Sociology 185D: Theories of Race and Racism

Fall quarter, 2018
Professor Howard Winant
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Time: TTh 200-315pm
Place: Lecture - Phelps 1260
Section – Girvetz 2128, Th 700-750pm
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ISSUES OF THE COURSE

This course is about the sociology of race. We place particular emphasis on the dynamics of racism. Because the sociology of race is so huge, we take a "topics" approach, focusing on some key approaches to the subject. This year, alongside the two books that we read on racial theory (Omi and Winant 2015; Singh 2018), we also look at immigration (Park 2018), the KKK (Gordon 2017), and the moral movement for racial and social justice (Barber and Wilson-Hargrove, 2016). There is a fair amount of reading.

Some brief notes about race and racism, and also about ethnicity. All these concepts need to be carefully defined and thought about. The meaning of these
terms may at first appear obvious, but it is not. One of our key tasks in the course will be to clarify understandings of these and other race-related ideas.

Race shapes both individual identity and social institutions. At its most basic level the race concept signifies on the human body: it links identities and interests -- economic, political, social, and cultural -- to different types of human bodies (sometimes called "phenotypes"). On the level of identity (the "micro-level"), race is a crucial component of one's self-knowledge and knowledge of others: we expect everyone to have a racial identity. Yet at the same time we experience uncertainty and conflict about the meaning of race in our personal lives and our race-based relationships with others. Over the past decades, racial identity has become a more prominent public issue. It is a lot less taken for granted than it used to be, so all of us, whatever our racial group, are forced to think about it more.

On the level of large-scale social structures (the "macro-level"), race is an important factor in the social system. Thus we see economic rewards, political activity, social space, and even cultural tastes being organized on a racial basis. Race is involved in the operation of many key social institutions, for example in the employment decisions of corporations, in electoral campaigns and policy-making within the political system, in education and access to education, in social control like policing and imprisonment, in immigration, and in the way society is represented in various cultural forms such as the mass media and the arts. Here in the university we can see that numerous issues have a racial dimension, such as: admissions and faculty hiring, relations with the surrounding neighborhood, content of the curriculum, and tolerance/anymosity among student groups.

Ethnicity is often equated with race, but it is different. Although the two overlap to some extent, the concept of ethnicity does not relate to the human body. It is about the cultural identities and differences within and among human groups. The beliefs they share, the gods they worship, their shared (or shared imaginary) history, their music, their language, and even their cuisine, are some of the elements that determine their ethnic identity.

So race and ethnicity are not the same. Yet they are not entirely different either. What is a "racial" characteristic or group at one time or in one place may be an "ethnic" one at another. Some examples: Jews were considered a race in Nazi Germany but they are an ethnic group in the contemporary U.S. The Irish were considered a race when they first immigrated to the U.S. in large numbers (in the 1840s), but they are an ethnic group today. In Africa before the Atlantic slave trade began (around 1530 CE), there was no race; there were no "Black people"; instead there were Bakongo, Ovimbundu, Wolof, and numerous other ethnic groups. The slave trade lumped these peoples together according to their appearance. In other words, ethnic groups can be racialized and racial groups can be deracialized or ethnicized.
Racism has various meanings. It can refer to beliefs and attitudes, or what we commonly call prejudice: attributing negative characteristics or values to members of a racially-defined group. It also refers to various types of actions, such as discrimination: treating members of racially-defined groups differently because of their race. Another form of action to which the term racism refers is the violence practiced against individuals or groups because of their race: e.g., lynching (against individuals) or genocides or "ethnic cleansing" (against groups). Finally, racism can refer to social structures, patterns of racial inequality that are the result of injustices practiced in the past, whose legacy continues in the present even if few people deliberately seek to perpetuate it. This is perhaps the most controversial form of racism: it is often called institutional or structural racism. Each of these understandings of racism has its limits in describing the phenomenon, but they are all useful tools for analyzing the complexities of racism in contemporary society.

THE CURRENT MOMENT

I’m not going hide it: this is a time of racial crisis. After decades of political effort to achieve greater racial equality, inclusion, and justice, after movement struggles (and some state actions too) designed to curtail racism, the tables seem to have turned with the 2016 election. The electoral campaign and administration of Donald Trump have been explicitly aimed at supporting whites and white supremacy; they have attacked immigrants, the poor, and working people – not all non-white, but disproportionately so. Centrally involved in this process have been attacks on other “outside” groups and issues: women, LGBT people, the environmental and labor movements.

