Course Description

Racial and Ethnic Politics is an advanced offering in American politics. Race and ethnicity represent some of the most contentious and longstanding cleavages in US politics. Not surprisingly then, they also create difficulties for American democracy, which is skeptical of big government, but also embraces equality. How are our democracy’s values and aspirations challenged when race is so strongly correlated to inequalities in education, health care, and housing? As a result, race and ethnicity pose serious challenges to a number of models of US politics, particularly pluralism. We subscribe to the perspective that a study of race and ethnicity is essential to advancing the understanding of power and authority in a democratic system; conversely, political science also informs and enriches the analysis of racial and ethnic politics. To answer these questions, the course makes use of the work of several disciplines including history, sociology, anthropology, and psychology. And while the course focuses on the US, we also consider comparative scholarship to see how generalizations about race in other contexts might inform US politics. We begin by spending considerable time on the various ways in which race is socially constructed in the United States and how those constructions have changed from the “one drop rule” to multiracialism. These definitional issues have important political and policy implications. Our approach also is eclectic for we study African-Americans, Latinos, and Asians as separate groups, but also look at issues such as representation, political participation, and elections through the lens of all minority groups. To the extent possible, we want to build generalizations that transcend a particular racial group, even though scholars have typically emphasized the differences among and between the groups in terms of history, identity, political participation, interest groups, and integration into political parties.

The justification for this multi-faceted approach is that the role of race in contemporary US politics is changing at a lightening pace. Since 2009, Americans elected the nation’s first African-American president. Immigration continues to be a hot-button issue, and the racial dimensions of that policy cannot be ignored. After the 2000 census, Hispanics emerged as the largest minority group in the United States displacing blacks. What are the implications of this change, especially for the 2012 presidential race? As the semester opens, there is substantial debate over recently passed state laws requiring voters to present photo identification cards before casting their ballots. Is this an attempt to suppress the vote of racial minorities or a prudent measure to eliminate election fraud? Presidential candidates are using implicit and explicit racial messages on the campaign trail. Vice-President Biden accused the GOP contenders of wanting to put voters in “chains” while President Obama has been called a “welfare President.” We spend considerable time analyzing the 2008 presidential election and its implications for President Obama’s term in office. The many analyses of the 2008 election allow us to make comparisons with the 2012 presidential campaign and ultimately the election outcome. The US Supreme Court also will wade into the race issue this fall when it hears arguments in a closely watched case, Fisher v. Texas, a challenge to the use of race in college admissions. This course reviews the Court’s holding in similar cases beginning with Bakke.

Finally, the Pew Center released a study in July that reports Asians are replacing Hispanics as the largest immigrant group in America. How will this demographic shift affect future elections? The vectors of racial politics in the US? The dynamic of the new racial politics in the United States isn’t one that is merely black-white or white versus other minority groups. Does the new racial politics in the US signal the emergence of a post-racial order? It is an exciting time to be investigating what is still true about US racial and ethnic politics and what must be discarded in light of developments in the last 30 years.

Required Readings


Moodle

We make extensive use of Moodle to post class assignments. This includes discussion questions we determine are relevant, discussion questions posted by your peers, and reading assignments that relate to the class. We may also post messages on Moodle. You should consult Moodle on a daily basis to remain current with your classroom responsibilities.

Course Requirements

Class Participation (15%) This course is operating in a seminar format; therefore, it is imperative that all students arrive to class prepared to discuss the readings and the issues raised by them. Your performance will be evaluated both by the quality and the quantity of your participation. We especially value commentary that links readings together, identifies inconsistencies, or employs the readings to understand current events. Your professors envision the seminar to be an intellectual discussion—one where participants make thoughtful, well-founded arguments. Class discussion is NOT an invitation to hurl opinions that are based on your visceral reactions, which generally are not reflective or considered. A course in racial politics often conjures strong emotions. We are committed to offering a space that promotes an honest discussion of a subject often thought to be taboo, but in so doing we require seminar participants to be respectful of others in the course. We believe that a civil discussion of racial politics is often lacking in current political discourse, and it is our desire to ameliorate that condition. Note that we will call on students during the seminar. While attending class is important it is NOT an end in and of itself. Participation requires engagement and preparation.

