Tuesday, October 4, 2016
12:30-1:30pm
Room 2339
Faculty Administration Building

President Obama and the Black Panther Party
Ollie Johnson, Chair and Associate Professor, African American Studies

Ollie A. Johnson III is Chair and Associate Professor in the Department of African American Studies at Wayne State University. He is the co-editor of the book, Race, Politics, and Education in Brazil: Affirmative Action in Higher Education (2015). He also authored Brazilian Party Politics and the Coup of 1964 and coedited Black Political Organizations in the Post-Civil Rights Era. Professor Johnson received his Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of California at Berkeley. His current research focuses on African American, Afro-Brazilian, and Afro-Latin American Politics.

The year of 2016 is important for black politics in the United States. The year represents the last year of the presidency of Barack Obama. President Obama served eight years in office. The year of 2016 also represents the 50th anniversary of the birth of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, CA. The BPP formally ended in 1982. This paper will discuss the impact of President Obama and the Black Panther Party on African Americans, the United States, and the world.

President Obama became a symbol of political progress for blacks in the U.S. and around the world. His policies (foreign and domestic) are more controversial. His supporters maintain that he did the best he could for Americans and African Americans despite conservative opposition in Congress. As a result, President Obama was not able to achieve all his goals.

The president’s critics claim that his race neutral approach to running for office and governing prevented him from addressing the traditional black political agenda which focuses on reducing racial inequality and racial discrimination and increasing black employment, education, and health opportunities. Consequently, blacks continue to lag behind whites on traditional socio-economic and political indicators.

The BPP survives as a powerful symbol of black resistance to oppression and the fight for black liberation. This essay will also examine the relationship between President Obama and the BPP and their distinct approaches to politics.

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