The Trump administration has in many ways repudiated the legacy of the civil rights movement, the legacy of Dr. King and those of the feminist, labor, and antiwar movements of the past. Trump is supported by millions of whites who are in general nativist (anti-immigrant), Negrophobic, Islamophobic, and sometimes fascist. They are often “aggrieved white men” who resent what they perceive as a loss of status after the fall of the Jim Crow South and the rise of “second-wave” feminism. In carrying out this political turn, the Trump administration exhumes and repeats some of the worst episodes and traditions of US history: mass deportations (also carried out by Obama and FDR, Democratic Party heroes), the white racist terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan, the American Native Party (the "Know-Nothings" of the 1840s and 1850s), and the America First movement, led by Charles A. Lindbergh, of the late 1930s and early 1940s.

In response to this, though, the anti-racist movement legacy has re-emerged as well. Civil rights and civil liberties organizations, the immigrants rights movement, as well as numerous grass-roots groups and networks, have mobilized to defeat the racial reaction that is underway. The legacy of Dr. King, Malcolm X, Cesar Chavez, and Robert F. Kennedy is not dead.
I have designed this Soc 185D course to look long and hard at present US racial conditions. I don’t expect everyone to agree with me, and indeed I welcome open and honest debate about the issues I have just listed. For that reason the Soc 185D class has been reorganized in regard to teaching approach as well as in respect to the course content studied. These approaches are outlined below in the syllabus, particularly in the “Discussion Section” and “Written Work” material below.

READING


These books are on 2-hr reserve at the Davidson Library. They are available for purchase at the UCEN bookstore (buy them quickly, because they never order enough). They may also be ordered on line (sometimes at a discount) at http://bigwords.com, http://www.booksamillion.com/, http://www.powells.com, or at other online outlets of your choice. (Note: I’m not sending you to Amazon, which is both a sweatshop and a monopoly in my view.)

DISCUSSION SECTION

This class is adopting a new approach to discussion section. Instead of having three separate, required sections, we are going to have just one – not required -- section. It will meet Thursday 700-750pm, in Girvetz 2128.

The agenda of the section will be open, but it is intended to be a forum where people can discuss issues of race and racism. These will be keyed to material we are covering in the main class, but the section will also be a place where people can discuss personal or political issues. The same guarantee on “participation,” stated in the next part of this syllabus, applies to the section as it does to the main class.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance, Study, Honesty and Plagiarism: You will not do well in this course if you do not attend regularly and engage with the material. Attendance is taken in the main lecture class by means of a sign-up sheet. Class attendance and participation account for 10% of the final grade. Failure to study or attend class will result in poor grades, as surely as night follows day.

Participation and the “no dissing” rule: Participation can be a major issue in courses on race. Since race and racism are highly emotional topics, students sometimes feel uncertain about saying what is on their minds. They wonder if what they think and feel is “correct” and whether they might offend others. It is logical to feel this way, but it is also important to feel safe enough to speak in class. In more than 30 years of teaching the sociology of race I have rarely encountered an intentional effort by a student to offend anyone else. Therefore I make the following commitment to you: I will protect your right to present your views, even if they are unpopular, so long as you are not being dishonest or putting down anyone else. This guarantee is designed to facilitate discussion of sensitive topics in class.

Honesty: I view honesty as particularly important in efforts to teach and learn about race. My commitment to academic and personal honesty is absolute, and I expect a similar commitment from you. This class cannot be used for provocation or deception, including self-deception. Your views are welcome, subject only to the condition just stated about honesty and respect for others.

Plagiarism and cheating have become major issues in higher education in recent years, unfortunately. Plagiarism is defined as occurring “…when a writer deliberately uses someone else’s language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source.” This means taking material from somewhere else (like the web, a book, or another student) without citing that source. Plagiarism can also occur without directly quoting a source, for example when one repeats someone else’s idea or concept of (paraphrasing), without acknowledging the source. The way to stay out of trouble is this: When in doubt, cite the source.

