Purpose & Objectives

America’s founding principles of equality and equal opportunity have long been the subject of interpretation, debate, national angst and widespread (oftentimes violent) conflict. No more is this the case than when we talk about the issue of race. While biological notions of race have lost their scientific validity, race remains a salient issue in American life as a social and political reality sustained through a wide variety of media forms. The broad purpose of this course is to better understand how notions of race have been defined and shaped in and through these mediated forms. Specific attention is given to the ways that race is articulated in forms of mass media and popular culture.

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Analyze, articulate and defend their own understanding of controversial terms such as: race, racism, racists, systemic racism; bigotry, institutional racism, colorblindness, and others;

2. Assess and evaluate the dominant, divergent ideological positions on race and racial politics in the United States;

3. Identify, analyze and deconstruct how the aforementioned concepts and ideological positions are constructed, represented, and debated in various forms of media.

Required Readings

Primary Reading


**SAMPLE SYLLABUS** – *This syllabus is provided as a sample. Course content may vary.*

*Studies 39: 732 - 743.*


**Recommended Reading**


**Assignments/Learning Activities**

**Reading Summaries**

Students are required to complete a 2-page summary of all reading assigned for a given class. Each summary should include, in narrative form, a: statement/description of the author’s thesis/primary argument(s) in a given reading segment; a description, in the students’ own words, of the major concepts central to the authors’ thesis/primary arguments, along with the student’s explanation of what those major terms mean in the context of the reading segment; and an assessment/evaluation of the author’s thesis/arguments. These may include descriptions of questions the author has left unaddressed or unanswered, general criticisms of the author’s arguments, or reactions (positive, negative or otherwise) to the specific evidence-examples-data the author uses to substantiate his or her claims. In the case that a specific reading assignment includes multiple chapters, students should present a synthesis of the all the material covered in the manner stated above.

At the end of each summary, each student must include three (3) probing questions based on the assigned reading, meant to stimulate discussion during the class. Each summary is to be typed, in 12-Point, Times or Times New Roman Font (ONLY), with 1-inch margins on all sides of the page, and include the student’s name, the due date of the assignment, and the author/chapters assigned for reading.

**Online Discussion Posts**

Students are required to engage each other in online discussion about the topics covered in the class inasmuch as they relate to current examples, instances, reports, and controversies of racial politics and discourse in the public/political sphere (news, popular culture, institutional policies, court rulings, etc.). This discussion will be facilitated through the Facebook page of the Project on Race in Political Communication [http://www.facebook.com/RaceProject]. Each student must become a “fan” of the group in order to post and engage in discussion on the site. Aside from this page, you are not otherwise required or encouraged to become a “friend” of any other student in the course or the professor.

Each week (every 7-day period beginning at the start of term), each student will be required to post and respond to at least 1 (each) discussion on the page. Each post should be a current link to a news/opinion article, video or some other form of publicly accessible media that illustrates...
some aspect of racial discourse in today’s public sphere. The posted link should be accompanied by an explanation of why you posted it – what you find significant, interesting, exemplary, controversial, objectionable, etc. about the content of the link. Each discussion response should respond directly to something posted by one of the other members of the page (currently, some 800 individuals). Your response should be substantive – that is, present at least one full argument in response to the post you’ve chosen to discuss. Your one response post may be a response to someone who responded to your posted link.

**Group Paper**
Each student will participate in a group responsible for producing an essay on a particular case study related to the intersection of racial discourse and the media. For example, a paper might focus on how conservatives used Justice Sandra Sotomayor’s statements (“Wise Latina,” and others) about race to undermine her confirmation to the U.S. Supreme Court. The paper will be no fewer than 25 pages in length. Each student in the group will be graded on his or her own individual work product related to the presentation, in addition to the group grade for the assignment.

**Individual Essay**
Each student will be responsible for producing an individual essay in the form of an extended editorial. Students should choose a contemporary racial controversy, choose a recent example that represents the nature of that controversy, choose, state and defend a position related to the controversy. The length of the paper should be between 1,200-1500 words.

**Grading**
Each assignment will be graded as either Satisfactory (S) or Unsatisfactory (U). If an assignment receives a (U), the student will be given the opportunity to redo the assignment until deemed satisfactory. No one will be able to pass the course without satisfactorily completing the group assignment. If a group assignment is unsatisfactory, each member of the group will receive an Incomplete grade as their final grade. The grade will be changed to the appropriate grade once the paper has been resubmitted and deemed satisfactory or other arrangements have been made between the professor and individual group members. The following letter grades will correspond to the number of assignments the student completes satisfactorily.

A = All assignments satisfactorily completed
B = 80% of all assignments, including individual and group paper completed satisfactorily
C = 80% of all assignments, not including individual paper (but including the group paper) completed satisfactorily.
D = 65% of all assignments, not including individual paper (but including the group paper) completed satisfactorily.
F = Below 65% of all assignments completed.
Late Assignments
A hard copy of each assignment is to be turned in at the end of class the day the assignment is due in order to be considered on time. If you must miss class on a given day, you must make arrangements for your assignment to be turned in either to me in class or to my mailbox.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Preparation
You are expected to come to class each week fully prepared, which means having read all assigned readings, and having done so in a way that demonstrates adequate comprehension of the material, not just a mere surface reading. It also means that you should come to class having spent some time having carefully reflected on course material, lectures and discussion in a way that allows you to develop a set of questions, critiques, and discussion points related to course material.

