How did we get here? America's racial history and its impact on social policy

Fall 2021
Thursdays, 12:45-2:45pm

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Office hours: Tuesdays 1-3pm (virtual at https://harvard.zoom.us/j/9232449589) & Thursdays 11-12:30pm (in person in TBD)
Course website: https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/93376

Racial discord dominates many contemporary explanations for recent political and sociological developments in the United States. The scars of slavery, the Civil War, failed reparations, and resistance to the Civil Rights movement are common knowledge. However, the story of race in America is much more complicated, particularly when examined in conjunction with the haves and have-nots of political power. In the first half of the course, we will move beyond the headlines of recent racial discord by combining works from history, psychology, sociology, and political science to better understand the history of race in America. The second half of the course focuses on the history of key policy areas and the institutions that resulted from them: immigration, education, healthcare, voting rights, statues and symbols, and the carceral state and policing. We will explore how race and racism has influenced the development of policies within each of these policy areas, with an eye to evaluating how such policies can be made more equitable. Though we will read some scholarship from political theory to ground our thinking about race and politics, we will primarily rely on readings from the empirical social sciences. We will focus our efforts on developing coherent, empirically backed arguments in response to the following essential questions:

• What is race and racism? When and why did these concepts emerge?
• How has the role of race and racism in American politics changed over time?
• What role has race played in the development of American politics and American political institutions?
• How have different policy areas contributed to or addressed racial inequality?
• How might different policy areas impact racial equality in the future?

Our purpose is two-fold: first, we will engage in respectful, evidence-based, and moving discussion about race, power, and politics to develop answers to our essential questions (see below). Second, we will learn to develop a research question, craft theoretically grounded hypotheses, choose an appropriate methodology and research design, and write coherently in the social sciences. This is intended as preparation for writing a senior thesis.

We will begin each class with discussion and application of the readings, followed by a brief break, and conclude each day with a mini lesson on how to conduct research and write coherently for social scientists. This time may also include workshopping and peer review opportunities for students to share challenges and successes and get feedback on their progress.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING
There are two types of assignments in this course: reflections on the readings each week and a research style seminar paper. Each category of assignments is worth 40% of the final grade (or a possible 50 points). For the reading reflections, students may decide what combination of short and long reflections they would like to complete such that the total possible points they have earned adds up to 50 (i.e., 8 short reflections or 4 long reflections or 4 short reflections and 2 long reflections). Reading reflections are due by 8am the day we have class. Students may also choose how to earn the other 50% from their final paper: through meeting more or fewer incremental deadlines. We will spend a portion of most sessions learning about the different aspects of conducting social science research and writing about our findings. More detailed descriptions of each assignment and the rubrics I will use to score them are available on Canvas and will be discussed in class.
### Assignment Type

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment Type</th>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading reflections</strong></td>
<td><strong>Short reflection</strong>&lt;br&gt;2-3 sentence summary of each reading AND 2-3 questions or comments about themes or confusions across the readings.</td>
<td>5% each</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>In-depth reflection</strong></td>
<td>3-4 page reflection that identifies key themes from the readings, articulating how the readings either connect or contradict one another and other ideas from the course</td>
<td>10% each</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>More structured, more feedback</strong>&lt;br&gt;Research Paper (due 9/27/21)</td>
<td>Research question paper</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hypothesis generation &amp; data sources paper (due 10/18/21)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>Prospectus (due no later than 11/15/21)</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Research Paper</strong></td>
<td>Final draft (due date dependent on exam schedule)</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>(see rubric for grading criteria)</td>
<td><strong>More autonomy, fewer feedback opportunities</strong>&lt;br&gt;Final research question paper (due 9/27/21)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hypothesis generation &amp; data sources paper (due no later than 10/18/21)</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Final paper (due date dependent on exam schedule)</td>
<td>35%</td>
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### A Note About Participation

I believe that students can contribute in a myriad of ways: writing excellent reflection papers, asking questions of their peers, raising their hand in class, attending office hours, and reaching out to the instructor via email, just to name a few. Contributing to the intellectual dialogue and conversations in our class is a foundational expectation of the course but is not explicitly included in the grading scheme because of how subjective assessing participation can be. I will touch base with students if I am concerned about their engagement in the course, but otherwise trust that students will do their best to contribute to our collective learning when and how they are most excited about doing so.

### STATEMENT OF INCLUSION & BELONGING

One of the goals of this class is to use social science research to ground conversations about race and racism, but this approach does not remove the passion, emotion, and challenge of having such conversations. This is especially true given that we will only be working together for two weeks. Furthermore, we all interpret findings through the lenses of our own experiences, be it ideological, racial, regional, or economic (to name a few). I have done my best to include a diverse set of perspectives; however, I acknowledge that it is possible there may be both overt and covert biases in the material, due to both the lens through which much of political science and journalism is written and through my own biases when choosing materials.

