

Course Syllabus
RACE AND ETHNICITY
SOCI3305, May term 2015
Monday – Friday
1PM to 5PM
Hyer Hall 204

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Office hours: T, TH 2:00 – 2:30 (and by appointment)
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The mounting scientific wisdom about race is that it is socially constructed, a sort of historical figment of the imagination that varies across time and place. Yet, race takes on an objective reality. It permeates our society as racial inequalities in income, occupational attainment, education, poverty, crime, and incarceration, just as it pervades our everyday lives as inescapable components of social encounters between different races. This course inquires about the socio-cultural objectivity of race by analyzing the historical existence and “career” of race in America up to the present. We look how race currently exists in social relationships, culture, institutions, and social structures. And, we consider how progress has been made and can continue to be made, in realizing our modern American ideals of freedom and citizenship.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Anderson, Elijah (1999). *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. New York: Norton.

Omi, Michael, Winant, Howard (2015). *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3rd Edition. New York: Routledge.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the term, students will learn, know, appreciate...

1. How race is less the product of biology and more a product of social processes of “racialization”
2. How race cannot be understood apart from social relationships of inequality and domination
3. The role ideology and power play in racialization processes and of how race categories change over time
4. The role of race and racial identity in everyday social interaction and in American society more broadly

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Race is one of the most difficult subject matters to address and discuss socially. There are no absolute correct ways to talk about it. Even with the best intentions, we all make mistakes and say things that can sound insensitive, ignorant, offensive, defensive, etc., to others. In matters of race, people in earnest can easily perceive, interpret, and understand the exact same stimuli in radically differing ways. Racial content in social



happenings, encounters, and discussions can be like the gestalt psychology image of the duck/rabbit. Depending on one's experience, one's identity (especially racial), and the various positions one occupies in the larger social structure, a particular event, scenario, conversation, etc. may look like a "duck" to you as it looks like a "rabbit" to another person. These facts in themselves are sociologically important; in understanding them we learn a great deal about the subject matter. But, it is also important to keep these lessons in mind in the class room. We stand to learn little if discussions become overly heated or if they become dead dull because no one has the courage to speak. Beyond the usual common sense classroom discussion ground rules (e.g., speaking in turn, speaking civilly and calmly, no name-calling) it might also help to consider the following:

- Be open to others' views and flexible in your own. Be willing to hear what others have to say and take what they say seriously. If you can only see a "duck" the only way to understand how someone else sees a "rabbit" is to listen to that person and hear what and how s/he perceives. "Bracket" or suspend your own inclinations to evaluate and judge when such inclinations prevent you from seeing a bigger picture. Even if your evaluations eventually prove correct, by getting a more comprehensive and accurate picture, they also become stronger.
 - *A helpful exercise when you hear or see something you strongly disagree with or cannot understand is assume the person in question is a) a good person who is well-intentioned, and is b) intelligent and knowledgeable, then ask yourself, *how or under what circumstances can a fundamentally good and intelligent person think or behave that way? If I were the one doing that behavior, under what circumstances could it make sense to me as appropriate moral behavior?* The sorts of answers likely point to potential accurate sociological explanations. And while yes there are evil, ignorant, and stupid people, no doubt there are vastly more decent people trying to live their lives and do the right things, and yet still bad things (or things we strongly disagree with) happen. The sociological point is to understand why. If one's answer is always that people are evil or stupid (or whatever), there is nothing more to understand, there is little that can be done to improve, and more importantly, we trade a sociological dividend for a psychological one (i.e., we feel superior to the evil stupid people while we conveniently disavow any further potential heavy lifting in our thoughts, beliefs, and actions).
- Understand that some words and stereotypes can be harmful and hurtful and existential beyond the more casual insults we all receive periodically in daily life. It is true that with "typifications" (stereotypes), we *can't live with em, can't live without em*. But in being open, provisional, flexible, and self-critical with those we employ, we tend to develop ones that are more sophisticated, useful, and less hurtful to others. We get socially smarter.
- Race or "color-blindness" is not always the answer but neither is bringing racial content into every encounter or instance.

