

Race and Ethnicity in American Society

Sociology confers on you an extraordinary autonomy, especially when you don't use it as a weapon against others, or an instrument of defence, but rather as a weapon against yourself, an instrument of vigilance.

– Pierre Bourdieu

CLASS DESCRIPTION

This course provides a sociological perspective on race and ethnicity in the United States. Such a perspective suggests that:

(1) Racial and ethnic categories – including ‘white’ – are the result of historical struggles over economic resources, political access, and cultural identity. These categories are being made and remade as meaningful today.

(2) Racism and ethnic prejudice and their corollary, white privilege, are institutionalized (part of our social organizations and, thus, the social structure), cultural (part of collective meaning making), and social psychological (part of our unconscious psychologies). Institutions and cultural products often reaffirm both conscious and unconscious prejudices.

(3) Racial and ethnic conflict reflects a constellation of ideological commitments (to ideas like individualism, meritocracy, and laissez faire capitalism) and serves to preserve material class privilege. Understanding how beliefs about race intersect with other beliefs individuals hold helps us think through interpersonal and societal conflicts that are overtly racialized as well as those that appear colorblind.

GRADE BREAKDOWN

Assignment	Percent of Grade
Participation:	10
Papers:	
• Identity:	30
• Pop Culture:	30
• News:	30

REQUIRED READING

Course Reader. The course reader can be assessed through Moodle (<http://moodle.oxy.edu/>).

You will be split into four groups. On some days, you will all read the same material, on other days, you will read the material assigned to your group, and on still other days, you will do a combination of both. While your group may do more reading than another group on some days, I have carefully distributed the readings so that the reading load is even across the semester.

For group-specific material, you should come to class prepared to explain your reading(s) to the 3/4ths of the students who did not read the same material. You are responsible for knowing, however, all of the material in the class. Thus, other students will depend on your explanation of your readings and you will depend on theirs. In many cases, readings that you were not directly assigned might be useful for your papers and I will expect you to use them accordingly. This makes attending class regularly essential.

COURSE POLICIES

- *Office Hours:* I encourage you to make an appointment outside of office hours or come by my office anytime. I am happy to discuss class concepts, college more generally, musings about majors, future planning, or graduate school.
- *Feedback:* I love getting feedback on my teaching and how the class is going. I value your input and I am willing to make changes to the class according to your preferences. Please share with me any comments, suggestions, and ideas you may have, and help me make this a great class. If you would like to do so anonymously, you can type and print out a note and drop it in my mailbox in Swan.
- *Class Demeanor:* As a student at Occidental and as a member of this class you must hold yourself and your peers to the highest standards of civil engagement and discourse. Chatting with your neighbor is frowned upon when I am lecturing and it is absolutely impermissible when other students are trying to participate. While we may find ourselves disagreeing, we must do so with respect, a commitment to hearing what others have to say, and a willingness to think and rethink our own positions. Personal insults have no place in the college classroom.
- *Special Accommodations/Learning Differences:* If you require assistance for classes or exams, please let me know as soon as possible. I will do whatever I can to help. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes a learning disability, I encourage you to contact the friendly folks over at the Center for Academic Excellence.
- *Accessibility:* I want my course to be as accessible to as many different people as possible. If there is any reason why the standard approach to college classrooms or coursework is difficult for you to accomplish, please come talk to me. This includes those of you with a learning or physical disability (as discussed above), those of you who have other emotional or psychological challenges, those of you who have had past experiences that make college attendance or class content anxiety-producing, those of you whose parents did not go to college (and can't help you understand the system as well as other parents might), those of you who are too shy to actively participate, those of you who have more responsibility than the typical college student (such as dependent parents, children, or an especially heavy workload outside of school), and other situations I can't anticipate. The earlier you come to see

me, the more I can do to try to work with you to alleviate the unique disadvantages you might face. I prefer that you come in the first two weeks but, if you do not and you decide you would like to, please do not hesitate to come to me at any time.

- *Grading Inquires*: All inquiries/disagreements regarding grades will be handled during my office hours or at another mutually agreeable time.
- *Make-up Exams*: Make-up exams will generally not be given without appropriate official documentation excusing the absence. Bring documentation with you to my office when you inquire about a make-up.
- *Assignments*: Papers/assignments must be handed in at the scheduled time and by the assigned mode. Late assignments are docked ½ grade per day. Computer and printing problems are not a good excuse for missing a deadline; make sure to print your papers early to avoid any such problems. Keep a paper and electronic copy of everything you hand in until you receive your course grade.
- *Academic Integrity*: Academic integrity violations, including plagiarism, will be taken very seriously. If you are not sure about what constitutes a violation of academic integrity, please see me as soon as possible. A description of Occidental's academic ethics policies is available in the Student Handbook and on the following webpage: www.oxy.edu/student-handbook/academic-ethics
- *Flexibility*: This syllabus only provides an approximate schedule for the course. I will discuss changes to the syllabus in class. It is your responsibility to keep up to date on class events and requirements. In addition, I reserve the right to give in-class quizzes on the readings if necessary (and re-calculate the distribution of graded material in accordance with this change).

