

Seminar on Racism SOC 386

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In the United States, as well as throughout much of the world today, people designated as "white" are the dominant group. This course explores racism as a central and enduring principle around which the United States is structured. We will analyze the origin, nature, and consequences of racism. Topics we will explore include: the sociological perspective as a way of understanding how racism is organized and maintained; the meaning of race as a social fact and social construction; the economics of racism; the politics of racism; racism in education, housing, employment, and the criminal justice system; culture and ethnicity; white racist ideology and stereotypes; the social psychology of racism; everyday racism.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

There are no required texts. Assigned readings are posted on CANVAS

ASSIGNMENTS:

Beyond class participation, you will be asked to submit a journal entry every other week, complete assignments, write a final paper, and deliver an "Address to Humanity."

JOURNAL ENTRIES:

What insights have you had during the past couple weeks? What did you think of the readings? Have you seen racism at work? Journal entries are a place to offer sociological analyses, show you are a keen observer of human behavior, and make creative connections between the course material and daily life. The challenge here is to see whether you can go substantially beyond the readings, videos, and class discussions to offer your own unique social analyses and insights. In other words, rather than simply illustrating course material with examples from current affairs or your own life (as you would in a *personal* journal), see if you can delve deeper, take the course material beyond what you were given, and create a "journal of psychological insights." In doing so, don't be afraid to research your topic, interview other people, experiment with your life, engage in social justice activism, and suggest specific remedies when discussing social problems.

Beginning April 10, you will be asked to turn in a 2- to 3-page typed, double-spaced journal entry once every two weeks. Anything related to the course is fair game: insights about yourself or others, social observations, commentaries on the readings or class discussions, etc. (given the 3-page limit, though, it is generally best to pick one central theme). Each journal entry should apply sociology to the topic at hand, and each should be followed with a "Springboards for Discussion" page containing a few questions for class discussion (usually on the topic being covered the day journal entries are due). Also, be sure to include an essay title and page numbers.

Journal entries will be graded primarily on the basis of creativity and critical thinking, but variety and style will also be considered. That is, entries should not become *repetitive* (e.g., week after week of research critiques), and they should not be *sloppy*. To prevent sloppiness, spell-check your entry and proofread the printed version for typos. The grading for each journal entry will range from 0-5 points along the following scale:

- 5 points = truly superlative (a cleanly written, rare gem of insight)
- 4 points = very good (clean writing and creative, novel analyses)
- 3 points = generally good (shows a mastery of the course material)
- 2 points = acceptable (somewhat thin or contains significant errors)
- 1 point = marginally acceptable (very thin or contains major errors)
- 0 points = not turned in on time (late entries will not be accepted)

FINALPAPER

Final papers should be 10-15 typed, double-spaced pages (including references). You are free to choose any paper topic that shows original, creative, and insightful thinking about racism. Here are a few sample topics that would be appropriate:

- **TOPIC #1:** Do something novel that succeeds in reducing prejudice, discrimination, or racism and write about what you did. What were the sociological principles that made it work? Could others do what you did? How could your idea be further improved?
- **TOPIC #2:** Create an original classroom activity, student assignment, web demonstration, tutorial, or other pedagogical resource that promotes social justice at the same time that it teaches about sociology. Then write a paper describing it and explaining the sociological principles involved.
- **TOPIC #3:** Write a paper that compares the common sociological mechanisms involved in two different forms of discrimination (e.g., sexism and racism, anti-fat prejudice and heterosexism). Cite relevant research whenever possible, following a format similar to that found in journals.

- **TOPIC #4:** Watch at least three minutes of video clips within each of the seven subcategories listed at (link posted on CANVAS):

<http://www.understandingprejudice.org/links/animals.htm#> videos and discuss:

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- (a) whether the actions you observe involve prejudice,
- (b) the relation between animal cruelty and biases against human outgroups, and
- (c) effective ways to reduce speciesism.

- **TOPIC #5:** Analyze the role of racism in one or more international conflicts, such as the Iraq War, genocide in the Sudan, the war on terrorism, or the Israeli- Palestinian conflict. Then see if you can use sociology to generate specific practical suggestions for U.S. citizens who would like to help bring about peace.

