

**SOC301 Race and Ethnicity**  
**Lasell University - Spring 2023**  
Professor: Betsy Leondar-Wright

**Required textbooks** (on sale in the bookstore and on reserve in the library):

- McClure and Harris, *Getting Real About Race*, Sage, 2nd edition, 2015
- Lui et al., *The Color of Wealth: The Story Behind the US Racial Wealth Divide*, 2006

If buying the books poses a financial hardship, please speak to the professor.

## **FOCUS AND GOALS OF COURSE**

When the US elected our first black president in 2008, many said we had become a post-racial society. But that assessment turned out to be far off base. Hate crimes against Latin American immigrants, Muslims and Jews have become much more common. The deaths of unarmed Black men at the hands of the police sparked a “Black Lives Matter” movement that thrust racial injustice back into the spotlight. Segregation, voter disenfranchisement and discrimination based on race were outlawed in the 1960s, yet each continues in new ways.

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Connect your own racial identity and family history with the historical events that widened gaps among racial and ethnic groups;
- Distinguish among different understandings and types of racism;
- Explain racial differences in average income and wealth, homeownership, incarceration rates, graduation rates and other inequities;
- Plan, carry out and evaluate original social science research;
- Apply sociological theories\* to current events and racial controversies;
- Join the national conversation about race and racism in a more informed way; and
- Evaluate advocacy efforts to reduce racism.

\* Some of the key theory concepts covered: Frame theory/framing; The Thomas theorem; Racialization/racializing; Essentialism/essentializing; Implicit bias; Internalized racism; Institutionalized/structural racism

### Summary of deadlines

Essay on racial/ethnic identity - January 30

Hypothesis for opinion study - February 15

Research plan for opinion study - March 1

Interview notes for opinion study - April 3

Research report on opinion study - April 19

Presentation in class - April 24

Final exam as scheduled during May exam period

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**A. Essay on racial identity** – up to 10 points towards your final grade.

Due January 30. Minimum 400, maximum 750 words of text (1½ to 3 double-spaced pages).

How do you identify yourself by race and ethnicity? How have your parents' and grandparents' racial self-identities differed &/or been similar over time? What historical events affected your family's racial caste and race-base advantages and/or disadvantages? Which readings so far have seemed most relevant to your family's experience, and how? Besides these four questions, feel free to write about race in relationship with your family heritage in any way. Include references to at least two readings.

## **B. Research assignment on public opinion about controversies related to race – up to 50 points**

Over the semester you will create and carry out an original sociological study and report your findings. There are 5 deadlines, explained in more detail on an assignment sheet (handed out in class). One point will be taken off for each day late without a documented excuse.

### 1. Hypothesis - due February 15 (up to 5 points)

Define a controversial public issue related to race or immigration, two or more social groups who might tend to have different opinions on the issue, and a hypothesis. Fill out hypothesis form.

### 2. Research plan – due March 1 (up to 10 points)

### 3. Interview notes – due Wednesday April 3 (up to 5 points)

4. Research report – due Wednesday April 19 (up to 15 points) – minimum 750 and maximum 1500 words of text and one bivariate or multivariate table with percentages. It won't affect your grade whether your hypothesis is confirmed or unsupported by your data, only whether you carried out a careful study and wrote it up accurately and thoughtfully.

### 5. Presentation of findings on April 24 – up to 15 points

5-minute presentation summarizing your findings to the class, with visual aid. (Some students with strong findings will also have an opportunity to present at the Symposium on April 27.)

## **C. Final exam – up to 20 points**

From the list below of 8 possible questions, two broad questions and two topical 'why' questions will be randomly selected for an essay test during exam week. It will be a closed-book, offline exam, with one page of self-created notes allowed if uploaded to Canvas before the exam time.

### Broad questions

1. What is a "race"? What are some other common definitions and why are they inaccurate?
2. What are some meanings of the word "racism"? Which one do you think best fits racism in the US today, and why?
3. Compare a colorblind approach with a critical race theory approach to race and racism in the US today, giving examples. (\* "Critical race theory" is the scholarly tradition that McClure, Harris, Lui et al. and the professor draw from.) How does the US look to holders of each theory?
4. What would it take to bring about racial justice in the US, in your opinion? Describe some past and present efforts to reduce racism, and give your opinion on their effectiveness.

