

Race: History, Biology, Psychology, Philosophy

(HPS 1602)

Spring 2021

Monday, Wednesday 4:30PM–5:45PM

121 Alumni Hall

Instructor: Dana Matthiessen

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Office hours: Online by Zoom, Monday and Wednesday, 3PM–4PM

Claim a 15 minute slot using “Find Appointments” on Canvas calendar

Or drop in (you may have to wait), or email for alternate time

Office hours will be held using Zoom: <https://pitt.zoom.us/j/7784657942>

As recent events make clear, race has played a highly consequential part in American society. This course aims to provide you with the tools and concepts to think about race and racism in a nuanced and reflective way. Such understanding can only be gained by bringing together several disciplines in an interdisciplinary manner. Thus, the course will move from philosophical reflection on the reality of race, to historical accounts of the rise of modern race concepts, to the psychology and ethics of race and race discourse. In particular, we will examine the following questions: What are races? What is racism? Does genetics show that races are real? Where does the concept of race come from? Is it a recent historical invention? How has it influenced the sciences? Should we be color-blind? How does race contribute to one’s identity? How do racial categories and attitudes affect our cognition and our institutions? How should they? Students with a variety of views on the topics are equally welcome. The course aims to encourage the critical assessment of your prior understanding of ‘race’ and ‘racism’ as well as engaged and respectful discussion of issues relevant to everyday life.

Objectives: Students who successfully complete this course will be able to...

- Identify and analyze different philosophical theories of race.
- Read and critically interpret philosophical arguments.
- Use newly developed skills, alongside historical and empirical knowledge, to assess social issues involving race.

Readings

All course readings will be made available on Canvas or from links in this syllabus.

Please note that this is a reading-focused course. Students will be expected to arrive at class having digested the assigned readings enough that they can contribute to possible discussion and ask informed questions. Do not despair! Do your best to grasp the gist of the texts, bring your notes and readings to class, and we will work together in class to clarify and synthesize the material for that week. You are strongly encouraged to consult some of the guides on reading history and philosophy available online, such as...

W. Caleb McDaniel, “How to Read for History” <https://wcm1.web.rice.edu/howtoread.html>
Hugh Wilder, “How to Read Philosophy” myweb.facstaff.wvu.edu/wasserr/114/how_to_read.pdf
Russo, “Reading a philosophical text” sophia-project.org/uploads/1/3/9/5/13955288/russo_reading.pdf

Office hours/contact: as above.

See the grading and assignment schedule section below to note how participation and assessment may change under different operating postures.

NOTE: If I am not able to instruct the class in person during the “guarded” or “elevated” posture, say, due to a need to self-quarantine, then I will either (1) appear on a screen in the room and conduct the class, or (2) team teach with another instructor who will be present.

A (pretty long) note on classroom discussion and the general topic

All students are encouraged to ask questions, raise points of concern, and contribute their own knowledge and reflections whenever they can. We will be surveying a wide range of material, much of which I am not an expert in, and I expect there is a great deal we can learn by hearing what each other thinks and picks up from the readings. Ample space will be given for discussions of this sort.

The overarching topic of this class has been central to many deeply violent and inhumane episodes in our history, as well as many uplifting, unifying experiences. As with any area of academic inquiry, the classroom is meant to provide a space in which we can collectively work out thoughts and ideas that may not at first be fully formed or clear to us. In ideal circumstances we could treat this as an experimental and creative endeavor, where every reasonable claim is regarded as provisional and up for debate and no one is targeted for volunteering fresh intuitions or inklings that may further discussion—even if many of us, speaker included, find them mistaken...

But all of that comes with an expectation that we approach such discussions with the maturity and care that the topics of race and racial identity demand. Especially in a class like this, **it is paramount that everyone maintain a respectful attitude toward one another, and those of whom we speak, during these discussions.** It may be that certain topics will grip you and generate enthusiasm that can lead to heightened emotions, but this is absolutely no excuse to disparage, dismiss, talk over, or otherwise disrespect your fellow classmates. Any abusive, bigoted, or harassing behavior or language will not be tolerated. Any students who are experiencing behavior that is affecting their ability to concentrate and learn or otherwise have concerns about social dynamics of the class are strongly encouraged to contact me privately, and we will figure out how to best resolve the issue.

