

Honors Introduction to Comparative Ethnic Studies

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At the start of the 20th century, W.E.B. DuBois predicted that “the color line” would be the fundamental preoccupation of the 20th century. As visionary as his remarks proved to be, he did not foresee the lasting significance of race and ethnicity in American society. Arguably, today, more than ever, “the color line” shapes social life and self-understandings. This course endeavors to make sense of the meaning of race in post-Civil Rights America, while introducing students to the key theories and concepts of ethnic studies. On the one hand, it strives to discern the persistence and reconfiguration of stereotypes, prejudice, institutionalized discrimination, and the like in a supposedly color blind society. On the other hand, it aims to clarify the ways in which race and ethnicity foster identities and communities. Throughout, readings and discussions focus on the ubiquity, centrality, productivity, and plasticity of race and ethnicity, emphasizing both their impact and import to historical inequities, social relations, and cultural politics in the United States and beyond. Readings and discussions strive to incorporate a range of experiences and perspectives, comparing and contrasting particularly those of African Americans, Asian Americans, EuroAmericans, and Native Americans (or indigenous peoples). Although we think about the big picture, we never lose sight of small things and local practices. To this end, the university as a social space centers our attention, encouraging us to think about learning and socialization, the exclusionary consequences of testing, debates over curriculum, struggles over affirmative action, social justice movements (organizing against sweat shops for instance) and the implications of increasing corporatization of higher education,

Objectives

This course has five objectives. First, it seeks to enhance understandings of the scope and significance of race and ethnicity. Second, it strives to enable students to locate themselves within the racialized terrain of American culture. Third, it endeavors to introduce students to a range of theories and concepts at the center of ethnic studies. Fourth, fostering self-reflection and critical social perspectives, it also aims to create a learning environment in which students seriously and sensitively engage race and ethnicity. Fifth, it seeks to improve students’ critical thinking and communicative skills.

Required Readings

There are three required books in this class. Both are available for purchase at the Bookie; used copies may also be obtained online (abebooks.com, amazon.com, and half.com all are good resources for locating used books).

Henry A. Giroux and Susan Searls Giroux, Take back higher education : race, youth, and the crisis of democracy in the post-Civil Rights Era . Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Thomas C. Patterson, Inventing Western Civilization. Monthly Review Press, c1997.

Lee D. Baker, ed. Life in America : identity and everyday experience. Blackwell, 2004.

In addition, supplemental readings will be available in one of two ways, either online or in a reader. The latter may be purchased at Cougar Copies in the CUB.

Expectations and Policies

This course emphasizes active learning. It stresses discovery, analysis, and application through listening talking, reading, reflecting, and writing. It sets aside lecturing in favor of interaction and discussion. Given the subject of the class, our explorations demand respect and sensitivity; open and honest communication is essential to understanding. All participants are expected to come to class prepared, to be engaged and open once in class and to contribute to our ongoing discussions. A few points of etiquette warrant reiteration:

- **Treat others with respect and courtesy.**
- **Show up to class on time.** Students arriving late or leaving early disrupt the class and should not anticipate receiving credit for attendance.
- **Do the readings and assignments.**
- **Do not have private conversation in class.**
- **Do not read the paper or work on assignments for other classes.**
- **Turn your cell phones off.**

This is a reading intensive, discussion oriented class, thus I expect each student to carefully read and think critically about the assigned readings and come to class prepared to actively participate in class discussion, group activities, and individual writing assignments. Student participation will be evaluated on quality as well as quantity. If you remain quiet throughout the semester or rarely express yourself, you can expect to your participation grade to suffer accordingly. Of course, one cannot participate, if s/he does not attend class. Students are expected to attend every class and will be awarded points for each day that they do. Missing class for legitimate,

Reading Notes (15%)

At the start of each class period, students will turn in a 3x5 note card bearing two open-ended questions or comments for each assigned reading. These cards will be evaluated for their connection with the reading (do they suggest the student read?) and quality (would they foster productive discussion?)

Writing Assignments (30%)

On several occasions, students will write brief papers. These will require critical thinking and interpretation. Papers will be evaluated for clarity, cohesiveness, creativity, and completeness. Specific details for each paper will be distributed well in advance of their due dates.

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the class. No exceptions.

Late assignments will be penalized one letter grade per day.

Group Projects (35%)

Students will complete group projects on issues of race and racism in their everyday lives, ideally at Washington State University. Students will make presentations of their work to the class and hopefully the CES Conference. Students will also complete a written component. Specific details will be discussed in class and distributed well in advance.