Plagiarism or cheating in this class may lead to your failing, or worse. It can mean a mandatory disciplinary hearing before the Dean of Students, or indeed suspension from the university.

Written Work: This course meets two Sociology major requirements: theory and race/ethnicity/nation.

GauchoSpace: To navigate this course you must use GauchoSpace. You found this syllabus on GauchoSpace. There you will also see links to the assignments, and links as well to assigned internet-based sources. Assignments are submitted
and graded/returned on GauchoSpace, and my powerpoint lecture slides are posted on GauchoSpace at the end of each week.

In this class there are three assignments: an autoethnography, a critical reflection essay on one of the two theoretical books assigned (Omi and Winant 2015; or Singh 2017), and a final essay in response to a prompt. Instructions for completing these assignments are given below. Written work should always be word-processed and double-spaced, with adequate margins. It will be submitted, graded, and returned with comments, all on GauchoSpace. Always keep a copy of all the work you turn in, preferably on a disk as well as in printed form. Assigned reading is due in class on the date listed (see "Schedule of Classes," below).

*Autoethnography*

In this assignment you focus on yourself and your understanding of the meaning of race and racism. Think about your own racial identity, look at your experience and your history through the lens of race consciousness. Consider yourself as the subject of your own research. How, when, and where did you learn about race? How, when, and where did you become aware of your own racial identity? How was your community of origin structured racially, and how were you (and others you knew) located within it? What were the key incidents that shaped your race-consciousness: what someone told you, what you saw, how you were treated or treated others, the racially-informed emotions you experienced and why: fears, pride, alienation, shock, pleasure, sadness, etc. What effects did these experiences have on your personal development and thinking? In your paper’s conclusion, explain how and why the incidents or lessons you learned about race and racism that you write about in your essay shaped your present views on the subject.

--C. 1500 words (five double-spaced pages), 20% of final grade. DUE ON GAUCHOSPACE SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14, BEFORE 600PM.

*Critical Reflection Essay on one of the Two Assigned Racial Theory Texts*

This assignment is more-or-less a take-home MidTerm. Omi and Winant 2015, and Singh 2017 are two prominent critical race theory texts in circulation now. The books overlap but also differ.

Omi and Winant offer their racial formation theory as an account of “the sociohistorical process by which “racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed” (109). They provide a great deal more than that: their theory of racial “projects”; their accounts of the rise of the post-WWII movement for racial justice (“the great transformation”) and of the “racial reaction” that arose to block it; their discussions of ethnicity-, class-, and nation-based theories of race, and their analysis of “colorblind” approaches to race and racism, among other matters.
Singh approaches race and racism as a "long war," an ongoing historical conflict, often violent but also legal, economic, political, and cultural, that shaped US history in important ways, and continues to do so in the present. He deals extensively with issues of repression: policing, incarceration, and empire are considered as some of the ways that race and racism have developed over US history. In many ways, he argues, the US could not have been created, and could not exist today, without a comprehensive commitment to racial despotism. Because his theory is about race as war, and war always has at least two sides, Singh also deals with resistance, opposition, anti-racism, and anti-imperialism. But his main focus is placed on racial rule, not racial resistance.

Final Essay in Response to a Prompt

This essay responds to the following prompt:

Until shortly after WWII, the US took race and racism for granted. Jim Crow had been in place since about 1880, the “second Klan” had attained a great deal of power up to the 1920s, and anti-immigrant movements and laws dominated the US from the 1920s to the 1960s. Then, after WWII, things changed: the US armed forces were desegregated in 1948, the 1954 Brown decision attempted to desegregate schools, and the Montgomery bus boycott, led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., demanded and won desegregation of that city’s public transportation system in 1955. Immigration from the “third world” – Africa, Asia, and Latin America – was vastly expanded after 1965. All these events, and many others too, contributed to the rise of the Civil Rights movement, and many other movements besides. From then until now, over decades of struggle, the US attempted to become more racially egalitarian. Of course there were ups and downs, but everyone, even the advocates of “colorblind” racial policy, at least claimed to believe in racial equality.

But after 2016 and the election of Trump, something basic changed. Charlottesville happened. The Muslim ban happened. The US government attempted to ban many types of immigration, undo voting rights, and stigmatize people of color (especially Latin@s and Muslims, but also Blacks, Asians, and Native Americans). It no longer cared about integration or racial equality. In many ways the Trump presidency and Trump’s supporters yearn for the “good old days” of Jim Crow, closed borders and “zero tolerance” immigration policies, and a return to official, state-supported racism.

