

Oberlin College

CAST-231

Fall 2021

King 106

Time: Tuesdays 7-9 PM

**Instructors:** Simon Greer, Megan Black

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**The Coalition of the Future:  
How we combat white nationalism and weave the fabric of democracy  
(a course in practice)**

**Course Description:**

The 2020 presidential election and its aftermath caused a number of observers to suggest that the United States is more deeply divided than during the Civil War, and that the survival of democracy itself is threatened. This course is intended for students who wish to challenge the hopelessness of this view by envisioning the coalition of the future. This will begin by exploring the politics of white nationalism through the lens of political activism and community organizing. Students will grapple with the intersections between antisemitism and racism and the ways they conspire in white nationalist ideology to threaten our democracy. The class will focus on political ideologies, systems of oppression, social movements, as well as social change in practice. We will consider the history of white nationalism and white supremacy, examine how they affect Black and Jewish communities as well as the broader society, and ultimately focus on the hands-on work of engaging in difficult conversations to build alliances and create broader coalitions for change.

**About the Instructors:**

**Simon Greer** has been involved in progressive social change work for the past 25 years. He is the founder of Cambridge Heath Ventures, a strategic advisory firm that works with purpose driven organizations, private sector companies, unions, foundations and governments to help them overcome their most pressing challenges. He works closely with Eric Ward on the Western States Center's Common Good initiative. Greer curates "courageous conversations" and helps to identify common good values, policy ideas, messages, and narratives that he believes have the power to engage a broad cross-section of Americans and help America live up to its promise. He is the founder of Bridging the Gap which piloted in January 2020 as part of a Winter Term collaboration between Oberlin College and Spring Arbor University.

**Megan Black** is a Midwest-based organizer and trainer committed to equity, inclusive democracy, and the common good. Since 2010 Megan has worked with organizations like Interfaith Youth Core, Faith in Action, and Western States Center to navigate the spaces and tensions created by divisions in race, religion, and politics, with a particular focus on

antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Black racism, and Christian dominance. She earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Notre Dame and a Master of Divinity Degree from Vanderbilt University. Megan directs the Common Good program at Western States Center from her home in Kansas City, MO.

### **Learning Goals:**

- Understand the difference between white supremacy and white nationalism, and their relationship to one another.
- Grapple with the effects white nationalism has on Black and Jewish communities as well as democratic practice more broadly.
- Identify the manifestations of antisemitism and racism, identify their similarities and differences and counter the “wedging effect” they currently have in our politics.
- Analyze the historical roots and contemporary dimensions of challenges to U.S. democracy.
- Develop skills and practice to effectively participate in difficult conversations and become accustomed to the tensions and discomfort required for change.
- Explore the possibilities of common good solutions and the engagement of unconventional allies.

### **Required Texts and Materials:**

- Wilkerson, Isabel. *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*. New York: Penguin/Random House, 2020.
- Articles and videos (see course Blackboard site)

### **College Policies:**

- **Honor Code:** The Honor Code applies to all assignments in this course. Students are required to include the Honor Code pledge on all assignments, which should include the statement, “I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment.” For more information on the honor code, please see <http://www.oberlin.edu/studentpolicies/honorcode>.
- **Disability Statement:** The College makes reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities. If you would like to request an accommodation for this course, please contact the Office of Disability Resources promptly. For more information, please see <https://www.oberlin.edu/disability-resources>.

### **Course Requirements and Expectations:**

- ***Attendance:*** Attendance at all classes is expected. Since we only meet once per week, your presence and participation are vital to the success of the entire course. Each absence beyond two will decrease your final grade by 2 percentage points. In the event

of a family emergency or an illness, reasonable exceptions can be made. If you anticipate missing class, please notify Havi ([Hcarrill@oberlin.edu](mailto:Hcarrill@oberlin.edu)) prior to class.

