

# 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 imper



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  
*DuBois Review* 1:47-91.

Reparations Justice and Greed in Black and White

Marist

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. The Great Land Robber: The Shameful Story of How 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. A Guide to a New Model for Land Tenure in America. *The Community Land Trust Reader*. Lincoln Institute. Pages 113-22, 184-93.
- John Emmeus Davis. Interview with Charles Sherrod. *The Community Land Trust Reader*. Lincoln Institute. Pages 194-201.
- John Emmeus Davis. 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. Whether the Community in Community Land Trusts. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 40: 755-769.
- James DeFilippis, et. al. 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



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%

**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 Rort 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

\*\*\*\*\*

## 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



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.