

Race and Ethnicity

Sociology 275

Spring 2007

Office Hours: T / TH 2:30-4:15 & W 1-3 p.m. or by Appointment

T / TH 12:45-2:05

ARH 131

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**“Not everything that is faced can be changed,
but nothing can be changed until it is faced”** -- James Baldwin

Course Overview:

- Post 911, we are in need of people who have invested the time and energy to develop thoughtfulness and sensitivity when it comes to issues of race and ethnicity in the 21st century. We need people who understand and can speak intelligently about racial and ethnic issues, who know the facts (or can be honest when they don't), and are able to juggle the complicated factors informing such issues. But equally important, we need people who understand first hand just how hard it is to engage with others around race and ethnicity and have developed the stamina to “hang in” there even during difficult times of institutional and individual inquisitions.
- The purpose of this course is to support students in developing these complimentary strengths by providing a comprehensive “taste” of the race/ethnic relation fields and ample opportunities to engage with one another around them. While our focus rests squarely in developing an understanding of contemporary American race and ethnic relations, it is not possible to talk about the present without also acknowledging the past and roles played by earlier social and historical factors.
- Racial and ethnic differences in America have always been the basis for a socially constructed system of hierarchy and domination. As such, I take a developmental approach to the study of race, racism and ethnicity, looking at how we have learn to “being raced, “do ethnicity” and how easily this learning has been used to justify racial and ethnic inequality, prejudice, and discrimination.
- My approach is decidedly multi-racial and multi-ethnic; demographic projections make clear the limitations of a strictly black-white paradigm. Nevertheless, I believe the “racial and ethnic group of the week” approach works well with “theme specific” readings to help us understand how individuals and groups resist social oppression. Therefore, as we study challenges to oppression in a sociological context, we will consider what methods of social change are best suited for confronting the racial and ethnic tensions in the United States today.

- My approach is also decidedly scholarly, process-oriented. I place a high premium on paying attention to **how** people learn to engage American racial and ethnic minorities as well as **how** each of us examine our own “racial and ethnic autobiography.”
- Lastly, my approach is guided by certain conceptual assumptions about race:

Operating Assumptions

- ❖ There is no such thing as a “pure” race. All racial categories are socially constructed and have less to do with biology than you might think. Rather than fixed or static then, racial categories are dynamic.
- ❖ We learn how to “do” race. That is, we learn the rules surrounding race, the meanings associated with each race, and what boundaries are salient, etc.
- ❖ Race is relational and hierarchical (White is meaningless without Black, etc.).
- ❖ We are all strangers in racial and ethnic histories of America – most of us know very little about other race or ethnic experiences.
- ❖ Race/racism operates at the personal, interpersonal, structural/organizational, and international levels.
- ❖ Our nation’s race relations history can best be described as involving both progress and setbacks: *“two steps forward, one step back. One step forward, two back...”* The point is that racial healing can and does take place – but it’s a never ending process.

Learning objectives:

1. To become familiar with the major racial and ethnic groups that is present in the United States.
2. To become familiar with who and what is “whiteness” and the politics of “being white.”
3. To become familiar with the kinds of questions and problems that has concerned sociologist and policy makers who study race and ethnicity.
4. To learn to apply sociological concepts to our examination of race and ethnicity in America. This includes:
 - Being able to explain how social structures and institutions affect personal and institutional experience.
 - Being able to make the connection between private experience and public issues.
 - Being able to determine when and why is personal experience significant on a political level?
 - Being about to see how internalized racial and ethnic oppression is learned and can be unlearned for social change.

5. To gain an understanding of the connection between the historical experience of people of color in the United States and the contemporary issues now facing those groups.
6. To acquire an understanding of the dynamics of racial domination and resistance to domination. This includes seeing how domination shapes conceptions of race and ethnicity, and how resistance to domination challenges these conceptions and breaks down racial and ethnic hierarchies.
7. To improve one's skills in writing, critical thinking, oral presentations, and class discussions involving race and ethnicity.