We will discuss topics that may generate strong personal and emotional reactions. Our conversations will not always be easy; we will make mistakes in our speaking and our listening; sometimes we will need patience or courage or imagination or any number of qualities in combination to engage our texts, our classmates, and our own ideas and experiences. We will always need respect for others. Thus, an additional aim of our course necessarily will be for us to increase our facility with the sometimes-difficult conversations that arise as we deepen our understandings of multiple perspectives. While our intention may not be to cause discomfort or offense, the impact of what happens throughout the course is not to be ignored and is something that I consider to be very important and deserving of attention. If and when this occurs, there are several ways to address it:

1. Discuss the situation privately with me. I am always open to listening to students’ experiences and want to work with students to find acceptable ways to process and address the issue.
2. Discuss the situation with the class. Starting by asking a question from a position of assuming the best about the speaker’s intentions can be a useful strategy for bringing something to the class’ attention. Chances are there is at least one other student in the class who had a similar response to the material. Discussion enhances the ability for all class participants to have a fuller understanding of context and impact of course material and class discussions.
3. If for any reason you do not feel comfortable discussing the issue directly with me, I encourage you to speak with one of your resident advisors.
COURSE SCHEDULE & READINGS

We will read between 80 and 100 pages each week. Be sure to check each citation for any specifics on which chapters or pages to focus on. At the end of each class, I will preview the following week’s readings and offer suggestions on what can be skimmed vs. what should be read in detail.

PART I: SETTING THE STAGE

What is race and racism? When and why did these concepts emerge?  
What role have race and racism played in American history?  
How has the role of race and racism in American politics changed over time?

September 2: Political science and its approach to race, racism, and policy  
What is political science?  
How do political scientists approach the study of race and policy?  
Skill: What is a research question & the arc of research


September 9: Defining race and racism  
What is race?  
How should we define racism?  
Skill: Finding scholarly resources & staying organized while researching

- Kendi, Ibram X. *How to be an Anti-Racist*. Random House. 2019. Introduction & Ch 1

PART II: THE POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

What role has race played in the development of American politics and American political institutions?  
Have U.S. racial dynamics in politics changed over time? If so, how?

September 16: Colonization and the origins of racial stratification  
Who in the US defined race and how did they define it?  
What are the historical reasons for acknowledging race in American society and politics?  
Skill: Overviewing social science methods part I


**September 23: Origins of the contemporary racial order**

*What were the incentives to make policies based on race?*

*How has the definition of white changed over time?*

*What role has race played in the development of American institutions?*

Skill: Overviewing social science methods part II


**Research question paper due 9/27/21**

**September 30: Resistance and Protest Part I (Movements)**

*What tools and strategies have minority groups used to protest racism and discrimination?*

*Under what conditions are protest and resistance effective? Does it vary by group?*

Skill: Contextualizing your research (aka structuring literature reviews)


**October 7: Resistance and Protest Part II (Intergroup dynamics)**

*How have racial groups cooperated to protest and resist discrimination?*

*Under what conditions is intergroup cooperation successful?*

Skill: Crafting hypotheses


October 14: Contemporary Electoral Politics
How should we describe the current role of race in politics?
What explains the election of Barak Obama and the subsequent presidential politics?
Skill: Using evidence in research papers (aka when to use primary and secondary sources)


**Hypothesis generation & data sources paper due 10/18/21**

PART III: PUBLIC POLICIES
How has this policy area contributed to or addressed racial inequality?
How might this policy area impact racial equality in the future?

October 21: Immigration and the changing racial order
How has immigration policy changed over time and how do these changes reflect changing racial dynamics?
How do immigration policies impact the lived experiences of people residing in the United States?
Skill: Quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing


**October 28: Incarceration and Legality**

*What economic, social, and political incentives lead to the rise of the carceral state?*

*What are the social and political consequences of a carceral state that disproportionately targets people of color?*

**Skill: Citations**


Western, Bruce and Becky Pettit. “Incarceration and Social Inequality.” Daedalus 139(3) (Summer 2010): 8-19.

Weaver, Vesla, “How Mass Imprisonment Burdens the United States with a Distrustful Civic Underclass” SSN Key Findings Brief, Scholar Strategy Network, October 2012

**November 4: Education**

*What is the role for education and educational access in changing unequal racial outcomes?*

*Is changing the educational system the starting point for radical change or is it a reflection of change in other policy areas?*

**Skill: Tackling student questions or issues**


**November 11: Voting Rights**

*Is voting a right or a responsibility?*

*Should governments monitor who votes or encourage people to vote?*

**Skill: Writers’ workshop**


**Prospectus due 11/15/21**

**November 18: Student choice 1**
Skill: Deep dive on introductions & conclusions

**December 2: Student choice 2 & Wrap Up**
Skill: Writers’ workshop

**Options for student choice:**

**Climate Change and Climate Justice**
*How has (and will) climate change affect social, political and economic outcomes for different racial groups?*
*In what ways is climate change similar or different from the other public policy areas of concern for racial justice activists?*


**Healthcare**
*How does the American healthcare system work, and why is it designed the way it is?*
*What are the social, economic, and political impacts of having access to healthcare?*


**Statues and symbols**

*How should Americans acknowledge and celebrate their history given past expressions of racism? What drives public opinion regarding monuments? How should public serving institutions decide what historical figures to display and honor?*