What accounts for the major shift in the meaning of race and the nature of racism in the US after 2016? Why did the Trump administration attempt to reverse
decades of consensus on the US’s commitment to racial equality – however unstable and problematic -- that had existed after WWII?

Relying on the assigned texts, develop an argument that answers those questions. You may use a particular case, like voting rights or immigrants’ rights, or you may offer a broader analysis.

--C. 2500 words (10 pages); be sure to cite effectively from the texts you use. 40% of final grade. DUE ON GAUCHOSPACE THURSDAY DEC. 13 BEFORE 600PM.

When and How to Cite a Text

You will be citing text in your written assignments for this class. Do so as follows:

When: Not only when you quote, but when you paraphrase or draw an idea from a text, you must cite the source.

How: Place the citation, including the page number, in parenthesis at the appropriate point in your essay. For instance: (Singh 2017, 103). Then at the end of the paper, have a section called Works Cited or Bibliography. In that section, list the work cited, as follows:


Do the same thing with all your citations. If you use additional sources, treat them the same way. If you repeat sources, just use the parenthetical cite; you don’t have to repeat the entry in the bibliography.

Please be aware that I require adequate citation of sources: books, articles, internet-based..., there are no exceptions. You have been warned. I take plagiarism very seriously. If you do not produce your own material, you will not only fail the class, but you may also be subject to university disciplinary action, which could include suspension.

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GRADING RULES, LATE AND INCOMPLETE ASSIGNMENTS
Assignments are afforded the following percentages of the final grade:

Attendance: 10%
Auto-ethnography: 20%
Critical Reflection Essay: 30%
Final Essay in Response to a Prompt: 40%

Attendance is taken in the lecture by means of a sign-in sheet.

Attendance at the discussion section is encouraged but not required.

Failure to complete any assignment gets you a 0% on that assignment. Turning in an assignment late gets you one grade-level reduction on that assignment (e.g., from A- to B+), unless other arrangements have been made with the instructor.

Incompletes ("I" grades) will not be given except by written arrangement with the instructor.

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SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Week 1

Thurs, Sept 27
Introduction to the course; discussion of requirements, readings, section etc.
Discussion of themes of race and racism.
FIRST SECTION MEETING – 700PM, GIRVETZ 2128

Week 2

Tues, Oct 2
Omi and Winant vii-74

Thurs, Oct 4
Omi and Winant 75-136

Week 3

Tues, Oct 9
Omi and Winant 137-184
Thurs Oct 11
No reading assignment
Prepare “Auto-Ethnography” assignment
Be prepared to discuss your work for this assignment in class.
“AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY” ASSIGNMENT DUE ON GAUCHOSPACE SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14, BEFORE 600PM.

Week 4

Tues, Oct 16
Omi and Winant 185-269

Thurs, Oct 18
Singh ix-73

Week 5

Tues, Oct 23
Singh 74-122

Thurs, Oct 25
Singh 123-189

Week 6

Tues, Oct 30
Gordon xi-62

Thurs, Nov 1
No reading assignment
Prepare “Critical Reflection Essay”
Be prepared to discuss your work for this assignment in class
“CRITICAL REFLECTION ESSAY” ASSIGNMENT DUE ON GAUCHOSPACE SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 4, BEFORE 600PM.

Week 7

Tues, Nov 6
Gordon 63-138

Thurs, Nov 8
Gordon 139-180

Week 8

Tues, Nov 13
Gordon 181-209

Thurs, Nov 15
Park 6-68

Week 9

Tues, Nov 20
Park 69-124

Thurs Nov 22
Thanksgiving holiday

Week 10

Tues Nov 27
Park 125-184

Thurs Nov 29
Barber and Wilson-Hargrove ix-66

Week 11

Tues., Dec 4
Barber and Wilson-Hargrove 67-135

Thurs, Dec 6
Last day of class
No reading due: discussion based on your work for your final paper

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Thursday Dec 13
FINAL ESSAY IN RESPONSE TO A PROMPT DUE ON GAUCHOSPACE BEFORE 600PM.