Be aware that some of the reading covers factual matters and historically influential points of view that are likely to offend, disturb, astonish, appall, or otherwise provoke strong emotional responses—all perfectly warranted. This material has been chosen for its educational value. It is the

aim of the course to grapple with these facts and views, and convert our reactions into meaningful discussion. But please contact me—the sooner the better—if you anticipate any difficulty being able to participate as expected and we will figure out how to proceed.

Grading and assignment schedule (more info in “Assignments” folder on Canvas)

- **Week three active reading assignment: 5% (submit by the beginning of class Feb 1)**
 - For the third week of class, students are required to either print the reading assignment by Quayshawn Spencer and bring in notes taken while actively reading the text, or submit photographs or a digital version of notes via email (5%).
 - Note-taking should strive to identify and label the main thesis of the paper, identify components of the argument supporting this thesis—supporting claims for the thesis and the primary lines of evidence/argumentation meant to back them up—and record any points of confusion or critical comments the student has in response to specific points or terminology in the paper (e.g., written in the margins).
 - The note-taking may be on the reading assignment itself (encouraged), or on a separate piece of paper, which identifies the parts each note refers to.
- **Reading responses: 30% (every week starting Jan 25)**
 - Starting on August 25, I will ask students to prepare and submit (via email) a brief *analytical or reflective comment* each week. This should isolate what the student considers a central or especially interesting part of one assigned text. In response to this claim the student will (1) provide a very brief contextualization of this claim and what makes it significant, and (2) provide a brief but reasoned personal commentary, criticism, or question that this paper provoked. *Consult the hand-out for this assignment for further guidance.*
 - Except for special circumstances, students are required to submit these before class via email. Since I will not be taking attendance, they serve as a proxy for their being “in” class.
 - These will be given a grade of either 3 (fully complete), 2 (part incomplete), or 1 (significantly incomplete). Ten responses will be graded. Students can hand in more if they like and the ten best scores will be counted. If fewer than ten are submitted, the remainder will be given a score of 0.
- **Class participation: 20%**
 - Being able to engage in reasoned interpersonal discourse is crucial to skillful reflection on the kind of complex issues we will encounter in class. With that in mind, I have arranged the course to emphasize discussion. While I will provide some framing and moderation, my aim is for a good portion of the class content to be generated by the questions and interests that come from student participants, either through in-class discussion or through use of the course’s online discussion board.
 - 20 participation points will be given in ½ point increments based on substantive contributions to in-person or online discussion, attendance of office hours, and other clear signs of engagement with the content of the course. *Note: to enhance discussion it may be useful to have a way to access the papers during class time.*

- To enable online discussion, I will create a new topic for each reading assignment every week in the “Discussions” section of the course Canvas page. Students are encouraged to respond to the article by posting comments, questions, or criticisms, or by responding to other students’ posts.
 - A substantive contribution is on topic, does not simply repeat previous remarks or your reading response, and is something that gives some supporting reasons or context, rather than a single sentence or utterance. A few more guidelines will be provided in a pinned post on the discussion board.
 - If these forms of participation are difficult for you, please contact me and we can work out an alternative way to earn credit, including the following:
 - Additional active reading assignments.
 - Sending me an email with an article that is relevant to our weekly reading, along with your thoughts on its contents.
 - A more detailed version of the analytical comment assignment, that includes additional criticisms or raises a “big picture” question or comment with respect to the reading.
 - Directly emailing me with questions or comments regarding the ideas and debates discussed in class.
 - Something else.
- **Film response project: 5% (submit via email by the end of the day Friday, March 26)**
 - Students will watch a film of their choosing (or alternatively recommended by me), narrative or documentary, and submit a reasoned reflection on how it speaks to a significant aspect of race or racism along lines that we have been considering. The reflection can be a commentary, interpretation, or critique of the film’s content.
- **Short quizzes: 10% (complete one for units 1-2 and 3-4, by the beginning of the following unit)**
 - These will be a mixture of short answer questions or multiple choice questions meant to demonstrate basic understanding of the material covered in each unit.
 - Tests will be made available in the “Quizzes” section on Canvas after the last class of each unit. They will be open book, but time constrained, so some prep is important.
- **Question Bridge response: 5% (submit via email by class April 19)**
 - Students will browse question videos on <http://questionbridge.com/conversations>
 - And choose two to listen to, including all of the answers, and then write a reflection on how it relates to the topic of racial experience and identity.
- **Semester creative project: 25% (email by 5:00pm May 1, with earlier progress deadlines)**
 - As the course progresses, each student will develop a creative project that examines a specific theory or aspect of race in terms that align with the focus of the course.
 - This may be an essay (2500-3000 words), a podcast, a video, a concept map, a historical survey, a community project, a set of structured interviews, or a similar kind of work that manifests research into a specific topic of your choosing. The goal is for you to investigate a question or problem that you find especially interesting (perhaps related to your personal experiences, social group, political endeavors, or other non-academic pursuits) and connect it to material we encounter in the course. Further instructions will