COURSE SCHEDULE

Tuesday, Jan. 20 – Introduction

No Readings.

Thursday, Jan. 22 – Introduction

All: • *Breaking the Silence* by Tatum
 • *Failing to See* by Dalton

Tuesday, Jan. 27 – Introduction

Group One: • *Optional Ethnicities* by Waters
Group Two: • *Ethnic and Racial Identities of Second Generation Black Immigrants in New York City* by Waters
Group Three: • *The Continuing Significance of Race* by Feagin
Group Four: • *What White Supremacists Taught a Jewish Scholar About Identity* by Ferber

Part One: Theorizing Race and Ethnicity

Thursday, Jan. 29 – The Social Construction of Race and Ethnicity

- Group One: ● *Beyond Black* by Rockquemore & Brunnsma
Group Two: ● *Are Asian Americans Becoming “White”?* by Zhou
Group Three: ● *Brown-Skinned White Girls* by Twine
Group Four: ● *Just Walk On By* by Staples
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Tuesday, Feb. 3 – The Emergence of Race as a Concept

No Readings.

Film in class: *The Story We Tell*

Thursday, Feb. 5 – NO CLASS

Tuesday, Feb. 10 – The Emergence of Race as a Concept (continued)

- Group One: ● *Real Indians* by Garroutte
Group Two: ● *Becoming Hispanic* by Foley
Group Three: ● *White Negroes* by Pieterse
Group Four: ● *Asian American Panethnicity* by Espiritu
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Thursday, Feb. 12 – Discussion of First Analysis

No Readings.

REMINDER: FIRST PAPER DUE IN CLASS

Part Two: The Reproduction of Racial and Ethnic Inequality

Tuesday, Feb. 17 – Cultural Racism

- Group One: ● *TV Arabs* by Shaheen
Group Two: ● *Ling Woo in Historical Context* by Sun
Group Three: ● *Distorted Reality* by Lichter & Amundson
Group Four: ● *Winnebagos, Cherokees, Apaches, and Dakotas* by Merskin
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Thursday, Feb. 19 – Cultural Racism (continued)

- All: ● *Toy Theory* by DuCille
● *Flesh-Toned* by Wade & Sharp
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Tuesday, Feb. 24 – Social Psychology

No Readings.

Special Event: Brett Wheeler on Cognitive Dissonance, Jazz, and the Black Musician

Thursday, Feb. 26 – Social Psychology

- All: ● *Skull Face and the Self-Fulfilling Stereotype* by Wade & Sharp
● Harvard Implicit Test Website: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>
● *Racism in the English Language* by Moore

Tuesday, Mar. 3 – Discussion of Second Analysis

No Readings.

REMINDER: SECOND PAPER DUE IN CLASS

Thursday, Mar. 5 – Institutional Racism

No Readings.

Film in class: *The Way We Live*

SPRING BREAK (Monday, March 9th to Friday, March 13th)

Tuesday, Mar. 17 – Institutional Racism (continued)

- Group One: ● *Environmental Justice in the 21st Century* by Bullard
Group Two: ● *Savage Inequalities* by Kozol
Group Three: ● *Why Are There No Supermarkets in My Neighborhood* by Zenk et al.
Group Four: ● *The Making of Ferguson* by Rothstein
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Thursday, Mar. 19 – Institutional Racism (continued)

Special Event: Kenjus Watson, MEd on Race and Higher Education

- All: ● *Resituating Race* by Cobham & Parker
 ● *Welcome to Multicultural U.* by Mithers
 ● *Unqualified Kids* by Larew
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Tuesday, Mar. 24 – Institutional Racism (continued)

All: ● *Oppression* by Frye

- Group One: ● *Race and Criminal Justice* by Escobar
Group Two: ● *Race and Criminalization* by Davis
Group Three: ● *The Mark of a Criminal Record* by Pager
Group Four: ● *From Watts to Ferguson* by Perlstein
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Thursday, Mar. 26 – NO CLASS**Tuesday, Mar. 31 – NO CLASS****Thursday, Apr. 2 – White Privilege**

All: ● *White Privilege* by McIntosh

Part Three: Understanding Racial Conflict

Tuesday, Apr. 7 – Interpersonal Conflict

- All:
- *Color Blind Privilege* by Gallagher
 - *Is the Benign Really Harmless?* by Rains
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Thursday, Apr. 9 – Interpersonal Conflict (continued)

No Readings.

Film in class: *Black.White*

Tuesday, Apr. 14 – Interpersonal Conflict (continued)

No Readings.

Film in class: *Black.White*

Thursday, Apr. 16 – Interpersonal Conflict (continued)

- All:
- *Blaming the Victim* by Ryan
 - *Invisible Woman* by DeMott
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Tuesday, Apr. 21 – Societal Conflict (continued)

- Group One: ● *When the Melting Pot Boils Over* by Waldinger
Group Two: ● *America's Angriest White Men* by Michael Kimmel
Group Three: ● *The Uses of Poverty* by Gans
Group Four: ● *"We Are All Americans"* by Bonilla-Silva & Glober
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Thursday, Apr. 23 – Social Change

- Group One: ● *The Minority Rights Revolution* by Skrentny
Group Two: ● *The Genius of the Civil Rights Movement* by Morris
Group Three: ● *How the New Working Class Can Transform Urban America* by Kelly
Group Four: ● *American Racial and Ethnic Politics in the 21st Century* by Hochschild
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Tuesday, Apr. 28 – Discussion of Third Analysis

No Readings.