Some Guidelines

This is a class seeks to promote mutual growth and shared learning about challenging subjects. To achieve this ideal, we will have to work together, treat one another respect, and push ourselves to get beyond our comfort zones. We will encounter difficult topics and sensitive material that may at times disturb or offend. This is perhaps unavoidable given that the readings and discussions prompt us to take up themes often left silent in our society, including race and racism, power and oppression, conflict and struggle. With this in mind, the following guidelines are meant to encourage open, productive, and reflexive conversations.

1. **Acknowledge** the existence of institutionalized forms of oppression, particularly racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism.
2. **Listen to others.**
3. **Create a safe environment for discussion.** Think the language in which you choose to express yourself. Be aware that how you talk may impact others and their willingness to share. Avoid words that hurt, stigmatize, stereotype, or silence others.
4. **Be respectful.** Do not interrupt. Do not belittle. Treat others with the same dignity and compassion you would expect.

5. **Be engaged.** Commit yourself to the material, to getting at its political and personal implications.
6. **Be open** to others and their opinions.
7. **Actively participate.**
8. **Read critically.** Ask yourself: What is significant in this piece? What are the central arguments and what do they mean? What do they teach? How do they challenge? What feels or emotions do they evoke anger/sadness/laughter?
9. **Reflect on your position.** Recognize where you are at, that is, how your life, desires, and interpretations fit in a broader social context. Be willing to name your prejudices, ideologies, and privileges.
10. **Resist the temptation to dismiss positions before you take them seriously.**
11. **Ground your comments in evidence.**
12. **Agree to actively work against myths and stereotypes.**
13. **Appreciate the knowledge and experience of your peers.**
14. **Avoid blaming.**
15. **Remember** class discussions should not be about embarrassing, showing off, winning, losing. Our meetings rather should be about dialogue, self-reflection, and learning.

Tentative Course Outline

11 Jan **Opening**

Race as Social Construction

13 Jan *Race the Power Illusion*. (video shown in class)

18 Jan Audrey Smedley, “Race and the Construction of Human Identity” (Reserve).

20 Jan **No Class.**

Race and Classification

25 Jan Judith Goode, “Dousing the Fire or Fanning the Flames” in *Life*, 62-83.

Suzanne Oboler, “The Politics of Labeling,” in *Life*, 381-392.

27 Jan Maureen Mahon, “Black Like This,” in *Life*, 302-326.

Joane Nagel, “The Politics of Ethnic Authenticity” (Reader).

(White) Privilege

1 Feb <http://www.anarchistblackcross.org/org/wp/peggy.html>

<http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~rjensen/freelance/whiteprivilege.htm>

<http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~rjensen/freelance/whitefolo.htm>

see also: www.whiteprivilege.com/

3 Feb *The House that Race Built* (video shown in class).

The Problems of Whiteness

8 Feb Julia Hall, “It Hurts to be a Girl,” in *Life*, 329-339.

Pam Perry, “White means never having to say you’re Ethnic,” in *Life*, 339-358.

10 Feb Kyle Kusz, “I want to be the Minority,” in *Life*, 359-377.

Anne Allison, “Cyborg Violence,” in *Life*, 25-45.

White Supremacy: Extreme and Mainstream

- 15 Feb Abby Ferber, “Mongrel Monstrosities” (Reader).
17 Feb Howard Winant, “Racism Today” (Reader).
Amy Ansell, “The New Face of Race” (Reader).

On Western Civilization

- 22 Feb Inventing Western Civilization, 9-44.
24 Feb Inventing Western Civilization, 45-85.
1 March Inventing Western Civilization, 87-132.
3 March Claire Norton, Marines versus *Fedayeen*.
<http://eserver.org/bs/63/norton.html>
8 March Kathryn Herr, “Institutional Violence...” in Life, 240-247.
Aiwha Ong, “Cultural Citizenship...” in Life, 156-178.
10 March Group Conferences
15 March **No Class. Spring Break!**
17 March **No Class. Spring Break!**

The Racial Politics of Higher Education

- 22 March Take Back Higher Education, 1-51.
24 March Take Back Higher Education, 129-167.
29 March Take Back Higher Education, 169-214.
31 March Stacey Lee, “More than ‘model minorities’,” in Life, 181-196.
Nazli Kibria, “College and Notions of ‘Asian America’,” in Life, 212-224.
5 April Take Back Higher Education, 215-247.
7 April Take Back Higher Education, 249-285.

12 April	Open
14 April	No Class.
19 April	Group Presentations
21 April	No Class. Attend CES Undergraduate Conference (22 April).
26 April	Group Presentations
28 April	Group Presentations