

HIST31752

# THE BLACK FREEDOM MOVEMENT, 1955-1975

Semester 2, 2021/22

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## Course Description

The Civil Rights and Black Power struggles of the mid-twentieth century, referred to by scholars as the Black Freedom Movement (BFM), constituted one of the most transformative moments in U.S. history. Activists working through a variety of organizations waged a concerted nonviolent campaign to topple segregation, disenfranchisement, and other discriminatory practices. By the mid 1960s these efforts culminated in a series of legal and legislative victories before giving way to uprisings and calls for “Black Power!” This module traces the origins, evolution and legacy of the BFM, using a multidisciplinary approach and emphasis on the agency of local people. Particular attention is paid to how issues of gender, sexuality and generation mediated participation and informed grassroots struggles. We also engage recent debates about the BFM’s temporal and spatial boundaries that shed light on the movement’s global reach and role in inspiring a generation of activists from Harlem to Handsworth. Accordingly, we will also examine the transnational linkages between US- and UK-based movements.

## Method of Assessment

- I. Public history artefact (e.g., online article, teaching resource, video) (2,500 words) = 50%
- II. Essay (2,500 words) = 50%

## Preliminary Reading List

If you are unfamiliar with postwar African American and Civil Rights history I would recommend: Manning Marable, Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945-2006, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (Jackson: Uni Press of Mississippi, 2007)

Our course will also focus on transnational linkages with struggles in the African diaspora including Britain. If you are unfamiliar with Black British history I would recommend: Peter Fryer, Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

The literature on the Black Freedom Movement - or "Black Freedom Studies"- is the largest sub-field in African American history with hundreds of books and articles in circulation. For an introduction to the major historiographic debates you might consider the following: Raymond D' Angelo, The American Civil Rights Movement: Readings and Interpretations (New York: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2001); Steven F. Lawson, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement," The American Historical Review 96:2 (Apr., 1991): 456-71; Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies," Journal of African American History 92:2 (2007): 265-88; Peniel E. Joseph, "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," Journal of American History 96:3 (Dec., 2009): 751-76.

## Discography

Sam Cooke, "A Change is Gonna Come," Ain't That Good News, (RCA Victor, 1964)

Nina Simone, "Mississippi Goddam," Nina Simone in Concert, (Phillips Records, 1964)

Otis Redding, "(Sittin' On) The Dock of the Bay," The Dock of the Bay (Volt, 1968)

The Impressions, "People Get Ready," People Get Ready (ABC Records, 1965)

Marvin Gaye, "Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)," What's Going On (Motown, 1971)

Gil Scott Heron, "Winter in America," Winter in America (Stata-East Records, 1974)

Kendrick Lamar, "Alright," To Pimp a Butterfly (Interscope Records, 2015)