Design of the course:

Our class meetings will combine a variety of teaching techniques—brief instructor lectures, small and large group presentations, role-playing, debates, dyads discussions, out-of-class field assignments and several videos. Moreover, the class is structured to facilitate interaction and open exchange. Additionally, I expect each student to contribute to discussion—which means that being prepared for class is an absolute as a prerequisite for listening to each other, which requires an atmosphere of patience, a sense of humor, and mutual respect.

***Instructor thanks Mia Tuan, Joe Feagin, Irma McClaurin, Lisa Avalos, Douglas S. Massey, Anthony Lemelle, and Henry A. Walker for their contributions to this syllabus.

Required Texts:

- Feagin and Feagin, *Racial and Ethnic Relations*, 7th edition, 2003
- Heldke and O'Connor, *Oppression, Privilege, and Resistance*, 2004

Reserved Readings:

- Lipsitz, George, Introduction & Chapter 1 “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness”, Temple University Press, 1998
- Rothenberg, Paula S., Introduction “White Privilege”, Worth Publishers, 2005.

Reserved Films:

- Race: The Power of Illusion Part II and III
- Gentleman's Agreement

There is EXTENSIVE reading in this class and you are responsible for keeping up each week. I've picked contemporary readings that are engaging.

Assignments and Evaluation:

Your final grade will be based on the following:

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| Attendance, Class Participation, etc. | 10% |
| Film Reviews (2)..... | 15% |
| Mid exam (Two Quizzes and Essay) | 30% |
| Hubbell Project..... | 15% |
| Final Exam | 30% |

Mechanics of Course:

- All papers will be graded and returned within **two weeks** after due date.
- Do not turn in any assignments through email.
- Use a “buddy system” to keep up with the class assignments when absent.
- Expect emails from instructor regarding assignments and course schedule changes.
- Instructor reserves the right to add or delete any part of this syllabus.
- Any student absent more than four classes should consider dropping the course.

Class Participation and Discussion Guidelines

This class may be one of the most difficult you will take during your undergraduate experience, not because my tests or grading policy are unusually formidable, but because we'll be talking about a topic rarely broached outside of the safety of our immediate circle of friends and family, if at all. We do not leave our racial identities at the classroom door; we wear them on our faces and, for some, close to our hearts. It is no wonder, therefore, that “academic” discussions about race and ethnicity can be filled with emotion and volatility or joy and relief in being understood or heard by others. Clearly, to talk openly about race and racism means being willing to take risks. And yet, for meaningful learning to take place, we have to communicate with one another and share our conceptions and misconceptions about the role race plays in society and in our lives.

Your personal input and feedback is crucial to the success of this class and the richness of your experience and learning in it. Thus, we will be encouraging you to step outside of your comfort zone both intellectually and interpersonally. From previous experience, I have found that the best classes are the ones where **you** believe that your risk taking is respected and honored by others. I believe the design of the course will create a supportive climate, but ultimately the biggest responsibility falls on each of your shoulders. How successful this class is will largely depend on how successful we are in honoring both the racial and ethnic commonalities and differences among us. We don't have to agree with each other or “convert” others to our way of thinking. **We do, however, have an opportunity to be curious about why others think the way they do.**

So, for the next 14 weeks we are an intentional community of sorts, representing diverse experiences, opinions, and identities. **Challenges facing us include:**

1. Developing “zoom lens” capability: seeing and understanding the multiple levels in which race operates (from macro analyses of power, privilege, inequality down to micro analyses of individual's lives)
2. Being able to address the complexity of issues (most issues rarely “black/white” but shades of gray); Now more than ever we need thoughtful thinkers
3. Not overplaying race or ethnicity -- reducing each other to an ‘essentialized’ identity (as if we know a person's story simply based on their race)

4. Not overplaying individuality -- denying that our individuality has anything to do with race and ethnic selves (as though larger social structures/categories haven't shaped who we are)
5. And finally, remembering that we learn and unlearn misinformation about "others" and have the choice to do so in class and out and throughout our lives.

Hubbell Project: We will visit and examine a historical district of Des Moines through the lens of Hubbell Elementary School, its origins and challenges, and develop a pictorial / text timeline showing the way the institution contributes to the cultural richness of the community.