be provided after the first segment of the course. The final project will be due on the final day of the term **May 1**.

NOTE: If you find yourself struggling with the course material or are concerned about your grade, please act sooner than later. Come to office hours and we will work to identify the source of your difficulties and improve your understanding of tricky subjects.

Course schedule

Note: readings for each day are marked with a bullet point. Readings marked *Recommended* are not required, but help round out a topic if you have time for them. All readings without links are available Canvas. If there are multiple assignments, I've chosen them so they do not take up more reading time than a single long one. In general, journalism articles do not need to be read as closely.

Unit One: Philosophical Theories of Race

Wednesday 1/20: Introduction

Monday 1/25: Race eliminativism (plus a short intro to argument analysis)

- Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The uncompleted argument: Du Bois and the illusion of race"

Wednesday 1/27: Social constructionism

- Sally Haslanger, "A Social Constructionist Analysis of Race"

Monday 2/1: A case for realism (active reading due by email!)

- Quayshawn Spencer, "A Radical Solution to the Race Problem"

Wednesday 2/3: Race and ethnicity

- Lawrence Blum, "Latinos on Race and Ethnicity: Alcoff, Corlett, and Gracia"

Unit Two: History of Race in Science and Societies

Monday 2/8: From ancient to modern times

- Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Antiquity*, pp. 55-64, 74-78, 101-112, 123-129
- Adam Hochman, "Is 'race' modern?" <https://aeon.co/essays/fact-check-the-idea-of-race-is-not-modern-but-late-medieval>

Wednesday 2/10: Social context – European expansionism

- Eric Wolf, “Iberians in America”, “The Fur Trade”, “The Slave Trade” from *Europe and the People Without History*
 - o **Choose one chapter to focus on, skim the others**
- *Recommended:* Cedric Robinson, “Historical Archaeology of the Black Radical Tradition” from *Black Marxism*
 - o **Read up to p. 120, then choose one following section to focus on, skim the rest**

Monday 2/15: Social history of race in America

- Barbara Fields, “Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America”
- *Recommended:* Theodore Allen, “The Invention of the White Race”

Wednesday 2/17: Scientific racism

- Blumenbach, *On the Natural Variety of Mankind* (excerpt)
- Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, Chapter 2

Monday 2/22: Scientific racism, cont.

- Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, Chapter 3
- *Choose at least one to watch:* Consortium for History of Science, Technology and Medicine, “Perspectives on Race Science and Scientific Racism” (follow links to four YouTube videos): <https://www.chstm.org/video/101>

Wednesday 2/24: Scientific racism today(?)

- Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve*, pp. 269–282, 295–311, 340
- Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, “Critique of the Bell Curve”, pp. 367–378

- **Complete Units 1 and 2 Quiz on Canvas by 11:59PM on Sunday 2/28!**

Unit Three: Race in Modern Biology and Medicine

Monday 3/1: Genetic diversity and race, reconsidered

- Lewontin, “The Apportionment of Human Diversity”
- Edwards, “Human genetic diversity: Lewontin’s fallacy”

Wednesday 3/3: Genetic diversity and race, further reconsidered

- Deborah Bolnick, “Individual Ancestry Inference and the Reification of Race as a Biological Phenomenon”
- *Recommended:* Ian Tattersall and Rob DeSalle, *Race? Debunking a Scientific Myth*, pp. 130-143

Monday 3/8: Race and medicine

- Esteban Burchard et al., “The importance of race and ethnic background in medical diagnosis”
- Michael Root, “The Use of Race in Medicine as a Proxy for Genetic Differences”

Wednesday 3/10: Race and medicine, cont.

