W.E.B. Dubois, the renowned African American historian and sociologist, predicted that the question of the “color line”, and the ways in which our society has been divided on the basis of race, would be the primary problem for American society in the 20th century. Fifty years later, Swedish sociologist Gunmar Myrdal characterized America’s race problem as a moral dilemma, one that threatened the veracity of nation’s proclaimed commitment to equality and democracy.

Though the 21st century is only a few years old, it seems clear that controversies related to race, class, language, ethnicity and culture, will persist into this century as well. America is in the midst of a seismic demographic transformation. By 2041, most demographers expect that those who have historically been in the minority (at least as determined by membership in specified racial and ethnic groups) will be in the majority, and those who previously were in the majority (those we have historically categorized as “whites”), will be in the minority.

In this new course, students will be encouraged to think about the ways in which race has influenced the character of public education and the struggle for democracy in American society. They will also be encouraged to reflect upon the ways in which this struggle has shaped the educational experiences of those who have historically been discriminated against. Throughout the course, students will be provided with analytical tools to make sense of the many issues involving race and education in American society today. They will also be provided with practical skills for working in the public schools as educators who can make a positive difference in the lives of the children they serve.

Our nation’s public schools have long served as a key site where conflicts related to race and racial privilege have played themselves out. As the institution primarily responsible for introducing youth to the values and norms regarded as central to “American culture”, schools have historically played an important role in perpetuating the social, political and economic order. In addition to teaching basic academic skills schools also play a role in sorting students into career trajectories based upon measures and perceptions of their acumen and ability. These experiences influence the occupations and ultimately the adult roles and occupations they will assume later in life.
Given the important role they play it is not surprising that schools are also key places where Americans have struggled with basic principles of equity, merit, equal opportunity and civil rights. Public education is the only service that all students, regardless of their status, are entitled to in America. Yet, it is also an institution that is profoundly influenced by the inequities that are prevalent in this society. Today, our public schools are by far the most accessible institutions in American society and for many, the only means available to achieve social mobility and the hope of a better life.

Through an examination of the evolution of public education we will trace the process through which groups that have historically been excluded and discriminated against have gradually been granted the rights associated with full citizenship. Access to quality public education has never been equal for all segments of our society. Over 50 years after the historic Brown decision, both explicit and subtle forms of discrimination can still be observed in our nation’s schools. This course will provide students with a basis for understanding the historical and sociological processes that have shaped the character of public education in the United States. By focusing deliberately and explicitly on race, we hope to illuminate why and how the poorest and neediest children in American society continue to be relegated to inferior schools and classrooms, and why education continues to be so important to ameliorating inequality. Understanding the contradictions, controversies and dilemmas created by the hope and unfulfilled promise of American education is a central theme of this course.

In this course, we begin by interrogating the very existence of “race groups,” utilizing the perspectives of sociology and history to question these categories long framed as clear-cut realities in American society. We continue by examining the structural and informal ways in which Americans build and sustain racial hierarchies in schools and beyond. Students are provided with practical skills for working in the public schools as educators who can make a positive difference in the lives of the children they serve. We conclude the course with sustained analysis of key solutions currently proposed to achieve racial justice through education in America. Throughout, we make use of a variety of sources -- academic scholarship, films, government documents, newspapers, and the testimony of practitioners, policymakers, and students -- to identify the deepest dilemmas of practice, policy, and theory pertaining to race in American education. In grappling throughout the course with these central controversies of race and schooling in the United States, we hope to provide students with theoretical and practical assistance in responding to these dilemmas as they continue to play out in American life.

**Learner Objectives:** Students enrolled in the course should be able to:
1) describe the ways in which race has influenced the character of public education and the struggle for democracy in American society;
2) analyze the ways in which the struggle for racial justice has shaped the educational experiences of those who have historically been discriminated against;
3) evaluate the many issues involving race and education in American society today.

**Required Books:**


**Course Readings and Lectures:**

**Week 1: Sept. 5**  
Introduction to Course

**Week 2: Sept 12**  
Race, Education, and American Dilemmas


**Week 3: Sept. 19**  
Race and Schooling in American Society


**RESPONSE PAPER DUE**
Week 4: Sept. 26
Education and Inequality


Week 5: Oct. 3
What Works in School: Motivating Students to Learn


**RESPONSE PAPER DUE**

Week 6: Oct. 10
Midterm

Week 7: Oct. 17
What is Good Teaching?


**RESPONSE PAPER DUE**

**Week 8: Oct. 24**

What Works in School: Strategies for Maintaining Safe and Orderly Classrooms


**Week 9: Oct. 31**

Teaching English Language Learners


**RESPONSE PAPER DUE**

**Week 10: Nov. 7**

**Re-Thinking Education: Making School Matter**


**Week 11: Nov. 14**

**Engaging Parents and Community**


**RESPONSE PAPER DUE**
Week 12: Nov. 21
Thanksgiving Break – No Class

Week 13: Nov. 28
Why Some Schools Beat the Odds and Some Schools Don’t


Week 14: Dec. 5
Making A Difference Through Education


**RESPONSE PAPER DUE**

Week 15: Dec. 12
Lessons from School Reform


Assignments:

There will be an in-class midterm exam on October 10th. The exam will consist of two essay questions (students will be able to choose from five possible questions that will be distributed in advance). The midterm will be worth 35% of the final grade.

