

The Philosophy and Politics of Race

Illinois State University
PHI 340: Topics in Political and Legal Theory
"The Philosophy and Politics of Race"
Fall 2002

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I. COURSE OBJECTIVES:

We take race for granted in the United States. We usually do not think there is anything wrong with the ways in which people are sorted into different races. In fact, we rarely question the so-called "naturalness" races. We often assume that the physical differences that make up different races have always been thought about in the same ways. Most of us understand racism as a matter of attitude and not as something deeply woven into our social structure. We further assume that, in a good liberal society, public policy questions are color-blind. Or, that all people of color experience racism in the same way. This course challenges these assumptions.

Philosophy and The Politics of Race is designed to explore questions raised by racial categorization. Although the class is framed philosophically, the readings are by necessity interdisciplinary. The first section of the class will ask students to begin unpacking race as a social, political, legal and biological category. We will explore questions such as: What does it mean to be a particular race? How is race tied to issues of privilege and oppression? What does it mean to say that race is a political construction. How should the idea of mixed-race be conceptualized? How do controlling images (stereotypes) influence policy making with racial overtones? In addition, students will be encouraged to think outside the Black/white model of racism and to think through gendered and class-specific dimensions of racial politics.

II. TEXTS:

- Gregory Williams, *Life on the Color Line: The True Story of a White Boy Who Discovered He Was Black*.
- Wright Printers. PHI 340 Course Packet.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

A. Attendance and Class Participation. This course is only as good as the students in it. Because this is a 300 level course, I expect that most of our time together will be spent

discussing articles. This means you must come to class prepared, that is, with questions about what you did not understand in the readings, and with a working knowledge of what you did understand. Since this class meets once a week, attendance and class participation are of the utmost importance.

IV. WRITTEN WORK AND EVALUATIONS: All work should be saved for your final portfolio...

- Journals, attendance, and quality class participation 20%
- Microessays 40%
- Two one-page critiques of class members drafts 10%
- Final research project and presentation 30%

Grades will be assigned using the following criteria:

"A": The student easily integrates all parts of the question into a precise, accurate, well-organized, and well-argued discussion. Answers demonstrate a working knowledge/understanding of the readings, lectures, and class discussions. The student has the ability to put relevant ideas into her or his own words. Answers are well supported with relevant evidence. The student is attentive to spelling and grammar

"B": The student answers the question with a good understanding of the material by drawing on relevant data for support, but is either missing some important aspect of the answer, or has arguments that are not fully developed. Some supporting information may not be complete or relevant. The answer demonstrates some ability to put ideas into his or her own words. The student has a few errors in spelling and grammar.

"C": The student's answer does not show a distinct understanding of the material; It only reiterates lectures, discussions, readings. Most supporting information is not relevant to the question, but is a random recitation of ideas from class notes. There is no organization of material independently of lecture notes. Some errors in principle or fact. No argument development. The student has serious errors in grammar and spelling.

"D": The student's answer shows only vague familiarity with lecture notes, and readings, and no general understanding of question. Serious errors in principle and fact. Little or nothing to organize. Ideas are presented randomly and unclearly. In some cases irrelevant information is presented as an answer to the question. The student's grammar and spelling are poor.

"F" The student's answer is a clueless attempt to make something up that sounds like class lectures. Poor organization, grammar and spelling.

V. ACADEMIC HONESTY: Most of you know this, but it bears repeating.... Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will not be tolerated. Students who cheat or otherwise engage in significant ethical violations can expect me to pursue such matters to the full extent of

ISU policy, up to and including expulsion from ISU. Any work submitted with evidence of cheating or plagiarism will automatically receive a failing grade. The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers defines plagiarism as follows:

- repeating another's sentences as your own,
- adopting a particularly apt phrase as your own,
- paraphrasing someone else's argument as your own,
- presenting someone else's line of thinking in the development of a thesis as though it were your own.