Participation
In line with the last point, I expect your preparation to be the basis for your full participation in each course. Participation includes contributing insights, questions, explanations, etc. to class discussions, contributing outside material at times, taking detailed notes on any class lectures, etc. Since each student will take some responsibility for the conduct of the course, I expect that you will be prepared to engage with both me and your fellow classmates who, I will assume have valuable knowledge and perspectives on the course material being covered.

Attendance
Come to class. You will receive much less from the course if you do not attend regularly and less than regular attendance will make it difficult for you to complete your assignments satisfactorily. If you miss class, YOU are solely responsible for getting caught up about lecture material, notes, assignments, announcements, etc. Do not expect your professor to fill you in. If you have a specific question about something you missed, you should feel free to ask.

Quality of Work and Academic Integrity
You are expected to complete quality work reflective of your intellectual abilities, your fitness for admission to this university and to this department. This includes the amount of research and work put into your readings and assignments, your attention to details such as proper grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, writing style and format. You are expected to turn in your own work. Plagiarism will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Critical works of various texts abound in the public arena, be assured that should you, in light of your failure to devote the requisite time and attention to your assignments, choose to rely on any of them without proper citation and referential use, you risk failing the course.

Reasonable Accommodation Policy
If you have a disability that affects your performance in this course, please notify me at the beginning of the semester and necessary special arrangements can be made to accommodate you.
SAMPLE SYLLABUS – This syllabus is provided as a sample. Course content may vary.
Course Outline

*All class content and dates are subject to change at the professor’s discretion.

Section 1: Conceptualizing Race, Racism and the Ideology of Colorblindness

Approx. Coverage Dates: September 15-29


Major Questions:

1. How does the ideology of colorblindness influence our attitudes about and interactions with members of differing racial groups?

2. In what ways does and/or should America’s racial history influence contemporary discourse about racial definition, the persistence of and solutions to racism, and public deliberations about race-related public policy?

3. How do our disparate conceptualizations of and understanding about race, racism, racial inequality and racial discrimination make it difficult for us to talk openly and honestly about race in America?

Primary Readings: Bonilla-Silva
Class 1 – Chapters 1-3
Class 2 – Chapters 4-6
Class 3 – Chapters 7-9
Class 4 – Summary/Review
Class 5 – Summary/Review

Section 2: Racial Talk: The Formation and Flow of Black Counter-Publics and Oppositional Discourses

Approx. Coverage Dates: October 1 - 15

Key Concepts: Ideology, Black Ideology, Black Autonomy, Black Conservatism, Black Counter-public, Black Elites, Black Feminism, Black Inequality, Black Information Networks, Black Liberation, Linked Fate, Black Political Attitudes, Black Nationalism, Black Publis Space, Civil Rights
Movement, Integrationism, Assimilation, Black Authenticity, Black Institutions.

Major Questions:

1. How does and has language, and the circumstances of everyday talk among African Americans contributed to the formation of disparate categories of Black political ideology?

2. What role have Black institutions historically played in resisting White supremacist ideology and racial discrimination and what value do those institutions have for stimulating citizen activism within the contemporary sphere of U.S. racial politics?

3. In what ways have Black media institutions been supplanted in the United States, and what impact have Blacks’ differential access to and control over mass media had on Black Americans’ ability to define and shape a coherent mass public for the purposes of resisting racial hegemony?

Primary Readings: Harris-Lacewell

Class 1 – Introduction & Chapter 1
Class 2 – Chapters 2 - 3
Class 3 – Chapter 4
Class 4 - Chapters 5 - 7
Class 5 – Summary/Review

Section 3: Racial Discourses in Mass Media & Popular Culture

Approx. Coverage Dates: October 20 – November 17

Key Concepts: Media Framing, Objectivity, Media Representation, Prototypes, Stereotypes, Public Opinion, Schema, Media Segregation, Taboo, Racial Humor, Blackface

Major Questions:

1. How have media portrayals of racial groups in the United States impacted American public opinion about those groups?

2. In what way have media representations of race and media framing of racial issues contributed to the formation and persistence of the dominant ideologies about race in America (those discussed primarily in section 1)?
3. In what ways have television/film content about race over the past forty years impacted our ability, inability, reluctance, etc. to talk about race in America?

4. Is it possible in today’s media landscape of television/film/popular music to form effective narratives and counter-narratives about race that speak truth to power and influence public opinion about racial issues?

Primary Readings: Entman, Hall

Class 1 – Chapters 1-3
Class 2 – Chapters 4-8
Class 3 – Chapters 9-12
Class 4 – Prime Time Television/1970s
Class 5 – Cont.
Class 6 – Prime Time Television/1980s
Class 7 – Cont.
Class 8 – “Prime Time” Television/Contemporary
Class 9 – Cont.

Section 4: Race Appeal: Racial Discourse & American Political Campaigns

Approx. Coverage Dates: November 19 – December 10


Major Questions:

1. How have dominant norms about racial equality influenced the strategic possibilities of mobilizing racial attitudes in political campaigns?

2. What varieties of race-based appeals appear in political advertisements and what constitutes a “racial appeal?”

3. How have or might racial discourse in political campaigning influence broader frames and discussions of race, race-based public policy and governance?

Primary Readings: McIlwain & Caliendo, Mendelberg

Class 1 – Mendelberg
SAMPLE SYLLABUS – This syllabus is provided as a sample. Course content may vary.

Class 2 – McIlwain & Caliendo

Class 3 – Open

Class 4 – Open

Class 5 – Open

Individual Essay Due: Tuesday, December 1
Group Paper Due: Friday, December 18