### Topical 'why' questions:

5. Why is the rate of homeownership much higher for white Americans than for African Americans and Latinos/as? Why do Asian Americans have homeownership rates part way between the white and Black levels?
6. Why is the median wealth of white families over ten times the wealth of black and Latino/a families? Implicate at least two institutions of US society, using the term "institutionalized" in your answer.
7. When someone commits a racist hate crime, what justification might they be using to explain why? Use the word "frame" in your answer.

8. Many ethnic and religious groups have faced racism over the course of US history. Pick two groups and describe the historical context of the beginnings of their mistreatment, using the term “racialization/ing” in your answer.

**D. Class participation** is a very important part of the course, because we will learn from interacting with each other, and because summarizing the readings aloud will help anchor the ideas in your mind. Each class can add approximately half a point to your final grade. Here are ways to build up your class participation score:

**a) Demonstrate understanding of the readings.**

Readings listed for each session should be finished before class. You are expected to be able to answer general questions about authors’ main points in class, verbally and in writing. In many class sessions we will do an exercise based on the reading. Prepare as if every class included a quiz.

**b) Participate in discussions**

Share your thoughts and opinions, and listen to others. Too much silence, excessive talking without listening, or looking at or listening to unrelated material during class will cost points off your class participation grade. Cell phones, smart-watches and laptop internet connections must be turned off during class; laptops may be used only for taking notes offline and doing classroom exercises.

**Grading** will be on a 100-point scale.

1. Essay on racial identity – up to 10 points
3. Research report – 5 scores totaling up to 50 points
4. Final exam – up to 20 points
5. Class participation and evidence of reading comprehension – up to 20 points

## SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

### OVERVIEW SECTION

1. Wednesday January 18 – Family heritage; How do you think about race and ethnicity?
2. Monday January 23 – What’s a “race”? What’s “ethnicity”? Overview of course  
*Reading:* Essay 2 Buffington “...Naturally Good Athletes” - There will be a quiz on this reading
3. Wednesday January 25 – Racism, old and new  
*Readings:* Essay 6 Ioanide “Obama Says Blacks Should...”; and [“Where is Critical Race Theory Under Attack” EdWeek article](#)

### A FEW CURRENT CONTROVERSIES

4. Monday January 30 – Anti-immigrant attitudes on the rise  
*2 Readings:* Essay 17 Cebulko “We Need to Take Care...” and Essay 8 Domino Rudolph, “My Family Had to Learn English...”

**Deadline:** Essay on racial identity

5. Wednesday February 1 – Increased Islamophobia

2 Readings: Essay 4 Garner and Selod “Is Discrimination Against Muslims Really Racism?” and Essay 10 Ghazal Read “‘But Muslims Aren’t Like Us!’”

6. Monday February 6 – Symbols: Native American team names; taking a knee; Confederate flag  
*Reading:* Essay 11 Williams “But It’s Honoring!...”

7. Wednesday February 8– The N-word and other controversies over terms  
2 Readings: Essay 3 Koch “Native American/Indian...” and Essay 22 Harkness “Why Do They Get to Use the N-Word...”

#### HATE CRIMES AND THE IDEOLOGIES MOTIVATING THEM

8. Monday February 13 - The rise of racist and anti-Semitic hate crimes; Who’s a “terrorist”?  
2 Readings: [2020 FBI Hate Crimes Statistics](#), and Braine, [“Terror network or lone wolf?”](#)

9. Wednesday February 15 - What do hate groups believe?  
*Reading:* ADL, [“The Great Replacement: An Explainer”](#)

***Deadline:*** Hypothesis form filled out

\* No class on Monday February 20 \*

10. Wednesday February 22 - Students’ experiences of interpersonal racism and discrimination  
***Homework due:*** Fill out experiences of racism sheet

#### INSTITUTIONALIZED RACISM

11. Monday February 27 – Race and education  
*Readings:* Essay 14 Patel, Meanwell and McClure “Well, That Culture...” and Essay 16 Poon “I Had a Friend Who Had Worse Scores..”

