
THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN U.S. LEGAL HISTORY

Law 7397/25403

Spring 2026

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GENERAL COURSE INFORMATION

Meeting Times

Tues./Thurs. 10:30am–12:00pm, Room TBD

Office Hours: Thurs. 12:30–2:00pm, Room 430N

Course Materials

Readings will be provided as PDFs on Canvas, via a new course-delivery system called Leganto.

Course Overview and Learning Objectives

This seminar will examine the history of civil rights law and activism across the twentieth century, analyzing both the development of civil rights law over time and the sources of those changes. The seminar will provide students with the opportunity to learn about the history of, among other things: Supreme Court litigation, such as *Brown v. Board of Education*; civil rights legislation, such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965; and grassroots civil rights activism, such as the founding of the NAACP in the early 1900s. We will read a variety of primary and secondary sources, including Supreme Court opinions, book chapters and law review articles by historians, and primary sources such as historical newspapers and archived documents from civil rights movement organizations.

This course fulfills the UHLC writing requirement, with students writing academic legal papers on a topic related to the seminar and at least 10,000 words (including footnotes). The seminar will also include practical training in the methods used for legal history research, including the use of both digital archives and physical archives to research the history of the law. As legal history continues to play an expanding role in judicial decision-making, legal history research skills will be increasingly useful tools for practicing lawyers. For the seminar, students will develop final paper topics in consultation with the professor, and students may write about either civil rights history, or about contemporary issues in civil rights law today (with attention to the deeper historical context for those contemporary legal questions).

Assessment

The grade for this course will be based on a combination of a final paper (80%), a presentation about the final paper topic (10%), and participation (10%). For the final paper, students will write academic legal papers on a topic related to the seminar and at least 10,000 words (including footnotes). To that end, as just discussed, the seminar will also include practical training in the methods used for legal history research. Students will develop paper topics in consultation with the professor, and students may write about either civil rights history, or about contemporary issues in civil rights law today (with attention to the deeper historical context for such contemporary legal questions).

Please note as well that consistent, unexcused unpreparedness will result in a 1/3 drop in letter grade; and as required for law school accreditation by the American Bar Association, and by UHLC policy, students must be present for 80% of the regularly scheduled class sessions in order to receive credit for the course.

Honor Code

The [UHLC Honor Code](#) applies to all aspects of this course. You are responsible for knowing all Honor Code provisions and for complying with the Honor Code. Please inquire if you have any questions regarding how the Honor Code's provisions apply to specific activities or situations related to this course. Your continuing enrollment in this course is deemed to be a pledge by you under the Honor Code to comply with the Honor Code in relation to this course and to comply with the instructions in the course syllabus.

Artificial Intelligence

Generative artificial intelligence is a form of machine learning that creates new and original output based on the data it has been trained on, in response to prompts. Examples include generative “large language models” (LLMs), such as ChatGPT. LLM output can include text, images, music, code, and more. This syllabus policy covers the textual output of generative LLMs (AI-Generated Text). Because AI-Generated Text can often mimic human intelligence, it could potentially be used as a substitute for a student's own work product. Such use is potentially problematic to the extent that it becomes a substitute for internalized student understanding of the material or creates a dependency on AI-Generated Text, which may be strictly prohibited in settings that include the bar examination.

Therefore, subject to the exceptions immediately below, your continuing enrollment in this course constitutes your pledge not to generate or to use any AI-Generated Text—whether from yourself or others—in relation to any assessment in this course. The term “assessment” means *any graded or ungraded work product for this course that is submitted to the instructor, presented in a class session, or used in an oral or written graded assessment for this course.*

The following AI-Generated Text uses are narrowly defined exceptions to the preceding prohibition:

- You may generate and use AI-Generated Text for class preparation, although you must

disclose the full extent of that use if I ask. You may generate and use AI-Generated Text for study supplements to aid with general understanding of course content. This could take different forms that include creating examples or explanations of a concept, generating diagrams and flow charts, “gamifying” course content, creating flash cards for study, or creating sample questions and answers.

- You may generate and use AI-Generated Text for an outline that summarizes the course content.
- You may use AI-Generated Text for the purpose of language translation.