Note: At the beginning of our first class session in May, please submit a tentative paper title and a typed one-paragraph description of the paper you intend to write.

ADDRESS TO HUMANITY

What if you stood before the United Nations, with TV cameras in front of you and translators at the ready? What words of wisdom would you have to share on the topic of racism? On our last class, we will hold a roundtable session in which each student delivers a 5-minute talk on the topic of prejudice and discrimination. This presentation should:

1. Draw upon what you have learned during the quarter;
2. Show your capacity to think independently, deeply, and creatively by going beyond simple summaries of course material;
3. Be designed to have a lasting effect on your listeners -- to change their thoughts or behavior (Hint: Use vivid, memorable material rather than abstract generalities). After the talks are given, I will collect a typewritten copy of your address, and we will open things up for a final discussion.

GRADING

The overall distribution of final grades for this seminar is quite similar to that of other classes, but the grading will not follow arbitrary cutoffs determined in advance (e.g., 92%=A). Rather, grades will be based on previous norms for this class as well as my subjective judgment of where the grade cutoffs should most reasonably be drawn. Four components will enter into your grade:

- Class Participation (includes assignments) (40%)
- Journal Entries (20%)
- Address to Humanity (20%)
- Final Paper (20%)

Note: As with many seminars, half of your grade will be determined from assignments at the end of the quarter. Although this method of grading makes it difficult to project what your final grade will be, the advantage is that it ultimately yields the fairest grades (because it measures course mastery after all class material has been presented, rather than part way through).

HONOR CODE

Please read the Central Washington University honor code and abide by it closely. All papers, journal entries, and presentations for this class must be original – not reprinted or excerpted. Similarly, any text, tables, figures, or images reproduced from other sources must include clear reference citations, and all quoted passages must use quotation marks to indicate that they are quotations. If you're not sure about how to reference something, please ask me rather than running a risk of violating academic and professional norms.

Course Organization & Philosophy

ORGANIZATION:

In the first session, students will create a baseline record of their attitudes toward prejudice and discrimination, and racism. In the final two sessions, students will also be able to review their baseline attitudes and see how their perspectives have changed during the quarter.

PHILOSOPHY:

There is no single best method for learning about racism, no simple road map to take us where we need to go with this subject material. Hence, we will have to build an understanding of prejudice, discrimination and racism together. My responsibilities will be to:

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Complete all required readings before class,
- Attend and participate fully in every session,
- Reflect deeply on the course material.

A core assumption of this course is that there is no way to have a deep understanding of prejudice, discrimination and/or racism without first having a deep understanding of yourself. Accordingly, we will use our own prejudices as a vehicle for understanding the prejudices of other members of society. Because this type of exploration is not as safe as the standard approach to studying prejudice, we will need to:

1. Create a comfortable climate for discussion and dissent;
2. Maintain strict confidentiality with any personal material shared in the

seminar;

3. Treat each other with respect, regardless of whatever differences we may have in opinion or lifestyle choices.

INCOMPLETE POLICY: Incompletes will only be allowed under specific circumstances. The student must present a compelling reason for being granted an INC. What constitutes compelling circumstances is up to me but under no circumstances will an INC be awarded unless the student has consulted with me and petitioned for an INC before grades are submitted.

DISABILITIES STATEMENT:

Students who want to request disability accommodations must contact the Disability Support Services Office located in Bouillon 205. This office has the responsibility to assist students and advise faculty regarding reasonable accommodations. Thereafter students may voluntarily choose to identify themselves to the instructor to discuss accommodations.

Language Policy: WARNING! Professor Pichardo is a native New Yorker and talks like it. If you have any issues with so-called coarse language it is suggested that you either speak to me about it or not take classes offered by Prof. Pichardo. Or

CANVAS: CANVAS is an integral part of the course. All assignments and readings are posted on CANVAS. There are three course modules, each will take about 3 weeks: 1) Social Construction of Race; 2) Social Deconstruction of Race, and 3) the Social Consequences of race. GO TO COURSE MODULE TAB to access these materials