**PLSC 379: Critical Race Theory**

**Spring 2019, Thursday 10:30-1:10 pm**

**Weinstein Hall, Room 303**

**Andrea Y. Simpson, Instructor**

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**Office Hours: Tuesday, 11-noon and by appointment**

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Over thirty years ago, an intellectual movement began that had roots in the field of critical legal studies.[[1]](#footnote-1) This movement, Critical Race Theory (CRT), evolved into an expansive field of study that includes analysis from a number of scholars that represent other minority groups. Other disciplines are engaged in the methodological innovations of CRT.

CRT advances two central intellectual and political commitments: One is that the liberal legal tradition fails to consider how laws, for example civil rights legislation, reconstitute systemic and institutional racism. The second is that while law is a powerful tool, it has not been able to address structural and institutional racism. Our learning goals are as follows:

* Develop a sophisticated understanding and knowledge of CRT
* Learn how to engage with the concepts and methods to produce independent and original research

**Texts**

*The Derrick Bell Reader*, edited by Delgado and Stefancic

*Critical Race Theory*, Delgado and Stefancic

*White Rage*, Carol Anderson

All articles assigned are posted on the blogsite at <https://blog.richmond.edu/criticalracetheory/>

**Assignments and Grades**

Research Paper-30%

 Our work will result in the production of one, 25-page paper. Students will be guided in researching and completing the paper, and each stage of the process will be graded.

Reaction Papers-20%

 You will write four reaction papers by the end of the course. You will choose a reading, and *submit the reaction paper via email the night before the next class*.

Midterm-30%

Attendance, Class Participation, Blog Posts-20%

 Research Paper

*You are asked to submit a central argument an outline in the fifth week of the semester*. Start thinking about this assignment now. Read the assignments carefully so that you understand what critical race theory is. Skim through the articles in your reader and think about topics that interest and inspire you. When you have chosen a topic, think about what will be your central argument. Then do a more detailed round of research to make sure no one has already written a paper advancing your central argument.

Your submissions should be in the following format: (i) a statement of your central argument (which should begin with the phrase “This paper will argue that...”) and (ii) an outline. The outline does not have to be very detailed. *Here is an example of a complete submission:*

“This paper will argue that contemporary antidiscrimination law unnecessarily adopts a ‘perpetrator’ perspective that narrowly focuses on the intent of the perpetrator, rather than a broader ‘victim’ perspective that focuses on the effects of racism on the victim. Part I provides important theoretical background for the argument. This part discusses the theoretical difference between perpetrator and victim perspectives. Part II applies the binary framework to recent Supreme Court decisions. This part argues that the Equal Protection clause supports the victim perspective as well or better than the perpetrator perspective. This part also argues that contemporary anti-discrimination law might well have adopted the victim perspective rather than the perpetrator perspective. Part III analyzes why the Court has chosen to adopt the relatively narrow perspective. Part IV explores the implications of the Court’s narrow interpretation of Equal Protection law for employment discrimination.”

You must include both the central argument and the outline in your submission. You will integrate both of these in the introduction of your first draft. Start early—this area of study is difficult even for graduate students. It is impossible to complete such an assignment in a few days.

2. Your first draft should approximate as much as possible a final draft in length, citations and completeness. You should include headings and page numbers to make your paper more readable. Your introduction should include an opening set of paragraphs to explain why the topic is interesting and timely, followed by your central argument and roadmap. For helpful examples, check out the introductions in the papers in your reader.

3. Office Meeting: Whether or not you turn in a first draft, you are required to meet with me at some point between the submission of your topic and your final draft. Most students find it most helpful to set up a meeting around the rough outline stage, once they have sketched out the paper’s central argument (see above) and the outline and filled in the outline a bit.

4. Final Draft: Your paper should be complete and polished, in APA or Chicago style for research papers with in-text notes. If you have received comments on the first draft, these should be addressed or explained.

 Reaction Papers

 Once every three weeks you will submit a reaction paper to a reading. These are due the day before class at 5:00 pm. A reaction paper includes the following:

* I am looking for how you feel about a particular reading. Your reaction may be negative, positive, or neutral. In any case, you need to provide evidence for why you reacted in the way that you did.
* It should be no more than 1 page, double-spaced, with 12 font type.
* *Please consult the blogsite for tips on constructing a reaction paper at:* [*https://blog.richmond.edu/criticalracetheory*](https://blog.richmond.edu/criticalracetheory)

**NOTE:** Please send papers in Word format from the *same email address consistently* to asimpson@richmond.edu. Label the entry in the subject heading of the email like this: “CRT REACTION PAPER #1– this will make it easier for me to grade. Your filename should read as follows: [Your Name]\_Reaction Paper 1. docx. Example: Simpson\_Reaction Paper1.docx and Simpson\_Research Paper Proposal\_2\_14.docx.

 Midterm

 You will have a take-home open-book, open-note midterm.

 Attendance and Blog Posts

 A full 20 percent of your grade is determined by attendance, participation, and the quality of your responses to blog posts. Make sure that you consult the blogsite for the grading rubric regarding participation and the blog posts.

 Students will be assigned to post summaries of readings on the blog along with questions for the class to consider.

**Writing Expectations**

 My standards for writing are rigorous. I will assess your writing based on clarity, organization, word usage, and sentence construction. You should have a clear understanding of baseline standards in these areas. I plan to edit carefully each assignment, including in-class writing assignments, for spelling, punctuation, and grammatical mistakes. I strongly you recommend a good writing book My favorite tools are *On Writing Well*, by William Zinsser and *Woe Is I* by Patricia T. O’Connor. Other excellent writing tools are: *Eats, Shoots, and Leaves*: *The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* by Lynn Truss and *Elements of Style* by William Strunk, Jr.