READING SCHEDULE

The full reading schedule will be provided via a new course system called Leganto, which will enable easy access to each of the assigned readings. This seminar is participating in a pilot project to test Leganto with the Law Library. Leganto will include the reading list and links to PDF copies of each reading. Topics that will be covered in the course include:

- A brief examination of nineteenth-century civil rights activism, Reconstruction, and late-nineteenth-century legal changes, including the passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments; the Civil Rights Acts of 1866, 1871, and 1875; and subsequent Supreme Court cases including *U.S. v. Cruikshank*, *The Civil Rights Cases*, and *Plessy v. Ferguson*
- Early-twentieth-century civil rights activism, including the founding of the NAACP, and developments in Supreme Court doctrine, including *Giles v. Harris*, *Guinn v. United States*, and *Buchanan v. Warley*
- Pre-World War II civil rights movement strategy, the development of civil rights lawyering and debates about legal strategy, and 1930s and 1940s Supreme Court cases
- An in-depth study of the peak era of the civil rights movement—sometimes called the “classical phase”—from approximately 1954 to 1965, with attention to cases such as *Brown v. Board*; protest actions such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Sit-In movement, and the March on Washington of 1963; the Cold War foreign policy context for civil rights law and activism; and statutory developments, especially the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965
- Post-1965 developments, such as the Supreme Court’s approach to affirmative action from *Bakke* to *Parents Involved* to *SFFA* and recent cases on the Voting Rights Act
- The last 2–4 class sessions will consist of student presentations of paper topics and discussion of those research paper projects

GENERAL UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON POLICY INFORMATION

In addition to the course-specific information above, the University also wants you to have the following general information about resources and policies at UH.

A. Mental Health and Wellness Resources

The University of Houston has a number of resources to support students' mental health and overall wellness, including CoogsCARE and the UH Go App. UH Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) offers 24/7 mental health support for all students, addressing various concerns like stress, college adjustment and sadness. CAPS provides individual and couples counseling, group therapy, workshops and connections to other support services on and off-campus. For assistance visit uh.edu/caps, call 713-743-5454, or visit a Let's Talk location in-person or virtually. Let's Talk are daily, informal confidential consultations with CAPS therapists where no appointment or paperwork is needed.

Need Support Now?—If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call CAPS crisis support 24/7 at 713-743-5454, or the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988, or chat 988lifeline.org.

B. Title IX/Sexual Misconduct

Per the UHS Sexual Misconduct Policy, your instructor is a “responsible employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and state law and must report incidents of sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual intimidation, intimate partner violence, or stalking) about which they become aware to the Title IX office. Please know there are places on campus where you can make a report in confidence. You can find more information about resources on the Title IX website at <https://uh.edu/equal-opportunity/title-ix-sexual-misconduct/resources/>.

C. Reasonable Academic Adjustments/Auxiliary Aids

The University of Houston is committed to providing an academic environment and educational programs that are accessible for its students. Any student with a disability who is experiencing barriers to learning, assessment or participation is encouraged to contact the Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center (Dart Center) to learn more about academic accommodations and support that may be available to them. Students seeking academic accommodations will need to register with the Dart Center as soon as possible to ensure timely implementation of approved accommodations. Please contact the Dart Center by visiting the website: <https://uh.edu/accessibility/> calling (713) 743-5400, or emailing jdcenter@Central.UH.EDU.

The Student Health Center offers a Psychiatry Clinic for enrolled UH students. Call 713-743-5149 during clinic hours, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. to schedule an appointment.

The A.D. Bruce Religion Center offers spiritual support and a variety of programs centered on well-being.

The Center for Student Advocacy and Community (CSAC) is where you can go if you need help but don't know where to start. CSAC is a "home away from home" and serves as a resource hub to help you get the resources needed to support academic and personal success. Through our Cougar Cupboard, all students can get up to 30 lbs of FREE groceries a week. Additionally, we provide 1:1 appointments to get you connected to on- and off-campus resources related to essential needs, safety and advocacy, and more. The Cougar Closet is a registered student organization advised by our office and offers free clothes to students so that all Coogs can feel good in their fit. We also host a series of cultural and community-based events that fosters social connection and helps the cougar community come closer together. Visit the CSAC homepage or follow us on Instagram: @uh_CSAC and @uhcupbrd. YOU belong here.

D. Women and Gender Resource Center

The mission of the WGRC is to advance the University of Houston and promote the success of all students, faculty, and staff through educating, empowering, and supporting the UH community. The WGRC suite is open to you. Stop by the office for a study space, to take a break, grab a snack, or check out one of the WGRC programs or resources. Stop by Student Center South room B12 (Basement floor near Starbucks and down the hall from Creation Station) from 9 am to 5 pm Monday through Friday.

E. Recording of Class

Students may not record all or part of class, livestream all or part of class, or make/distribute screen captures, without advanced written consent of the instructor. If you have or think you may have a disability such that you need to record class-related activities, please contact the Justin Dart, Jr. Student Accessibility Center. If you have an accommodation to record class-related activities, those recordings may not be shared with any other student, whether in this course or not, or with any other person or on any other platform. Classes may be recorded by the instructor. Students may use instructor's recordings for their own studying and notetaking. Instructor's recordings are not authorized to be shared with anyone without the prior written approval of the instructor. Failure to comply with requirements regarding recordings will result in a disciplinary referral to the Dean of Students Office and may result in disciplinary action.