggle with those who opposed full citizenship guaranteed by the 14th Amendment, having control of the courts, the police, and support of most non-black citizens of the United States. Heroic acts were common as were atrocities which made the mid-20th century Civil Rights movement a necessity. As during the centuries of slavery, there were many people, classified as white, who joined in the struggle for rights of all citizens. Only a few of these people lost their lives, not true for blacks, their leaders and those who followed them.

Readings for each week are available on Moodle or other online sites. You are expected to be prepared to discuss the readings and to contribute interpretations of the events and the people. We will prepare in advance for the readings and discussion by a few questions for you to consider as you read.

Attendance is essential if you are to grasp the complexities of this history. The final exam will focus on the readings, lectures, and discussions. In addition, you are to write an 8-10 page paper on the lives and contributions of individuals or on events that had a significant impact on Afro-Americans and their fellow citizens. This might be a biography, a history of lynching, one of the Supreme Court decisions important to African-Americans, federal and state laws, an African-American writer or a specific literary form, i.e., poetry or essays or novels, segregation in the military or schools or housing or employment. If you find one book to be of special interest, you may write your paper on that title as long as you clarify why it was selected.. There are many other possible topics. You will also present a 5 minute oral summary of your research in class. You will choose your own topic but, to avoid duplication, each of you will need to turn in three topics or the book title of interest, the most desired labeled #1, etc. Topic ideas are due in class on October 23; each of you will receive a specific topic, one of your choices, on October 30th.

Grades:

50 % attendance, completion of assigned readings for class discussion, and participation in discussion.

 25% paper

 25% Michelle Alexander assignment in place of exam December 20.

ASSIGNMENTS. Note reading assignment are to be read for the date listed.

October 2: Overview of course. Brief history of slavery, Civil War, guerilla war.

October 9: NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS. P. 13-86. (Electronic copy)

October 16: 14th and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution (on line) Selections from Booker T. Washington. UP FROM SLAVERY. Chapters 5, 7, 8, 9,

October 23: Selections from W.E.B. DuBois. SOULS OF BLACK FOLKS. Chapters 3 and 6. (Electronic copy)

October 30: PLESSY V. FERGUSON (on line) Richard Wright. “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow.”

November 6: African-American Poets: Claude McKay, “If we must Die.” Arna Bontemps, Southern Mansions.” Langston Hughes, “Afro-American Fragment,” and “As I Grew Older.” Richard Wright, “Between the World and Me.” Gwendolyn Brooks, “The Children of the Poor.” LeRoi Jones, “Preface to a 20 volume Suicide Note,” and “The Invention of Comics.” You will also be given a poet and poem to present in class.

November 13:Vincent Harding. “So Much History, So Much Future: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Second Coming of America.” Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

November 20:James Baldwin. THE FIRE NEXT TIME. p. 3-10, 53-105. BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION, 1954. (on line)

November 27:Malcolm X. THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X, Chapter 1, “Nightmare,” and Chapter 19, “1965,” and “Message to the Grass Roots.”

December 4: Bayard Rustin, “From Protest to Politics,” and M.L. King, Jr., “I have a Dream.” Anthony Lewis, “The Shame of America,” NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS, Vol. LIX, Number 1 (January 12, 2012), p. 47-48.

December 11: Papers due. Discussion and Presentations.

December 20: “The Color of Law,, by Louis Menand. NEW YORKER ( July 8 and 15, 2013) p. 80 to 89. Michelle Alexander. THE NEW JIM CROW. Chapters to be assigned. Two page summary and presentation in class instead of exam.