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- Race or "color-blindness" is not always the answer but neither is bringing racial content into every encounter or instance.
- Be willing to risk sounding silly but be tolerant, forgiving, and even encouraging of those who take uncomfortable steps toward understanding another point of view.
- Seek to establish commonalities and to interact with others on a genuinely human level but do not seek to forget about or ignore differences. Differences are often good and often make us all stronger.
- Understand that dealing humanly and justly with race in a racialized society with racial inequality is never-ending work. Race relations and inequality are "out there" in the world we participate in. We continually

reproduce race and race relationships regardless of our intentions – but we also twist and reinvent those relationships, often in positive ways.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Grading

The final semester grade is based on several short-answer take-home tests and one analytical assignment. Following is the breakdown:

<u>Course grades</u>	<u>Percent grade</u>
Tests (3)	75
Assignments (1)	25
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100%	

Tests

There will be three take-home tests to be completed over two of the weekends and the last week of class. These will be in short-answer and short essay format and will cover the prior classes' readings, lectures, and discussions.

Assignments

There will be one analytical assignment that will require observation, reporting, and analysis of an inter-race social interaction in real life.

Participation

Students need to come prepared to discuss the day's class. This means completing before class all readings and assignments covered that day. Students are responsible for all material covered and all directions given in class. Students who miss a class are responsible for getting from classmates all that was missed. On the whole, this part of the grade works in most peoples' favor. But those who rarely come to class, who repeatedly demonstrate when called on that they have not kept up with the materials, and/or regularly set the class back with unproductive behavior, do not get the full points.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS

Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first be registered with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS) to verify the disability and to establish eligibility for accommodations. Students may call 214-768-1470 or visit <http://www.smu.edu/ALEC/DASS> to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)

EXCUSED ABSENCES FOR UNIVERSITY EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity should be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work. (University Undergraduate Catalogue)

COURSE SCHEDULE

Day	Day	Topics	Assignment
14-May-15	Thu	<u>Introduction</u> Course overview Assignments Readings	Documentary Race: Power of illusion
15-May-15	Fri	<u>Social Construction of Race</u> Social construction theory Culture, semiotics, and categories Categories and symbols in social process Reification, naturalization, and power	Omi and Winant <i>Racial Formation...</i> pp. 1 – 50 Berger and Luckhman (excerpts)
18-May-15	Mon	<u>Historical career of race in USA</u> Modernity and one of its peculiar contradictions Liberal democracy and pattern inconsistency	Omi and Winant <i>RFT</i> pp. 51 – 160 Classical liberalism Parsons (excerpts) Take-home 1 due
19-May-15	Tue	<u>Statistical/descriptive landscape of Race</u> Stratification, Occupations, Education Poverty, Crime	Wilson <i>Declining Significance... Truly Disadvantaged</i> (excerpts)
20-May-15	Wed	<u>Black urban poverty</u> WJ Wilson debates Poverty concentration	Massey (selections) Anderson <i>Code of the Streets..</i> pp. 1- 178
21-May-15	Thu	<u>Code of the streets</u> Adaptation to concentrated poverty	Anderson <i>Code of the Streets..</i> pp. 179 - end
22-May-15	Fri	<u>Everyday life</u> Social interaction Self, sociality, social needs, and recognition Power and the Master/Slave Subordination and social categories	Goffman <i>Presentation of Self... Face-work... Interaction order (excerpts).</i> Hegel <i>Master/Slave</i> (excerpt)
25-May-15	Mon	No Class -- Memorial Day	Take home 2 submitted by Sunday night
26-May-15	Tue	<u>Social fields, habitus, and capital</u> Social fields and competition Habitus Forms of capital Race, habitus, fields	Bourdieu <i>Invitation... (excerpts)</i> <i>Language and Symbolic Power...</i> (excerpts)
27-May-15	Wed	<u>Racial privileges ?</u> “White privilege?” – what it is and what it isn’t	MaCintosh “Unpacking the invisible knapsack...” Messner “White Guy Habitus...” Duke “What privilege.”

		Privileges and social categories	
28-May-15	Thu	<u>Democracy and dignity in everyday life</u> Mutual respect and understanding in busy competitive lives Intersubjectivity and fusion of horizons The moral work of democracy	Habermas "On Grammar of forms of life..."
29-May-15	Fri	<u>Conclusion</u> Presentations and discussions	Take home 3 Final assignment due