Race and Ethnicity

Sociology 275
Fall 2005
Office Hours: Thur. 1:00-4:00 and Fri. 1:00-4:00
MWF 11:00-11:50
ARH 302
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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 operate 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:
   o Being able to explain how social structures and institutions affect personal and institutional experience.
   o Being able to make the connection between private experience and public issues.
   o Being able to determine when and why is personal experience is significant on a political level?
   o 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.

**Required Texts:**
- Rothenberg, Paula, *White Privilege*, __________
- Heldke and O’Connor, *Oppression, Privilege, and Resistance*, 2004

**Reserved Readings:**

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:

- Attendance, Class Participation, etc. .................................................5%
- Film Review Assignment ...............................................................5%
- Six Quizzes ..................................................................................30%
- White Privilege Assignment .........................................................10%
- Brixton Assignment ....................................................................10%
- Final Research Paper Assignment ..............................................40%

**Mechanics of Course:**
- All papers will be 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.

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 15 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.
**Class Schedule**

**Week 1 (Aug. 26): 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: ARH 224, August 24 & 25, 7:00-9:30 p.m.**
- Film Review assignment: **DUE: September 2**

**Week 2 (Aug 29, 31, Sept 2): Theory- Laying Down the Groundwork**
- Feagin, Chapters 1, 2
- Defining Adaptation and Conflict Strategies
- Basic Review of Concepts

**Week 3 (Sept 5, 7, 9): 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)
- Quiz

**Week 4 (Sept. 12,14,16): Historical Context of Racial and Ethnic "Other"**
- Feagin, Chapter 5 (Jewish Americans)
- Feagin, Chapter 6 (Native Americans)
- Quiz

**Week 5 (Sept 19, 21, 23): The Changing Face of Race**
- Feagin, Chapter 7 (African Americans)
- Feagin, Chapters 8 (Mexican Americans)
- Quiz

**Week 6 (Sept 26, 28, 30): The Changing Face of Race**
- Feagin, Chapters 9 (Puerto Rican and Cuban Americans)
- Feagin, Chapter, 10 (Japanese Americans)
- Quiz

**Week 7 (Oct 3, 5, 7): The Changing Face of Race**
- Feagin, Chapter 11 (Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, and Asian Indian Americans)
- Feagin, Chapter 12 (Arab Americans)
- Quiz

**Week 8 (Oct 10, 12, 14): White Privilege**
- Rothenberg, Preface, Introduction and Part I and Part II
• Rothenberg, Part III
• Rothenberg, Part IV
• (RR) Lipsitz, George *Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, Introduction and Chapters 1, 2
• Quiz

**Fall Break (Oct 17-21)**

**Week 9 (Oct 24, 26, 28):** A Case Study: *Brixton*
- Introduction, pg vii to 63
- Pages 64-112
- Pages 113-184

**Week 10 (Oct 31, Nov 2, 4):** Brixton: continued
- Pages 185-222
- Guest Speaker: Dorothy Schwieder
- *A Case Study: Oppression, Privilege*, Introduction, Chapter 1

**Week 11 (Nov 7, 9, 11):** Heldke and O’Connor: continued
- Chapter 2
- Chapter 3
- Chapter 4

**Week 12 (Nov 14, 16, 18):** Heldke and O’Connor: continued
- Chapter 5
- Chapters 6, 7
- Chapters 8, 9

**Week 13 (Nov 21, 23):** Heldke and O’Connor: continued
- Chapter 10
- Chapter 11
- Chapter 12

**Week 14 (Nov 28, 30, Dec 2):** Heldke and O’Connor: continued Overcoming “Isms”
- Strategies of Resistance
- Chapters 13, 14
- Chapters 15, 16
- Chapters 17, 18
- See Film: "House of the Land and Fog"

**Week 15 (Dec 5, 7, 9):** Heldke and O’Connor: and Feagin
- Film:
- Feagin, Chapters 13, 14
- The Future of Race and Ethnicity in the 21st Century: Projections
• Class Wrap up and Review for Exam

EXAM WEEK Dec. 12-16**** TAKE HOME FINAL DUE: ____________.