race, power, and politics

course syllabus

PSCI 3184: Fall 2023 Stadium 140: TTh 2:00-3:15pm

Professor

NAME: Michaele Ferguson

OFFICE: Ketchum 151

OFFICE HOURS: TTh 3:30-4:30PM, and by appointment at <https://calendly.com/profferguson>

CONTACT: Email me at [michaele.ferguson@colorado.edu](mailto:michaele.ferguson@colorado.edu)

Class Description

The killing of George Floyd in May 2020 sparked larger and more widespread protests against police brutality and systemic racism over the past year, yet the insurrection at the Capitol on January 6th this year revealed that white supremacy has become more mainstream and more prevalent as well. What are we to make of this racial divide? How in a democracy premised upon the ideal of equality for all do we make sense of very unequal perceptions (and experiences) of racism and racialized power? What obligations do democracies like the US have to redress racial inequality?

In this course, we will examine the fraught relationship between democracy in the US and racial inequality. This tension is expressed most vividly in the contradiction at the founding between the Declaration of Independence (”all men are created equal”) and the recognition of slavery in the US Constitution (the 3/5ths clause). We will explore these issues through study of the abolition movement, the Jim Crow era, the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, the Chicana movement and immigrant activism, the American Indian movement and #NoDAPL, Black Lives Matter, and white abolitionism.

Course Objectives

At the end of the semester, you should:

* KNOW the texts we have read and the kinds of arguments you have encountered during the course.
* UNDERSTAND how different thinkers have theorized race and the politics of race, and why activists have chosen different tactics for creating social change.
* be able to ANALYZE other similar texts and political arguments.
* APPLY these ideas in your own arguments, and express those arguments verbally, in writing, and using other “new” media.
* SOLVE problems, both intellectual and social, using the skills and knowledge you’ve acquired in this course in conjunction with other skills and knowledge you might have from elsewhere. This includes being able to hold civil yet critical discussions about the politics of race, and being able to collaborate with others.
* JUDGE accurately your own strengths and weaknesses when it comes to learning, and ADAPT your approaches to learning.

Notice that the last point is not about political theory, or even political science. It has a lot to do with succeeding in college, and — you might not know this yet — it has everything to do about succeeding in life, whatever you end up doing.

There are also a few objectives I have for our course that go beyond the typical learning objectives. Over the semester,

* we should SURPRISE EACH OTHER with new insights
* we should LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER
* we should HAVE EPIPHANIES

Course Materials

Almost all of the readings for this class are available online through Canvas at no cost to you. However, I encourage you where possible to use physical books and printouts of the reading, as studies have shown that [students retain more when taking notes by hand](https://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away). To facilitate writing in the actual text, some of the books we are reading are available for purchase through the CU Bookstore (or checkout from the library – but please write on post-its rather than in the library books!). If you are using electronic materials only, you will need to bring to class a device (ideally a tablet or computer, not a smart phone) that you can use to access those materials.

The one book that is not available to us online is Nick Estes, *Our History is the Future*. Make sure that you obtain a copy of this book (whether as an ebook or a printed book) in time to read it for class in late October.

Course Schedule

This course schedule is preliminary and subject to change. If there are any changes to the schedule, I will communicate these to you in class, on Slack, and by making necessary changes to our Canvas site. If you are ever in doubt about the schedule, please ask.

**1 T Aug 29** Introduction

**2 Th Aug 31** Small Group Conversations (in class)

**3 T Sep 5** Frederick Douglass, "The Constitution and Slavery" and "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"

Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Editor’s Preface, Introduction, and Chapters 1-14

**4 Th Sep 7** Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*,Chapters 15-25, “Letter to His Old Master,” and “The Nature of Slavery”

**F Sep 8** Semester Plan due by 5pm

**5 T Sep 12** W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Forethought, Chapters 1-3

**6 Th Sep 14** W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chapters 4-6

Booker T. Washington, “The Atlanta Exposition Address”

**F Sep 15** Grading Contract: First Short Project due by 5pm

**7 T Sep 19** W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chapters 7-10

**8 Th Sep 21** W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chapters 11-14, Afterthought

**9 T Sep 26** Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *On Lynchings*, “Southern Horrors,” and as far as you can get in “A Red Record”

**10 Th Sep 28** Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *On Lynchings*, finish “A Red Record”

Frederick Douglass, “Why is the Negro Lynched?”