It is your responsibility to understand how to cite scholarly material properly. Students should consult the Student Judicial Office website to familiarize themselves with ISU policy on plagiarism:

<http://www.ilstu.edu/depts/SDRS/CodeofConduct.htm#D>. Academic Dishonesty

VI. CLASS SCHEDULE: This, like the universe, is subject to change. I reserve the right to shift assignments and dates to accommodate the pace of the class. Readings are to be prepared for the day they are listed (e.g., on 21 August we will be discussing 1-7 of Williams, so you should have read it for that class.

Students will have short writing assignments due for each class. We will divide that class into microessay groups. Each group will be responsible for the material for a particular day. Microessay group numbers will be listed in the margins. The rest of the class will have short journal entries for that day.

A. Introduction: What Does it Mean to Have a Race?

M 19 Aug. Introduction. Business and Discussion

W 21 Aug. Williams, *Life on the Color Line*, Chapters 1-7.

M 26 Aug. Williams, *Life on the Color Line*, Chapters 8-14.

W 28 Aug. Williams, *Life on the Color Line*, Chapters 14-21.

B. Science Constructs Race

M 2 Sept. Anonymous., "On the Variety of the Human Species" (1795)
Virey, "Natural History of the Negro Species" (1835)

W 4 Sept. Gould, "American Polygeny and Craniometry..."

C. Race as a Social, Political and Legal Construction

M 9 Sept. Omi and Winant, "Racial Formation in the United States"

W 11 Sept. López, "The Legal Construction of Race"

D. Understanding Race Privilege and Oppression as Systems

M 16 Sept. Frye, "Oppression"

Video Clip: "A Traffic Accident in Buffalo"

W 18 Sept. MacIntosh, "Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"

M 23 Sept. Bailey, "Despising an Identity They Taught Me to Claim"

W 25 Sept. Frankenberg, "Thinking Through Race"

M 30 Sept. Pratt, "Identity, Blood, Skin and Heart"

Trip to McLean County Historical Society

W 2 Oct. hooks, "Representations of Whiteness in Black Imagination"

Angelou, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings"

E. Mascots, Stereotypes and Myths: Where is the Harm?

M 7 Oct. Collins, "Mammies Matriarchs and Other Controlling Images"

Espiritu, "Ideological Racism"

W 9 Oct. Honor the Chief Society, "Frequently Asked Questions"

ACLU, "Chief Illiniwek Issue as Victory for Free Speech"

Video Clip: "In Whose Honor?"

M 14 Oct. Spindel, selections from Dancing at Halftime

Video Clip: "In Whose Honor?"

W 16 Oct. Collins, "The Power of Self-Definition"

F. Race, Gender and (Hetero)sexuality:

M 21 Oct. Hall, "The Mind that Burns in Each Body"

W 23 Oct. Dorothy Roberts, selection from Killing the Black Body

M 28 Oct. Charles Mills, "Do Black Men have a Moral

Duty to Marry Black Women?"

G. Subversion and Resistance: Towards New Alliances

W 30 Oct. Anzaldúa, "La Conscientia de la Mestiza"

M 4 Nov. Lugones, "Playfulness, Loving and World Travel"

W 6 Nov. Smith, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place"

M 11 Nov. Bailey, "Locating Traitorous Identities: ..."

W 13 Nov. Paul Kivel, "How White People Can Serve as Allies"
hooks, "Beloved Community"

M 18 Nov. The Color of Fear (Video and Discussion)

W 20 Nov. The Color of Fear (Video and Discussion) or Student Presentations

M 25 Nov. Student Presentations

W 27 Nov. Thanksgiving. No Class

M 2 Dec. Student Presentations

W 4 Dec. Student Presentations

VIII. SPECIAL ACCOMODATIONS:

Any student in need of a special accommodation should contact 438-5853 (voice), 438-8620 (TTD).

Children are welcome in class if they are not disruptive and can sit quietly. Keep in mind some of the material in this class may not be for G audiences.