**The Politics of Race**

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**Course Description**

We will examine various, intricate relationships between race and politics in the United States. We will begin by examining the concept of racism itself, particularly how racism pervades America. From the get-go, and throughout the semester, we will pay special attention to the contradictory projects of democracy and racial hierarchy, specifically, the enterprise of white supremacy. We will continually ask ourselves, and our classmates, can there exist a white identity, of any sort, alongside legitimate democracy. I will tell you right now that my theorizing tells me no. But, this challenging question confronts us everyday, as long as a substantial group and/or set of institutions participate in whiteness. We will spend a great deal of time during the first phase of this course studying contemporary forms of racial politics, particularly contemporary configurations of whiteness, white supremacy, and racism. How, in a social setting where a significant number of its citizens claim to be “colorblind” or “post-racial,” is it that racial identity seems to influence and shape so many of our life chances, opportunities, experiences, hopes and dreams?

The centerpiece (if you will) of this course will focus upon the inconsistencies, contradictions, ironies, and downright injustices of the criminal justice system. We will honor Michael Brown throughout this semester. Yes, I did say we will honor Michael Brown. As democratic citizens, it is our responsibility to make sure that the standards of democratic life and law are being upheld for all our fellow citizens. If even one citizen faces injustice based upon racism, we owe that citizen our deepest democratic commitments and energies to do what we can to try to right this injustice and prevent such violations of our democratic commitments from happening again. So, in this course, we spend much time studying and critically engaging the criminal justice system, what Michelle Alexander calls the “New Jim Crow.” We will think deeply about law, and its place in maintaining our racial status quo: how does law, legal practices, legal doctrine, etc., while attempting to appear unbiased, end up being a major vehicle or set of mechanisms that perpetuate white supremacy in a so-called democracy.

Throughout our time together, we will investigate how racial identity is shaped by varying economic, social and political contexts, and we will think critically about what is at stake in perpetuating our overt and covert, conscious and unconscious, and seen and unseen commitments to racial identity, especially the perpetuation of whiteness. During this semester, and hopefully thereafter, you are challenged to engage robustly your democratic sensibilities so that you might develop an alternative identity formation, one that mobilizes you to spend your days making this a better place for all of us.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADING POLICY**

Students are required to complete assigned readings on time, participate in class, write a course journal, which includes: discussions via the discussion board, write a series of response papers for texts, and write critical thinking essays, study course materials, and complete a midterm and final exam.

Course grades will be determined as follows:

Final = 100

Midterm = 100

Course Journal = 200

 Total 400

 Letter Grade Single Exam Grade Cumulative Grade

 A 93 - 100 372 - 400

 A- 90 - 92 360 - 371

 B+ 87 - 89 348 - 359

 B 83 - 86 332 - 347

 B- 80 - 82 320 - 331

 C+ 77 - 79 308 - 319

 C 73 - 76 292 - 307

 C- 70 - 72 280 - 291

 D+ 67 - 69 268 - 279

 D 63 - 66 252 - 267

 D- 60 - 62 240 - 251

 F < = 59 < = 239

**THE COURSE JOURNAL**

The course journal is an important part of your success in this course, both in terms of your final grade and regarding your engagement with, and understanding of, politics and race. The journal will entail written responses to critical thinking questions, and response papers, and participation in discussion board.

* **Written responses to critical thinking questions**. During the semester, I will assign four critical thinking prompts, in which you will address a question or series of questions related to course readings and issues. Your responses should be one typed page, single-spaced. I will post the actual questions on blackboard during the weeks they appear in the schedule below.
* **Response Papers**. Students are required to write seven response papers (see schedule/due dates below). The response papers should be 1 single-spaced page, 12-point font. The papers should be thoughtful engagements with a major theme or idea presented in the texts. After picking a theme, or set of themes, you should very briefly summarize the theme/idea; then, you should proceed to put forward your own ideas, points of agreement/disagreement, etc. Each paper is due the day before the class in which a given reading will be discussed, posted on Blackboard the evening before.
* **Discussion Board**. During the semester, I will post questions for discussion. Each student is required to engage both the topic, as well as each other, in a conversation. Therefore, Thursday through Saturday of a discussion board week, you should have posted your own thoughts and reflections, as well as your responses to your classmates, on the discussion board. While there is no single number of postings that you are required to submit, you should have at least two entries per week, the first being posted by Thursday of each week. Therefore, round one of postings about a given set of questions for each week should involve at least one post from every student by the end of the day on Thursdays. Then, another round or two, or three, of further postings will take place Friday and Saturday. I will post the questions on blackboard during the weeks they appear in the schedule below.