**11 T Oct 3** Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Ethical Demands for Integration,“ “The American Dream,” “Letter from Birmingham City Jail,” and “I Have a Dream”

**12 Th Oct 5** James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (pp. 1-30)

**F Oct 6** Grading Contract: Second Short Project due by 5pm

**13 T Oct 10** James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (pp. 30-59)

**14 Th Oct 12** Mid-Semester Reflection (in class)

**M Oct 16-W Oct 18: Mid-Semester Consultations**

**15 T Oct 17** Malcolm X and Alex Haley, “Saved”

Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet” and “The Founding Rally of the OAAU”

**16 Th Oct 19** Large Project Self-Assessment (in class)

**17 T Oct 24** Charles Payne, “Ella Baker and Models of Social Change”

Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture), “The Basis of Black Power”

The Black Panther Party, “The Ten-Point Program” and “Rules of the Black Panther Party”

**18 Th Oct 26** Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, Chapters I, II, and V

Bayard Rustin, “The Myths of the Black Revolt”

**F Oct 27**  Grading Contract: Third Short Project due by 5pm

**19 T Oct 31** Angela Davis, “Women, Race and Class: An Activist Perspective”

Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference”

Combahee River Collective, “The Combahee River Collective Statement”

**20 Th Nov 2** Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died For Your Sins*, Chapters 1-2, 8

**21 T Nov 7** Nick Estes, *Our History is the Future*, Chapters 1-3

**22 Th Nov 9** Nick Estes, *Our History is the Future*, Chapters 4-7

**23 T Nov 14** Leo Chavez, *The Latino Threat*, Chapters 1, 3, 7

**24 Th Nov 16** Cristina Beltrán, *Cruelty as Citizenship: How Migrant Suffering Sustains White Democracy*, Chapters 1, 3, 4

**F Nov 17** Grading Contract: Fourth Short Project due by 5pm

**-Fall Break Nov 20-24-**

**25 T Nov 28** Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, Introduction and Chapters 1-2

**26 Th Nov 30** Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, Chapters 3, 5-6

**27 T Dec 5** Keeanga Yamahtta-Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, Introduction and Chapters 1-3

**28 Th Dec 7** Keeanga Yamahtta-Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, Chapters 4-7

**29 T Dec 12** W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Souls of White Folk”

Ralph Ellison, “What America Would Be Like Without Blacks”

James Baldwin, “On Being White….And Other Lies”

**30 Th Dec 14** Noel Ignatiev, “The Point Is Not To Interpret Whiteness But to Abolish It”

Joel Olson, “The Abolition-Democracy”

Angela Davis, “Abolitionist Alternatives”

**Th Dec 14** Grading Contract: Fifth Short Project due by 11:59pm

**Sa Dec 16** Final Deadline for all Projects (regardless of assessment method)

**Su Dec 17** End-of-Semester Reflections due

**M Dec 18-W Dec 20: End-of-Semester Consultations**

the work of the Course

This course is about understanding how others have thought critically about race in the US and how they have sought to create social change. We will be exploring their ideas about America’s community and its failures while also enacting community as a group of learners in America. This means that we will all have to assume personal responsibility for how we interact with one another and engage in critical learning together. We will be engaging in discussions and collaborative projects online and face-to-face, and learning through our own practice how we might be able to best encourage critical discussion about race beyond the boundaries of this course.

**Preparation.** Being prepared for class is a matter of intellectual integrity and respect for yourself, for your instructor, and for your colleagues. Come to class well-read, curious, and with all of the materials (readings, notes, pens, devices, coffee) that you need.

The material that we are studying in this course is challenging, but also extremely rewarding for those who persevere! Skimming (except when expressly encouraged in the reading guide) is beyond insufficient, so give yourself plenty of time to read each assigned text with your full attention, consider it, and form an opinion relative to its form and content.

