

PLSC 325: The Politics of Race in the United States

Spring 2017

Weinstein Hall, Room 209

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Office Hours: Tuesday/Wednesday 10:30-12 and by appointment

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Racial and ethnic conflict is a factor of contemporary life in our nation and in the world. If we are to understand ethnic conflict anywhere, it may help to begin to understand ethnic and racial conflict here in the United States. This course will focus on the tension and conflict surrounding the political, social, and economic inequality of African-Americans/Blacks. The reason for this focus is that African-Americans/Blacks are the largest minority group in this country and the only group that arrived in this country as slaves.

Some of the questions we will be asking are:

What is the politics of race? How does it differ from ethnic politics?

Why is racial conflict so intractable?

What is the role of culture and class in constructing race?

Who is responsible for resolving racial conflict?

The goals of this course are:

* to introduce you, the student, to the concepts and language of scholarship on race
* to expose you to the most recent historical scholarship on race
* to encourage you to think critically about race politics in the United States
* to help you to hone your ability to express complex ideas on paper.

This is a race politics class, and tense moments and class sessions are likely to occur. We should think of thee moments and sessions as “positive tension”. Challenging ideas help us grow as intellectuals and individuals. I will respect you and your thoughts during our journey through this difficult subject, and I hope you will respect me in turn. Please check your preconceived notions about race and politics at the door so that we can begin this journey with curiosity and enthusiasm. Keep your minds on ideas and systems, and not on people.

Books

*Racism without Racists*, Anthony Bonilla-Silva

*The Anatomy of Racial Inequality*, Glenn Loury

*Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates

*The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, George Lipsitz

Articles

The following articles are available on the Politics of Race Blog:

“The Case for Reparations”, Ta-Nihisi Coates

“Lee Atwater and the Southern Strategy”, Rick Perlstein

“I’m Still Lee Atwater”, John Brady

“Understanding and Addressing Contemporary Racism”, Gaertner and Dovidio

**Assignments**

Paper: 30%

This is a 20-page research paper.

Midterm: 30%

Blog Posts: 20%

Class participation: 20% (Includes in-class writing assignments, 5 percent, leading class discussions, 10 percent, and contributing to class discussions, 5 percent.)

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.

**In-Class Exercises**

In-class exercises/quizzes and homework cannot be made up for any reason. No assignments will be accepted after class on the due date except by prior arrangement or in the case of authentic, verifiable emergency. If a student does not turn in an assignment on the due date and has not made arrangements with the instructor beforehand, the student will receive a “0” (zero) on that assignment. Late assignments are docked one letter grade for each class day late. After four late days, a late assignment will automatically be given a zero. *After a grade is submitted, students have one week to resolve questions about the grade with the instructor. Questions about a grade must be submitted first in writing. After one week, the grade is final.*

**Late Work**

Turning in late work reflects poorly on you. Please avoid it at all costs.

**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.

Course Guidelines and Standards

“A” for class participation is awarded when students regularly initiate discussion. This means coming to class thoroughly familiar with the assigned reading and, therefore, prepared to raise questions, to open discussion, to identify topics of interest in the reading, and actively engage other students in the discussion. We also factor in your performance on the assigned presentations made on weekly viewing assignments. (This does not mean monopolizing a discussion, or shutting others out, or talking for its own sake rather than to make a point about the topic). [90-100 points]

“B” for class participation is awarded to students who participate regularly and productively in class discussion, who are prepared, and who are willing to engage. Students who earn “Bs” differ from “A” students in that the latter are self-starters who do not rely on the instructor's questions to set the agenda for discussion. [80-89 points]

“C” for class participation is awarded to those who participate on a regular, but less frequent basis than the B student. Students who earn “Cs” arrive prepared for class, but their contributions will indicate that less thought has been given to assigned materials. [70-79 points]

“D” for class participation is given to those who contribute infrequently to the discussion and whose contributions do not appear to arise from thoughtful consideration of the assignments. [60-69 points]

“F” for non-participation in class discussion. Of course, participation is impossible if you donʼt attend class. Frequent absences mandate F grades. [0-60 points]

**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.html>

Course Schedule

January 10 Read: “The Case for Reparations”, Ta-Nihisi Coates

Introductions and Review of Syllabus

Assignment of Class Discussants

January 17 In-Class Viewing: “Colorblind: Rethinking Racism”

Read: Chapters 1-7, *Possessive Investment in Whiteness*

January 24 Lipsitz: Chapters 4 and 5

Discussants: Robin Akers and Ross Gaber

January 31 Read: Chapters 7, 10 and 11, *Possessive Investment in Whiteness*

**Discussants: Chapter 7: Sean Fitzgerald; Chapters 10 and 11: Jabari Lucas**

Assignment Due: Paper Title, Abstract, and Working Bibliography

February 7 Read: *Racism without Racists*, Chapters 1-3

**Discussants: Chapter 1-Georgia Morley**

**Chapter 2 –Yosan Teklezgi**

February 14 Review for Midterm Exam

Read: *Racism without Racists*, Chapters 4-6

**Discussants:** **Chapters 4: Alexis Blake**

**Chapters 5: Joe Costello**

**Chapter 6: Ross Gaber**

Assignment Due: Paper Outline and Annotated Bibliography

February 21- Midterm Exam

SPRING BREAK MARCH 3-10

March 14 Read: *Racism without Racists*, Chapters 7-8

**Discussants: Chapter 7: Yosan Teklezgi**

**Chapter 8: Leila Balady**

March 21 Read: *Racism without Racists*, Chapters 9-11

**Discussants: Jabari Lucas, Chapter 9**

**Georgia Morley, Chapter 10**

**Dominik Tesar, Chapter 11**

In-Class Viewing, *Freedom on My Mind*

March 28 Read: *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality,* Chapters 1-3

**Discussant-Robin Akers-Chapter 1**

**Alexis Blake-Chapter 2**

**Joe Costello-Chapter 3**

April 4 Read: The Anatomy of Racial Inequality, Chapters 4 and 5

**Discussants: Chapter 4: Sean Fitzgerald**

**Chapter 5: Ross Gaber**

Read: “Understanding and Addressing Contemporary Racism,” Gaertner

and Dovidio-**Discussant: Dominik Tesar**

Assignment Due: Draft of Final Paper

Read: “I’m Still Lee Atwater” and “Lee Atwater and the Southern Strategy”-

April 11 Read: *Between the World and Me*, Coates-**Review of Book-Leila Balady**

Individual Presentations

April 18- Individual Presentations-**FINAL PAPER DUE**

**Our trip to the National Museum for African American History and Culture has been arranged for Monday, May 1st! Please begin to make plans to go with us. It is an all-day trip. Details are forthcoming!**