There will be a take-home final exam distributed December 7th, due December 12th. Like the midterm, students will be given a choice of five possible questions and be expected to respond to three. Directions on what will be expected will be distributed prior to the exam. The final will be worth 45% of the final grade.

Students will write a response paper every other week. Prompts for the response papers will be handed out a week in advance. 20% of the final grade will be based on the response papers. All students are expected to attend class regularly and to participate in class discussions. Students will also be encouraged to participate in site visits to schools throughout the semester.

A message from NYU to all students:

1) ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All students are responsible for understanding and complying with the NYU Steinhardt Statement on Academic Integrity. A copy is available at http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.

2) STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities provides comprehensive services and programs for undergraduate and graduate students with hearing and visual impairments, mobility impairments, learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders, chronic illnesses, and psychological impairments. The Moses Center functions to determine qualified disability status and to assist students in obtaining appropriate accommodations.
Possible Evaluation Rubric:

Here is an example from the approved course, Growing Up in America.

Grading Rubric:

A: Outstanding
Students who earn an A for class participation are consistently present and prepared for class, synthesize course materials, contribute insightfully and analytically, listen well to others, and generally move the discussion forward and are actively engaged each class. For written work, an “A” applies to outstanding student writing. A grade of “A” indicates not simply a command of material and excellent presentation (spelling, grammar, organization, writing style, etc.), but also sustained intellectual engagement with the material. This engagement takes such forms as shedding original light on the material, investigating patterns and connections, posing questions, and raising issues.

An “A” paper is excellent in nearly all respects:
- It is well argued and well organized, with a clear thesis
- It is well developed with content that is specific, interesting, appropriate and convincing
- It has logical transitions that contribute to a fluent style of writing
- It has few, if any, mechanical, grammatical, spelling, or diction errors
- It demonstrates command of a mature, unpretentious diction

B: Good
Students who earn a B for class participation generally contribute consistently and thoughtfully and listen well to other but may be less consistent in their participation and/or their presence in class and may be less likely to move discussion forward with their contributions. On written assignments, a “B” is given to work of high quality that reflects a command of the material and a strong presentation but lacks sustained intellectual engagement with the material.

A “B” paper shares most characteristics of an “A” paper, but
- It may have some minor weaknesses in its argumentation
- It may have some minor lapses in organization and development
- It may contain some sentence structures that are awkward or ineffective
- It may have minor mechanical, grammatical, or diction problems
- It may be less distinguished in its use of language

C: Adequate
Students who earn a C for class participation do not contribute regularly and may be absent from class regularly and/or their contributions to class discussion are often tangential and unclear and they do not listen well to others. Written work receiving a “C” is of fair overall quality but
exhibits a lack of intellectual engagement as well as either deficiencies in the student’s command of the material or problems with presentation.

A “C” paper is generally competent; it is the average performance. Compared to a “B” paper, it may have a weaker thesis and less effective development.

- It may have serious shortcomings in its argumentation
- It may contain some lapses in organization
- It may have poor or awkward transitions
- It may have less varied sentence structures that tend toward monotony
- It may have more mechanical, grammatical, and diction problems

D: Unsatisfactory

Students who earn a D for class participation have spotty attendance, come to class unprepared, and make comments that are off-topic. On written work, the grade of “D” indicates significant problems with the student’s work, such as a shallow understanding of the material or poor writing.

- It presents no clear thesis
- It displays major organizational problems
- It lacks adequate support for its thesis
- It includes irrelevant details
- It includes confusing transitions or lacks transitions altogether
- It fails to fulfill the assignment
- It contains ungrammatical or poorly constructed sentences and/or demonstrates problems with spelling, punctuation, diction or syntax, which impedes understanding

F: Failed

Students who earn an F for class participation also have spotty attendance, come to class unprepared, fail to participate, demonstrate lack of engagement, and might create a hostile environment in the classroom. On written work, an “F” is given when a student fails to demonstrate an adequate understanding of the material, fails to address the exact topic of a question or assignment, fails to follow the directions in an assignment, or fails to hand in an assignment.

NOTE: Pluses (e.g., B+) indicate that the paper is especially strong on some, but not all, of the criteria for that letter grade. Minuses (e.g., C-) indicate that the paper is missing some, but not all, of the criteria for that letter grade.

** This rubric is adapted from those developed by Prof. Fabienne Doucet and Prof. Helen Nissenbaum, NYU Steinhardt.