Class Schedule

Week 1 (Jan. 23, 25): Introduction – Laying Down the Groundwork

- Introduction to the Race and Ethnicity Course
- What is race and ethnicity? (Preface to Feagin xvii-xviii)
- Feagin's: The Racial and Ethnic Mosaic (p. 1-2)
- Basic review of concepts
- Discussion of Film: Race: Power of an Illusion (Part II and III) **RESERVED: AV Center, 2nd Floor ARH**
- Film Review assignment: **DUE: Feb. 8th by 3 p.m.**

Week 2 (Jan. 30, Feb. 1): Theory- Laying Down the Groundwork

- Feagin, Chapters 1, 2
- Defining Adaptation and Conflict Strategies
- Basic Review of Concepts

Week 3 (Feb. 6, 8): Historical and Economic Context of U.S. Racial and Ethnic Groups

- Feagin, pg. 49-58: Chapter 3 (English Americans)
- Feagin, Chapter 4 (Irish and Italian Americans)
- Film: Gentleman's Agreement **RESERVED: AV Center for Feb. 9-12**
- Film Review Assignment: **DUE: Feb. 22nd by 3 p.m.**

Week 4 (Feb. 13, 15): Historical Context of Racial and Ethnic "Other"

- Feagin, Chapter 5 (Jewish Americans)
- Feagin, Chapter 6 (Native Americans)

Week 5 (Feb. 20, 22): The Changing Face of Race

- Feagin, Chapter 7 (African Americans)
- Feagin, Chapters 8 (Mexican Americans)
- Take-Home Quiz I (Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)

Week 6 (Feb. 27, Mar. 1): The Changing Face of Race

- Feagin, Chapters 9 (Puerto Rican and Cuban Americans)
- Feagin, Chapter, 10 (Japanese Americans)

Week 7 (Mar. 6, 8): The Changing Face of Race

- Feagin, Chapter 11 (Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, and Asian Indian Americans)
- Feagin, Chapter 12 (Arab Americans)
- Take-Home Quiz II (Chapters 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12)

Week 8 (Mar. 13, 15): White Privilege

- Rothenberg, Preface, Introduction and Part I and Part II
- (RR) Lipsitz, George Possessive Investment in Whiteness, Introduction and Chapter 1
- Mid Exam: Part I (Quizzes I & II)
Part II (In-Class Essays)

Spring Break (March 17 – April 1)**Week 9 (April 3, 5):** Heldke and O'Connor

- Chapter 1: Oppression: General Theories (1, 2, 3)
- Chapter 2: Axis One: Racism (4, 5, 6, 7, 10)

Week 10 (April 10, 12): Heldke and O'Connor: continued

- Chapter 3: Axis Two: Sexism (11, 12, 13, 14, 15)
- Chapter 4: Axis Three: Heterosexism / Homophobia (16, 17, 19, 20)

Week 11 (April 17, 19): Heldke and O'Connor: continued

- Chapter 5: Summing Up: Axes of Oppression (21, 22)
- Chapter 6: and 7 Privilege: (Introduction, #22 (Bailey), 23, 24, 25)

Week 12 (April 24, 26): Heldke and O'Connor: continued

- Chapters 8 and 9: (26, 27, 28, 29)
- Chapter 10: Complicating Theories of Oppression and Privilege: (Introduction, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34)

Week 13 (May 1, 3): Heldke and O'Connor: continued

- Chapter 11: Recognizing Multiple Axes of Oppression (35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41)
- Chapter 12

Week 14 (May 8, 10): Heldke and O'Connor: Theorizing Resistance and Strategies of Resistance (8 Group Presentations)

- Read Introduction
- Chapters 13 and 14

- Chapters 15 and 16
- Chapters 17 and 18
- Feagin Chapter 13
- Feagin Chapter 14
- The Future of Race and Ethnicity in the 21st Century: Projections

EXAM WEEK: May 14-18

Scheduled Final Exam: Friday, May 18 at 2-5 p.m.