**Class Participation.** Classes will consist primarily of discussion; there will be no formal lectures for this course. Students are encouraged to speak and to speak often, but also to listen to their peers & to respond thoughtfully to others’ comments. Students should demonstrate familiarity and critical engagement with the course material, as well as intellectual curiosity. The point is not to have understood everything before coming to class – but to show up with questions, difficulties, and issues ready to explore the course material.

Your insights, ideas, and perspective are valuable; so are those of your colleagues and the writers whose work we'll be reading. All conversation should remain respectful, positive, and constructive.

**Reading Discussion.** Critical reading is an active process of engaging with, puzzling over, and challenging the ideas in a text – and it is an activity that we do best in conversation with others. For each day’s reading, you are expected to post in a discussion channel on Slack before class. Don’t just throw your ideas into a vacuum. Instead, ask questions of each other and use other posts as a jumping off point by answering questions, amplifying or complicating ideas, etc.

If you cannot be in class for a particular discussion, ask your classmates to share in Slack what their biggest takeaways were from the in-class discussion, and use this as a starting point for you to engage your colleagues in further conversation about the material and ideas we are exploring.

**Small Projects.** For each set of readings we do, there are options to take your learning further, including additional readings and films to explore. You can opt to then complete a small project related to this additional material, which typically involves writing of some kind (500+ words per project). You are expected to complete at least five small projects, although you can choose to do more. While more may be added as the semester progresses, you can view all of them on Canvas and select which ones look more interesting to you. You are encouraged to complete each small project within a week or two of when we read and discuss the related course material, but you have until the end of the semester to complete all small projects for the class.

**Large Projects.** You have a choice of a large project, a project that requires an extended effort over the semester (all options are available on Canvas). Some options will be individual projects, while others are to be completed in small groups (you will have to find collaborators in the class for these). You are expected to complete one large project, and I discourage you from trying to complete more than one because of the larger time commitment (although you are free to do so).

assessment

This course is going to work a little differently than most of the others you’ve taken. While you will get a final grade at the end of the term, I will not be grading individual assignments, but rather asking questions and making comments that engage your work rather than simply evaluate it. You will also be reflecting carefully on your own work and the work of your peers. The intention here is to help you focus on working in a more organic way, as opposed to working as you think you’re expected to.

If this process causes more anxiety than it alleviates, see me at any point to confer about your progress in the course to date. If you are worried about your grade, your best strategy should be to join the discussions (online and f2f), do the reading, and complete projects.

You will be asked to complete an initial self-reflection for the semester, a mid-term self-reflection, a large project self-reflection, and an end-of-semester self-reflection. While you are encouraged to meet with me in office hours at any point in the semester, you are expected to consult with me after completing the mid-term and end-of-semester self-reflections.

course technology

In this class, we will be using two different kinds of classroom technology. I will walk through these in class, but if you have ANY questions about how to use these, or if you are concerned about the accessibility of any of these technologies, please talk to me.

This​ ​course​ uses​ Slack,​ ​which​ ​is either not​ ​currently​ ​accessible​ ​to​ ​users​ ​using​ ​assistive​ ​technology​ ​or​ ​has​ ​not​ ​yet been​ ​reviewed​ ​fully​ ​for​ ​accessibility.​ ​If​ ​you​ ​use​ ​assistive​ ​technology​ ​to access​ ​the​ ​course​ ​material​ ​please​ ​contact​ me​ ​and​ ​Disability Services​ ​at​ ​303-492-8671​ ​or​ ​by​ ​e-mail​ ​at​ dsinfo@colorado.edu ​as​ ​soon​ ​as​ ​possible​ ​to​ ​discuss​ ​other​ ​effective​ ​means​ ​for​ ​providing​ ​equal alternate​ ​access.

**Canvas**

The default CU Boulder “learning management system” we are using is Canvas. We will be using Canvas primarily to distribute class-related documents and links.

**Slack**

We will be using a communication application called Slack (which is available for free and across platforms) as the main way that we communicate with one another outside of class. Check out the handout “Using Slack” on Canvas and in our Slack teams for more guidelines, or poke around online to learn how to make the most of Slack.