12. Wednesday March 1 – Overview of institutionalized racism in the economy  
*Reading:* Essay 5 Thornhill “If People Stopped Talking...”

***Deadline:*** Research plan

13. Monday March 6 - Bias in the criminal justice system  
*Reading:* Essay 18 Doude “If Black People Aren’t Criminals, Why Are So Many in Prison?”

#### THE ROOTS OF THE RACIAL WEALTH DIVIDE

14. Wednesday March 8 - Why do some racial groups have more assets than others?  
*Reading:* *Color of Wealth*, Chapter 1

\*\* *SPRING BREAK – No classes on March 13 or 15* \*\*

15. Monday March 20 - The lasting effect of history  
*No new reading (but arrive ready to summarize Chapter 1 of The Color of Wealth)*

16. Wednesday March 22 – Historical obstacles for Native American Indians gaining assets  
*Reading: Color of Wealth, Chapter 2*
17. Monday March 27 – Historical obstacles for African Americans gaining assets  
*Reading: Color of Wealth, Chapter 3*
18. Wednesday March 29 – Historical obstacles for Latinos/Latinas gaining assets  
*Reading: Color of Wealth, Chapter 4*
19. Monday April 3 – Historical obstacles and boosts for Asian Americans gaining assets  
*2 readings: Essay 9 Zhou “Asians Are Doing Great…” and Color of Wealth, Chapter 5*

***Deadline:*** Interview notes

20. Wednesday April 5 - Historical boosts to whites gaining assets  
*Reading: Color of Wealth, Chapter 6*
21. Monday April 10 – The importance of government policy: the wealth divide  
*Reading: Color of Wealth Chapter 7*
22. Wednesday April 12 - Government policy and today’s racial wealth divide  
*Reading: Review the Color of Wealth timeline before class*

***\*\* No class on Monday April 17 \*\****

23. Wednesday April 19 – Moving toward racial justice  
*Reading: Essay #25 Harris “I’m Not Racist”*

***Deadline:*** Research report

## SOLUTIONS AND SYNTHESIS

24. Monday April 24– Student presentations of research findings  
*No reading*

***Deadline:*** Presentation in class

25. Wednesday April 26 – Moving toward racial justice; More student presentations  
*Reading: Essay 19 Yamahtta-Taylor “...Black Lives Matter Protests?” in McClure and Harris*

***\*\* Symposium on Thursday April 27 – please attend \*\****

26. Monday May 1 – Synthesis and exam review - How do you think about race and ethnicity now?

*No reading*

***\*\* Final exam will be held during exam week \*\****

## COURSE POLICIES

### **Policy on student opinions**

Some classroom exercises and assignments will ask you to put forward opinions. Feel free to try out a stance new to you, or one you aren't sure you actually agree with. If you disagree with the professor or the author of a reading, you will not be graded more strictly for that; if you agree, you will not be graded more leniently. All positions you take will be evaluated only by whether you present evidence and whether you make a reasoned argument.

**Identity Expression:** This classroom is intended to be a respectful space for all community members to express their identities or to decline to self-identify. We welcome you to use the gender pronouns most comfortable for you and encourage you to share your preferences with us. The professor is committed to allyship, supporting your social identities and the expression thereof, but may not always be perfect in this regard and welcomes your feedback for how she can do better. **The IC3 and the Donahue Institute** are supportive campus resources to help you if you feel disrespected or discriminated against (anytime or anywhere) due to identity expression.

**Trigger Warnings:** This class covers difficult topics such as hate crimes and racist slurs. For some students, this material can be re-traumatizing. To deal with the impact of such material, the professor will try to inform the class when content will be especially difficult. This does not mean that students can opt out of the assignment or experience, but rather the warning may help the students prepare to cope with the anticipated content. Students are encouraged to seek the support of the professor and Lasell's Counseling Center. They are also encouraged to use self-care techniques. It's acceptable for students to leave the class temporarily during difficult content-based lessons to gather themselves or take a breather. The professor will check in with you after class to ensure that you are safe and to lend support.