 Remember that running a “spell check” through your Word program is not the same as proofreading your work. Some students find it helpful to read their papers aloud to find errors. Please seek help from the Writing Center and other resources listed on the blog. I am available for consultation via email, during office hours, and by appointment.

* Your topic should be narrow enough to write a concise and convincing piece of research
* Anyone who reads your paper should understand it. You are writing for anyone who is interested; therefore, you must define your terms and organize your paper. Topic headings are a good way to lead the reader through your argument.
* Personal experiences and observations do not carry as much weight as an academic publication. Anecdotes and stories can illuminate, but they are no substitute for hard research, whether it is qualitative or quantitative.
* Avoid the temptation to write something you think I will agree with—you cannot be sure of my opinion in this class. During many classes, I will play “devil’s advocate” to spark discussion and to help you to think more critically. Integrity in writing includes writing about something that you believe in, not something that you believe can yield extra points from the professor.

**Criteria for the Research Paper**

* Clarity of your central argument(s). How clear and specific is (are) your central argument(s)? Your thesis should be revealed in an abstract on the cover page of your paper.
* Contextual background and support. Why should be care about the subject? Where does you argument fit in the existing literature?
* Persuasiveness and strength of your argument. How powerful is your evidence?
* Originality. Is your argument new and/or is your methodology novel?
* Recognition and discussion of various counterarguments
* Format, organization, grammar, spelling, punctuation

**Late Work**

Turning in late work reflects poorly on you. Please avoid it at all costs. Any late work receives a letter grade deduction for each class period it is late.

**Attendance**

Students are responsible for all information in the class, regardless of their personal attendance. If a student is absent, it is his or her responsibility to inquire about what they have missed. Absences due to university activities (e.g., sports, mock trial, etc.) must be discussed with the instructor before the relevant class period(s). An official notice must be shown to the instructor. Arrangements concerning absences are entirely at the instructor's discretion.

Please be on time for class to avoid unnecessary disruptions of speeches, lectures, and discussions.

We live in a digital age and you may need your laptop, tablet, or other device to take notes or to do in-class research. We will also do a lot of class discussion, so please be ready for us to ask you to put your screens away.

**Grievance Procedures**

Occasionally, students are unsatisfied with some dimension of the course. In such cases, you should first provide a written argument in support of your position to the instructors and request a meeting. All grade appeals on specific assignments must be made within one week of the return of the assignment.

\*\*Any students who need accommodations for learning or who have particular needs are invited to share these concerns or requests with the instructors as soon as possible.

Academic Honesty: Pledging

Students are expected to pledge the following statement on all assignments turned in for credit, including exams, papers and laboratory reports: "I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work." Academic honesty is—defined broadly and simply—the performance of all academic work without cheating, lying, stealing, or receiving assistance from any other person or using any source of information not appropriately authorized or attributed. The University of Richmond and your professors take academic honesty very seriously.

All students are responsible for maintaining the highest standards of honesty and integrity in every phase of their academic careers. The penalties for academic dishonesty are severe and ignorance is not an acceptable defense.

For more information visit:

http://studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/the-honor-code.htm

**Course Schedule**

**Part I. Introduction: What is Critical Race Theory?**

Thu 1.17- Why are we here? What do we want to understand? What do we know? What

do we want to know?

Thu 1.24 *Critical Race Theory*, Chapters 1-4

Thu 1.31 *Critical Race Theory*, Chapters 5-8

**Part II. Critical Race Theory: Key Writings, Application, and Narrative as Methodology**

Thu 2.7 “*Brown v. Board of Education* and the Interest Convergence Dilemma,” in *The*

 *Derrick Bell Reader*

“Why Obama? An Interest Convergence Explanation of the First Black President,” Richard Delgado

**Thu 2.14 RESEARCH PAPER THESIS AND OUTLINE DUE THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14**

Thu 2.14 “The Racial Preference Licensing Act,” “The Chronicle of the Space Traders,”

“Serving Two Masters,” and “Racial Realism,” in *The Derrick Bell Reader*

Thu 2.21 “The Last Black Hero,” “The Chronicle of the DeVine Gift,” “Strangers in

 Academic Paradise,” “Application of the ‘Tipping Point’ Principle to Law Faculty

 Hiring Practices,” “Memorandum to Harvard Law School Appointments

 Committee,” and “The Final Report,” in *The Derrick Bell Reader*

Thu 2.28 “Rodrigo’s Reconsideration: Intersectionality and the Future of Critical Race

Theory,” Delgado

Review for Midterm

**Thu 3.7 Midterm Exam: Due by Noon TODAY**

Thu 3.21 “Bamboozled”-Critical Race Theory in Film

**Thu 3.28 Full Draft of Paper Due Today**

Thu 3.28 Chapters 1-3, *White Rage*

Thu 4.4 Chapters 4-5, *White Rage*

Thu 4.11

Thu 4.18 Presentations

Thu 4.25 Presentations

**Thu 4.25 FINAL PAPER DUE TODAY**

1. Critical Legal Studies is a School of Critical Theory that emerged in the late 1970s. Scholars in the field challenged the notion that law is neutral. The most controversial assertion of this school was that law, in fact, codified the oppression of the poor and the material interests of the rich. Other aspects included the delineation of the political ends of laws, (legislative), from the judicial ends. CLS casts a critical eye on the function of laws as the protection of individual rights. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)