Race in Comparative Perspective  
GOV 94RC  
Dr. Christopher Rhodes  
Fall 2021 Syllabus

Course Meetings:  
Mondays 12:45-2:45pm  
CGIS Knafel K108

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Office Hours: TBD

Introduction
In much of the “West,” including the Americas and Europe, issues of racial identity permeate politics, economics, culture and society. Race exists alongside classifications such as gender, religion and class as one of the dominant social forces in many societies, providing a source of both cooperation and conflict for people across a host of social contexts.

Yet, despite its pervasiveness in modern politics and social organization, the predominant western conception of race is a relatively recent idea formed in the context of European imperialism, trade, exploration and slave trading and developed by many of the most important Enlightenment figures of the 17th and 18th centuries. This course explores various analogues to “race” that developed in other civilizations; focuses on the context and thinkers that were key to the European development of race and racism in the modern era; and examines the variations in “race” that developed in various political and social contexts.

The course is divided into four sections. Section I looks at the world before race, exploring notions of identity and division from a variety of cultures from ancient times. Section 2 examines the “invention” of race, examining the various religious, philosophical, economic, “scientific” and political factors that contributed to the development of modern western ideas of race and racial hierarchy. Section 3 examines ideas and practices concerning race, showing how the concept of race has been conceived in significantly diverse ways across countries and over time. Section 4 examines how individuals, organizations and communities have defined, redefined, and mobilized their own racial identities across a number of countries, regions and time periods.

Course Requirements
Attendance and Participation
Students are expected to attend all class meetings in person. Students are additionally expected to complete all required reading for each week before class, and come prepared to discuss the material in class. Beyond generally reading the course material, students may be assigned specific readings that they should be prepared to discuss in class. Absences from class meetings or failure to actively participate in class discussions can negatively impact your class participation grade. If you anticipate missing a class meeting due to an acceptable reason (such as illness or bereavement, religious holiday or observance, or approved university-sponsored activity or event), please inform instructor in advance and, when applicable, complete a written assignment to be given in lieu of attendance for that meeting. If you are absent for an unexpected reason, please contact your professor as soon as you can after the meeting to discuss the missed material and possible make-up assignment.
A note on class discussions and inclusion: Dealing with issues of race and racism can be challenging. Nothing in the course is intended to shock or offend, but we will be reading and discussing ideas, policies and practices that may contain shocking or offensive content. There will presumably be disagreements and divergent viewpoints within the class, which are key parts of academic discourse. I ask that you approach readings and discussions with an open mind and heart, and that you show yourselves and your classmates respect and grace as you engage with one another. Please reach out to me (or if you are uncomfortable doing so, speak with a resident advisor) if at any point you become uncomfortable or distressed by class material or discussion.

Readings
Readings are drawn from academic journals, scholarly books and news sources and can be accessed through the course website. Some readings may change to reflect current events – changes will be announced and posted to course website. Readings present a variety of perspectives, some of which may qualify, contradict or oppose perspectives from other readings. Documents on this list have been chosen for a variety of reasons. The inclusion of a reading on this syllabus should not be considered an endorsement of the content or viewpoints expressed in that reading. All readings should be approached critically.

A note on “how” to read for this class: There are a number of assigned readings for this course. Most of them are required, and you are expected to have completed these before each meeting. When reading, generally read first and foremost for main ideas, points and motivations of each article. What are the authors trying to say, and why are they trying to make these points? Additionally, the texts are rich in details and examples that you can think about and even explore based on what you are reading. Don’t get bogged down trying to read footnotes (though they are there if you want to explore a particular point from the reading in greater depth), and don’t worry if some of the articles contain technical details (quantitative analysis, game theory, etc.) that might be unfamiliar. If you understand these analytical tools, great! If not, try to focus on the main substantive points the author is trying to make.

The Harvard College Honor Code

All students are expected to abide by the Harvard College Honor Code, which states: “Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one’s own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.”

For more information on the Honor Code, see: https://honor.fas.harvard.edu/about

Course Policy on Collaboration

You are allowed and encouraged to discuss course material with your classmates and others outside of class. However, there are no collaborative written assignments for this course, and all graded assignments are intended to be completed individually. All written work submitted by a student for this class should consist of that student’s own individual ideas, that student’s research and be in that student’s own words. All quotations, paraphrases and additional uses of others’ ideas and work should be clearly and properly identified and referenced. See honor code above for class expectations.

Assignments

The final grade for this class will be based on the following assignments:

- Class participation (20% of final grade)
  - Includes attendance, general participation during in-class discussions and discussions of specific assigned readings.
- Three short (5 page) papers (16% each, 48% total)
- Final 10 page paper (32%)
  - Paper prompts will all be distributed early in the semester, as will a grading rubric. Papers should be submitted by the due date and time; late papers will subject to a grading penalty, as specified on the prompt. Contact your professor as soon as possible if you anticipate that you may not be able to submit a paper by the date and time when it is due.

Course Preview Period Meeting

Introduction to Gov 94RC: “‘Race is a Social Construct.’ So What?”

I will hold a special Zoom Preview Session for this class on Thursday, August 19 at 12pm (noon) EST. You can log in using the following link:

https://harvard.zoom.us/j/98338327540?pwd=NDFobS9FTkhSeGlvOHR3L01RUUl0Zz09

Zoom Meeting ID: 983 3832 7540    Passcode (if prompted): 876984

For a flavor of the topics covered in the course, feel free to read or skim any of the following passages, which are posted on the course website. (Enrolled students will be expected to read these passages in addition to the week 1 material below.)