- **Participation:** Please come prepared to participate in class discussions. You will be expected to have done the required readings, and participate in discussions regarding the content of the readings.
- **Assignments:**
  - OpenMind modules- Due throughout the semester (See week by week)
  - The Flip Side- Due throughout the semester (See week by week)
  - 5 Moments in Black History presentation (Due 10/19/21)
  - “Be the Character” Monologue (Due 11/2/21)
  - Midterm (Due 11/16/21)
  - 5 Moments in Jewish History presentations (Due 11/30/21)
  - Climate Change Scenarios (Due 1/11/22)
  - Final project (Presentations January 24th, 9-11AM)

### **Grading Rubric**

- Monologue (5%)
- 5 Moments, Race (10%)
- 5 Moments, Antisemitism (10%)
- Midterm (20%)
- Climate change scenario (15%)
- Final presentation (20%)
- Attendance (10%)
- Participation (5%)
- Extra credit: Earn up to 5 extra points on your final grade for significant, thoughtful engagement (+5%)
- Extra credit: Earn up to 3 extra points on your final grade for volunteering to present on Flip Side (+3%)

### **Schedule of Classes:**

***\*Note: Homework listed is due the following week\****

#### **Week 1 (10/5):** Practicum Introduction

- **Homework:** Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste* Chapters 2-4 (pp.13-53); [OpenMind](#) module 1; [Sign up for The Flip Side](#); Read article: [How Serious Are We About Inclusive Democracy?](#)

#### **Week 2 (10/12):** “Democracy”- Flawed birth of democracy and imperfect republic

- **Homework:** Read *Caste* Chapters 6-8 (pp. 62-88); [OpenMind](#) module 2; 5 moments in history research and prep
- **Guest speaker:** [Eric K. Ward](#)

#### **Week 3 (10/19):** *Caste* and the Role of Race

- **Homework:** Read [Skin in the Game](#) (Ward); Listen to SPLC Podcast “[This Sounds Like Hate](#)” (Choose at least one episode); Pairs discuss OpenMind

Week 4 (10/26): Supremacy, Civil Rights, and White Nationalism

- **Homework:** Monologue prep; [OpenMind](#) module 3
- **Guest speaker:** Graie Hagans (confirming)

Week 5 (11/2): “Be the Character” and Skills Building

- **Homework:** Work on midterm; [OpenMind](#) module 4 and pairs discuss
- Simon Greer and Megan Black in person at Oberlin

+Week 5.5 (11/3): Mini class: 12:00-2:00 PM

Week 6 (11/9): NO CLASS- Mandatory office hours, sign up for slot

- **Homework:** Work on midterm

**MIDTERM DUE: November 16th, 6:00PM**

Week 7 (11/16): What About Antisemitism?

- **Homework:** 5 moments in history research and prep

11/20-11/28: No class, Thanksgiving Break

Week 8 (11/30): Addressing the Tropes- Is this Antisemitism or not?

- **Homework:** [Islamophobia, Inc.](#) (Executive Summary); [OpenMind](#) module 5 and pairs discuss
- **Guest Speakers:** Mixed Guest Panel

Week 9 (12/7): Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism

- **Homework:** Read article: [White Christian America Needs a Moral Awakening](#); [OpenMind](#) module 6; Read [NYT article](#) and do survey
- **Guest speaker:** [Wajahat Ali](#)

Week 10 (12/14): Christian Supremacy

- **Homework:** Listen to podcast episodes (See Blackboard); [OpenMind](#) module 7
- **Guest speaker:** [Robert P. Jones](#)

Week 11 (12/21): Israel, It’s Complicated

- **Homework:** Prepare climate change scenarios; [OpenMind](#) module 8 and discuss
- **Guest speaker:** [Eric K. Ward](#)

12/23-1/2: No class, Winter Break

Week 12 (1/4): Building the Coalition of the Future

- **Homework:** Climate change scenario- resolve proposal; *Caste* Chapter 28 (pp. 350-352) and epilogue (pp. 377-388)

Week 13 (1/11): Where do we go from here: Addressing the Wedge

- **Homework:** Final presentations

***Final presentations: Monday, January 24, 2022, 9-11 AM***