COURSE POLICIES

**Political Disagreements**

This course is about politics. And contemporary culture is, to put it mildly, pretty polarized about politics. When we add race to the mix, the combination can be explosive, especially because many people in the US are not used to talking about race in mixed race and/or mixed partisan environments. This means that our classroom offers us a rare opportunity to start to develop habits of political discussion about race that we can carry out into other contexts.

We will not all agree in this course, either. The purpose of this course is **not** to influence your political beliefs one way or the other, and nobody is required to share their beliefs in class or on Slack. But nobody is forced to hide theirs, either. The following are the rules about how we talk about anything in this course (in person or online):

* Everyone is entitled to respect, regardless of their identity or views. You don’t have to respect someone’s *views*, but you have to respect their right to hold those views.
* If you want to express political views, be prepared to argue for them.
* If someone argues for their views, engage them reasonably: be curious and try to understand why they believe the way they do; do not interrupt, belittle, disrespect, or dismiss other views.
* If you have any ongoing concerns about dynamics in class discussions or in Slack, please bring them to me. I want us to have a good, collaborative dynamic, and I care if there are issues preventing you from engaging freely and fully in the course.

**Technology in the Classroom**

Portable technology is welcome in class with sound and ringers turned off, of course, so long as it is being used for class-related purposes (e.g. consulting the reading). With this freedom comes the responsibility to behave in a professional way with your technology. Tech use unrelated to class is disruptive and distracting — to you, your peers, and your instructors. If you are using technology in class in ways that are unrelated to the course, you may be asked to leave the class for the remainder of the session.

**Academic Integrity**

Engaging in academic work is a tricky business. On the one hand, it is important that individuals do the work that is assigned to them, even if it means reinventing the wheel. On the other hand, all scholars stand on the shoulders of others — in other words, all meaningful academic work is collaborative in one way or another — so it is sometimes hard to draw the line.

There is another reason why citations are so prevalent in academic writing. For all their bloviating, academics are a modest bunch, and when they write, “Pat Frye says this,” they think it’s possible they’ve gotten Pat’s idea all wrong. So they want to give their readers a chance to get it out for themselves.

Putting this simply, the idea of citations in academic work is to give credit where credit is due, and allow the reader to check things out and pursue things further.

That’s why us academics take the practices of proper citation extremely seriously. We are sure you will have lots of questions about the specifics of citation, and you may even get things wrong sometimes. We all do. But if it’s determined you have engaged in any form of academic misconduct, you will fail this course. So that we’re clear on this, for the purposes of this class, plagiarism will mean submitting a piece of work which in part or in whole is not entirely the student's own work without attributing those same portions to their correct source. See the handout “How and What to Cite” for guidance on citing sources in this course.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Dishonesty of any kind with respect to examinations, course assignments, alteration of records, or illegal possession of examinations is considered cheating. Students are responsible not only to abstain from cheating, but also to avoid making it possible for others to cheat.

All work that you submit for this course may be submitted only to this course and should be based upon work and thought undertaken only for this course. Written assignments will be submitted to turnitin.com to evaluate them for plagiarism. All incidents of academic misconduct will lead to an automatic academic sanction in the course (up to and including failing the course).

Meeting the learning objectives in this course requires that you apply your current knowledge and skills to the questions and assignments and, through them, improve that knowledge and those skills. Shortcuts won’t get you there, however appealing they might seem. Because of this, the use of commercial study guides such as Cliff Notes, Sparknotes.com, and other similar resources outside this course counts as academic misconduct. (They also won’t do you any good in this course.)

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Please see Canvas for the standard University Policies for this course.

1. While we are at it, I am very grateful to a number of faculty whose language and ideas I have used in this course design and this syllabus, including (but not only) Lawrie Balfour, Mika Lavaque-Manty, Jesse Stommel, Melissa Harris-Perry, Heather Mitchell-Buck, and Susan Blum. Syllabi are usually collaborative efforts, although academics typically do not acknowledge their debts to others in them. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)