- Richard Garcia, “The Misuse of Race in Medical Diagnosis”
- Dorothy Roberts, “Debating the Cause of Health Disparities: Implications for Bioethics and Racial Equality”

Unit Four: Racial Categorization and Racism

Monday 3/15: Racial categorization

- Lawrence Hirschfeld, *Race in the Making*, Chapter 4

Wednesday 3/17: Racism

- Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Racisms”

Monday: 3/22: Implicit racism

- Brian Nosek et al., “Implicit social cognition: From measures to mechanisms”
- Diana Burgess et al., “Why Do Providers Contribute to Disparities and What Can Be Done About It?”

Wednesday 3/24: Combating racism at the psychological level

- Daniel Kelly et al., “Getting Rid of Racism: Assessing Three Proposals in Light of Psychological Evidence”

- **Film response due by email on 3/26!**

Monday 3/29: Racism, culture, and colonialism

- Frantz Fanon, “Racism and Culture” <https://tamilnation.org/ideology/racism.htm>
- David Livingstone Smith, “Human atrocities and unnatural beings” <https://iai.tv/articles/human-atrocities-and-unnatural-beings-auid-1649>
- *Recommended:* Ashis Nandy, “The Psychology of Colonialism” (excerpt) from *The Intimate Enemy*

Wednesday 3/31: Racism as system or structure

- Charles Mills, “White supremacy”
- *Recommended:* Brandon Vaidyanathan, “Systemic Racial Bias in the Criminal Justice System is Not a Myth” <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/06/65585/>

- **Complete Units 3 and 4 Quiz on Canvas by 11:59PM on Sunday 4/4!**

Unit Five: Racial Identity and Politics

Monday 4/5: Identity movements, case study: Black nationalism and Black Power

- Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet” (also available with annotations on YouTube) <https://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/blackspeech/mx.html>
- Stokely Carmichael (aka Kwame Ture), “Black Power” (also available on YouTube) <https://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/carmichael-black-power-speech-text/>
- *Recommended:* Kwame Anthony Appiah, “What Can We Learn from the Rise and Fall of ‘Political Blackness?’” <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/07/opinion/political-blackness-race.html>

Wednesday 4/7: Standpoint theory and intersectionality

- Patricia Hill Collins, “Intersectionality, Situated Standpoints, and Black Feminist Thought”
- Kenneth Taylor, “Transcending intersectionality” <https://www.philosophytalk.org/blog/transcending-intersectionality>

Monday 4/12: Anti-racism

- Robin DiAngelo, “White Fragility”
- Ibram Kendi, “Definitions”, “Dueling Consciousness” from *How to Be an Anti-Racist*

Wednesday 4/14: Academic critiques of race discourse: liberal, conservative, socialist

- Joseph Heath, “Redefining racism” <http://induecourse.ca/redefining-racism/>
- John McWhorter, “The Better of the Two Big Antiracism Bestsellers” <https://www.educationnext.org/better-of-two-big-antiracism-bestsellers-kendi-how-to-be-an-antiracist-book-review/>
- Adolph Reed Jr., “The limits of anti-racism” <https://www.leftbusinessobserver.com/Antiracism.html>

Monday 4/19: Privilege and experience (Question Bridge response due by email!)

- Peggie McIntosh, “White privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”
- Kenan Malik, “White privilege and class” <https://crookedtimber.org/2020/08/30/white-privilege-and-class-a-reply-to-chris-bertram-by-kenan-malik/>

- Olúfemi Táíwò, “Being-in-the-Room Privilege: Elite Capture and Epistemic Deference”
<https://www.thephilosopher1923.org/essay-taiwo>
- *Recommended:* Kwame Appiah, “Why are politicians suddenly talking about their ‘lived experience?’”
<https://amp.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/nov/14/lived-experience-kamala-harris>

Wednesday 4/21: Prisons and police

- Devon Carbado and L. Song Richardson, “The Black Police: Policing Our Own”
- *Recommended:* Christian Parenti, “The Surprising Geography of Police Killings: Back-of-the-Napkin Calculations on Race, Region, and Violence” <https://nonsite.org/the-surprising-geography-of-police-killings-back-of-the-napkin-calculations-on-race-region-and-violence/>
- *Recommended:* Review Vaidyanathan article from 3/31