**The Journal Grade will be assessed as follows:**

Written responses to critical thinking questions: 50 points

Discussion Board 50 points

Response Papers: 100 points

Total: 200 points

**Texts**

There are **eight** required books for this course (available at The Little Professor Bookstore), as listed below, as well as two articles and a reading on electronic reserve. Each reading this quarter should be engaged closely and carefully (see Course Schedule below for reading assignments.).

The texts are:

*Racist America* by Joe Feagin (3rd Edition)

*Dog Whistle Politics* by Ian Haney Lopez

*Racism Without Racists* by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva

*The Law is a White Dog* by Colin Dayan

*The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander

*Reproducing Racism: How Everyday Choices Lock in White Advantage* by Daria Roithmayr

*Words That Wound*, Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, Williams-Crenshaw

*Citizen: An American Lyric*, Claudia Rankine

**Course Schedule**

M, 1/11: Course Introduction

M, 1/18: MLK DAY—No class.

**The Politics of Race: Contemporary Racisms**

M, 1/25: In-Class Meeting

Read: *Racist America,* 3rd Edition, Joe R. Feagin

 Response 1 Due Sunday, 1/24; posted to Blackboard by 8 p.m.

M, 2/1: Online Work

Read: *Dog Whistle Politics*, Introduction and Chapters 1 through 5.

Discussion Board

 Critical Thinking 1 Due Sunday, 1/31; posted to Blackboard by 8 p.m.

M, 2/8: In-Class Meeting

Read: *Dog Whistle Politics*, Chapters 6 through 9, and the Conclusion.

 Response 2 Due Sunday, 2/7; posted to Blackboard by 8 p.m.

M, 2/15: Online Work

Read: *Racism without Racists*, Chapters 1 through 6.

Discussion Board

 Critical Thinking 2 Due Sunday, 2/14; posted to Blackboard by 8 p.m.

M, 2/22: In-Class Meeting

Read: *Racism without Racists*, Chapters 7 through 10.

 Response 3 Due Sunday, 2/21; posted to Blackboard by 8 p.m.

**M, 2/29: Spring Break; no class.**

**M, 3/7: Midterm Exam**

**The Politics of Perpetuation: The Locked-In Power of White Racial Cartels**

M, 3/14: In-Class Meeting

Read: *Reproducing Racism*

 Response 4 Due Sunday, 3/13; posted to Blackboard by 8 p.m.

M, 3/21: Online Work

Read: *The Law is a White Dog,* Chapters 1-4

Discussion Board

Critical Thinking 3 Due Sunday, 3/20; posted to Blackboard by 8 p.m.

M, 3/28: In-Class Meeting

Read: *The Law is a White Dog,* Chapters 5-7

Response 5 Due Sunday, 3/27; posted to Blackboard by 8 p.m.

**The Politics of Racialized Criminalization: The New Jim Crow and The Brutality of Racist Speech**

M, 4/4: Online Work

Read: *The New Jim Crow*, Introduction and Chapters 1 through 3.

Discussion Board

 Critical Thinking 4 Due Sunday, 4/3; posted to Blackboard by 8 p.m.

M, 4/11: In-Class Meeting

Read: *The New Jim Crow*, Chapters 4 through 6.

 Response 6 Due Sunday, 4/10; posted to Blackboard by 8 p.m.

M, 4/18: In-Class Meeting

Read: *Words That Wound*.

 *Read: Citizen: An American Lyric*

Response 7 Due Sunday, 4/17; posted to Blackboard by 8 p.m.

**Final Exam**