Coates, Ta-Nehisi. Between the world and me. One World, 2015. Chapter 1 (excerpt)
Class Outline
SECTION 1: THE WORLD BEFORE RACE(?)

**September 1 (Wednesday)**

**Week 1: The Middle Kingdom and the “Four Barbarians”**

**Required readings:**


**Additional resources:**

[https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/where-did-indians-come-from-part-3-what-is-caste/](https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/where-did-indians-come-from-part-3-what-is-caste/)
September 6 (Labor Day Holiday)

Week 2: No Class

September 13

Week 3: *Caste is Exactly Like Race, Except Not At All*

**Required readings:**


Freitas, Kripa. "The Indian caste system as a means of contract enforcement." Northwestern University, unpublished manuscript (2006). Focus on the non-technical parts of the article (pages 1-11, 45-47); you don’t have to read the rest (though you can if you are interested and/or like economic modeling).

“Skin colour tied to caste system, says study” Times of India. Nov 21, 2016.

**Additional Resources:**


September 20
Week 4: Playing the ‘Rome’ Card: Ancient Greco-Roman Identities

**Required readings:**
Kennedy, Rebecca Futo "Is there a race & ethnicity in Greco-Roman antiquity?“ Classics at the Intersection (Blog). April 8, 2019. [https://rfkclassics.blogspot.com/2019/04/is-there-race-or-ethnicity-in-greco.html](https://rfkclassics.blogspot.com/2019/04/is-there-race-or-ethnicity-in-greco.html)


Ando, Clifford. "Race and citizenship in Roman law and administration." Xenofobia y racismo en el mundo antiguo (2019): 175-188.


**Additional Resources:**


**Friday, September 24 PAPER 1 DUE BY 5PM EST VIA EMAIL**
September 27  
Week 5: Father Abraham Had Many Sons  
**Required readings:**  
The Books of Genesis and Exodus excerpts (English Standard Version preferred)  
The Quran (excerpts)  
**Additional Resources:**  
De Rougemont, Denis. The idea of Europe. Macmillan, 1966. (excerpts)  
SECTION II: THE INVENTION OF RACE

October 4
Week 6: I've Got Soul (But I'm Not a Soldier): The Catholic Church and Race

Required readings:


(Don’t worry, the Papal documents are generally pretty short)

Pope Urban II. “Speech at Council of Clermont” 1095. (Five versions of the Speech)” https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/urban2-5vers.asp

Pope Eugene IV. “Sicut Dudum” January 13, 1435.

Pope Nicholas V. “Dum Diversas.” 1452.

Pope Nicholas V. “Romanus Pontifex.” 1455.

Pope Alexander VI “Inter Caetera.” May 4, 1493.

Pope Paul III. “Pastorale officium” May 29, 1537.

Pope Paul III. “Sublimis Deus” June 2, 1537.

Pope Gregory XVI,”In Supremo” December 3, 1839

Pope Paul VI. “Gaudium Et Spes” December 7, 1965. (Sections 27-29)
October 11 (Columbus Day/Indigenous People’s Day)
Week 7: No class

Friday, OCTOBER 15 PAPER 2 DUE BY 5PM EST VIA EMAIL

October 18
Week 8: “The Fellow Was Quite Black” – The Enlightenment and (Scientific) Racism

Required readings:


Kant, Immanuel. Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime 1764. (excerpt)


David Hume, Of National Characters (excerpt)


Additional resources:
October 25
Week 9: This is America: Spanish and British Colonialisms

**Required readings:**


**Additional resources:**


November 1
Week 10: Fifty Shades of White: British Martial Races and Theories of Whiteness

**Required readings:**


Hochman, Adam. "Of Vikings and Nazis: Norwegian contributions to the rise and the fall of the idea of a superior Aryan race." Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences 54 (2015).


**Additional resources:**

November 8
Week 11: Black Powers: Haiti and Brazil

**Required readings:**
- Chapter 2, “Race and Class in Creole Society: Saint-Domingue in the 1760s”
- Chapter 5, “Citizenship and Racism in the New Public Sphere”
- Chapter 8, “Free People of Color in the Southern Peninsula and the Origins of the Haitian Revolution, 1789–1791”


**Additional Resources:**

**Friday, November 12 PAPER 3 DUE BY 5PM EST VIA EMAIL**
Nov 15
Week 12: Gotta Keep ’Em Separated: Apartheid South Africa and Whiteness in the US

Required readings:


Beltran, Cristina (interviewed by Lulu Garcia-Navarro). “Understanding Multiracial Whiteness And Trump Supporters” NPR. January 24, 2021. (Read or listen)
ahttps://www.npr.org/2021/01/24/960060957/understanding-multiracial-whiteness-and-trump-supporters

Additional Resources:

Nov 22
Week 13: Pan’s Labyrinth: African, Arab, and Indigenous Identities and Solidarities

**Required readings:**


**Additional resources:**


Nov 29
Week 14: Racial Alchemy

**Required readings:**


Trieu, Monica M. "‘It was about claiming space’: exposure to Asian American studies, ethnic organization participation, and the negotiation of self among southeast Asian Americans." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 21, no. 4 (2018): 518-539.

**Additional Resources:**

Marrow, Helen. "To be or not to be (Hispanic or Latino) Brazilian racial and ethnic identity in the United States." *Ethnicities* 3, no. 4 (2003): 427-464.


**FINAL PAPER DUE DATE TBD**