Reflection Papers (25%) Each student will complete several short reflection papers on select assigned readings. The purpose of the assignment is for students to gain a deeper understanding of the readings. These papers will be completed prior to the seminar and will be shared with class members. Professors Cosby and Halva-Neubauer will decide which reading is assigned to which student. Reflection papers should include a discussion of the primary thesis of the reading, the data used to back the conclusion, and the degree to which the author’s argument is a compelling one. Additionally, the paper will illustrate how the article’s conclusions contradict or support earlier readings in the course. These papers will form the basis for class discussions. Reflection papers are short (2-3 pages, double-spaced, typewritten).

Mid-Term Exam (25%) An in-class (75 minute) essay exam, given on Thursday, October 23.

Final Exam: (35%) This comprehensive, open-book, open-note exam will be taken in a 48-hour take-home format; it is due by 2:30 PM, Monday, 10 December.

Grading

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Rules of the Game

(1) Incompletes are given only in extenuating circumstances and with the advance permission of the instructors.
(2) No make-up exams will be given.
(3) Failure to complete assignments timely results in a zero (0) for that assignment.
(4) No extra credit is available.
(5) Students must complete all work to receive course credit.
(6) Students are responsible for knowing and following the University’s Academic Integrity policy. The Integrity Pledge is posted in all classrooms.

(7) Any student wishing to receive an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) must provide documentation from the University’s ADA officer to Professors Cosby or Halva-Neubauer.

(8) No more than two unexcused absences are allowed; excused absences are those that are granted by Dean Gabbert’s office or are for documented, extenuating circumstances that prevent you from attending class.

(9) Cell phones are to be turned off and put in a basket at the beginning of class.

(10) No computers are allowed in class. Take notes in the old-fashioned manner—by handwriting them!

(11) It is RUDE to arrive to class late, leave the session early, or to leave class during the session and then return. Be forewarned that this is your professors’ pet peeve.

COURSE OUTLINE

August 21—Introduction to the course and its goals. Can traditional approaches to the study of racial and ethnic politics assist us in understanding contemporary racial politics?

August 23—Conceptualizing and Defining Race I


August 28—Conceptualizing and Defining Race II


August 30—Conceptualizing and Defining Race III


September 4—Conceptualizing and Defining Race IV


September 6 & 11—Conceptualizing and Defining Race V


September 13—Affirmative Action
September 18—Reverse Discrimination

READ: Bakke

September 20—Immigration Politics and American Citizenship


September 25—Contemporary Issues in US Immigration Policy

Arizona et al. v. United States

September 27— Latino Politics I

READ: Bedolla, Chapters 1-2

October 2—Latino Politics II

READ: Bedolla, Chapters 3-4

October 4—Latino Politics III

READ: Bedolla, Chapters 5-7

October 9—Fall Weekend, NO CLASS

October 11—Asian Politics I

READ: Aoki and Takeda, Chapters 1-2

October 16— Asian Politics II

READ: Aoki and Takeda, Chapters 3-6

October 18— Asian Politics III
READ: Aoki and Takeda, Chapters 7-9

October 23—Mid-term Exam

October 25—Identity and Interests


October 30—Race and the 2008 Election I


November 1—Race and the 2008 Election II

READ: Kennedy, Randall, *The Persistence of the Color Line*, Chapters 3-4

November 6—Race and the 2008 Election III

READ: Kennedy, Randall, *The Persistence of the Color Line*, Chapters 5-6

November 8—Race and the 2008 Election IV

READ: Kennedy, Randall, *The Persistence of the Color Line*, Chapters 7-8

November 13—How Institutions Shape Race I

READ: Katznelson, Preface, and pp. 1-52

November 15—How Institutions Shape Race II

READ: Katznelson, pp. 53-141

November 20—How Institutions Shape Race III

READ: Katznelson, pp. 142-172
Fox, Cybelle, “Three Worlds of Relief: Race, Immigration, and Public and Private Social

November 22—Thanksgiving Holiday, NO CLASS

November 27— How Institutions Shape Race IV


November 29—Representation and Empowerment


December 4—Is there a tie that binds this literature?