REMINDER: THIRD PAPER DUE IN CLASS

Thursday, Apr. 30 – Closing Thoughts

ASSIGNMENTS

Participation (10%)

Participation will be evaluated for each day of class. You earn participation credit for discussing the readings as well as sharing stories, thoughts, and opinions, asking questions, and responding to student inquiries. If you are absent, you will not earn participation points. Absences can be excused if they are for a legitimate reason (e.g. documented illness, family emergencies, etc.).

Attention Athletes: The participation policy applies to athletes. I understand that there may be an occasional conflict between class and your games or practices. However, do realize that any athletic activity that causes you to miss class more than two or three times in a semester is bound to have a significant negative effect on your participation grade. If you expect more than two or three conflicts between class and your athletic commitments, please speak with me as soon as possible so that we may decide whether it makes sense for you to take this class.

Papers (30% each)

Our everyday lives are saturated with racial and ethnic meaning. For these assignments, you are required to use concepts and readings from the class to analyze your own world.

First Analysis: Reflecting on your Racial and Ethnic Identity

Reflect on your own racial and ethnic identities, tying them into history, culture, and the social construction of these categories.

Consider: What are your racial and ethnic identities? Where did they come from? How do you know them? How are they reproduced in your life? How do they interact with other parts of your identity? Are they important to you? Why? Are they troubled? That is, do you or other people find that they cause confusion or distress? How and why?

Second Analysis: Race and Ethnicity in Popular Culture

Turn your critical eye to one manifestation of popular culture: a magazine, a website, a television show, a movie, or a product line. Taking your case in its entirety, explore how it reproduces or challenges racial and ethnic categories.

Consider: Who is the audience? Who is represented? How are they represented? What racial and/or ethnic categories are being reproduced or challenged? How? Where is whiteness? Are relations between different groups presented? How? What lessons do you think a reader/viewer is likely to learn?

Third Analysis: Race- and Ethnicity-Related Controversy in the News

Choose a topic that is overtly or, you think, covertly about race or ethnicity—for example, slavery reparations, Guantanamo Bay, affirmative action, Asian American success, immigration, the demographics of the United States, Obama’s presidency, police killings of civilians, the war on drugs, migrant farmwork, Sotomayor’s nomination to the Supreme court, terrorism, tribal gaming, poverty on reservations, or racial profiling—and investigate the way in which this issue is discussed in ten news articles in light of course material about interpersonal and societal conflict.

Consider: Do the reporters discuss race and ethnicity explicitly or implicitly? If implicitly, how do they nonetheless trigger racial and ethnic meaning? What ideological commitments does the reporter’s story belie? On what ideological commitments is he or she counting on among his or her readers? To what degree is the discussion about ideological commitments? And which? Is this topic also about material (dis)advantage? How do you know? Basically, what is this fight about? What different positions are being taken? And how can you explain those positions by considering the ideological commitments of the position-takers?

Logistics and Tips:

Analyses should not exceed three single-spaced pages in 12 point Times New Roman font with one-inch margins on all sides. Unusually wide or narrow margins or unusually large or small fonts only call attention to your effort to avoid meeting the expectations of the assignment.

Since engagement with the class material is an important part of this assignment, **I require references to at least four separate readings or class concepts in each paper.**

- A “reference” is the inclusion of a concept or an author’s argument (which sometimes, but not always, includes the use of a quotation). A good use of conceptual material is one that (1) helps push your analysis farther than it would have gone without the idea referenced and (2) draws from the unique and main points of the reading in question (as opposed to the introductory material or findings it cites from other studies).
- References to more complex ideas (“schema”) are likely to impress me more than references to simple ideas (“stereotype”) and make for a more sophisticated analysis. As you read over the concepts and think about your paper, don’t just use the ones you remember. Look up the ones you don’t. It’s those difficult ones that will give you a good paper.
- Additional references (more than four) are also likely to improve your grade as it suggests you are deep in the material and often complexifies your analysis.
- You need not include a bibliography if you use only class material.

Grading will consider the extent to which you conform to the assignment, your understanding of the concept(s), and the sophistication of your analysis. An “A” paper is not a good paper, it is a great paper. Even great writers only write great papers sometimes. It’s a rare prize.

To maximize your chance of getting a high grade, concentrate on writing an analysis that is sociological. Consider what is distinct about a sociological perspective on the case at hand. You should be looking for evidence of particular social processes so as to apply sociological concepts to everyday life. I am not looking for attributions of right and wrong (for example, explanations of who was racist). I am looking for an analysis that helps us learn something about how the world works by applying a sociological lens. To this end, be sure that you provide an analytic description of what you are studying: focus on drawing an overall conclusion about the case you are looking at; choose details that relate to the points you making (rather than trying to say everything about it); and organize your presentation so that the relationship between the details and your overall point is clear.