

PHILOSOPHY OF RACE
Sample syllabus -- gen-ed undergraduate class

Instructor: Dr. Colin Smith (he/him)

Course description: Given that there is no deterministic biological basis for race, does race exist? Should we continue or cease to recognize racial categories? What is it like to grow and live as someone who is racially marked, and how do the conditions of oppression affect the ways in which one learns? How has race affected judicial institutions like policing and incarceration in the United States? In what ways is race at play in current crises like environmental collapse, human rights violations among immigrant populations, and COVID-19?

Our aim in this course will be to do our best to ask and answer these difficult questions. In so doing, we will bring the tools of philosophy to bear on the question of race and, in turn, use the issues concerning race to help us to focus our own methods of philosophizing. No background knowledge in philosophy is presupposed.

Required textbook: None; readings will be provided on Canvas.

Grading:

15%: Attendance and participation, including discussion leading

5%: Review presentation

20%: Midterm exam

20%: Final exam

25%: Average of four response papers

15%: Podcast assignment

Schedule of classes:

Unit 1: What Is Race?

Week 1: Introduction

Syllabus, introduction to philosophy

Watch: *Race, The Power of an Illusion*, Episode 1, "The Difference Between Us"

Week 2: Social constructionism

Charles Mills, "What Are You *Really?*: The Metaphysics of Race"

Sally Haslanger, "A Social Constructionist Analysis of Race"

Week 3: Racial eliminativism

Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Race, Culture, Identity*, Part 1: "Analysis: Against Races"

Naomi Zack, "How Mixed Race is Not Constructed: US Identities and Perspectives"

Week 4: Racial realism

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

Quayshawn Spencer, "What 'Biological Racial Realism' Should Mean"

Unit 2: Race and human existence

Week 5: Struggle

bell hooks, "Learning in the Shadow of Race and Class"

Rigoberta Menchú, "I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala"

Week 6: Recognition

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Intro., Chapter 1, "The Negro and Language"

Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction"

Week 7: Black existentialism today

Lewis Gordon, "Black Existence and Philosophy of Culture"

Watch: "Lewis Gordon on engaging with Fanon in the time of COVID"

Week 8: Midterm exam

Unit 3: Race and justice

Week 9: Racial and policing

Naomi Zack, *White Privilege and Black Rights: The Injustice of US Police Racial Profiling and Homicide*, Chapter 3: "Black Injustice and Police Homicide"

Vanessa Wills, "Bad Guys and Dirty Hands: 'Ethical Policing' in the Face of Racial Injustice"

Week 10: Race and the criminal justice system 1

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2

Watch: *The Thirteenth* (2016)

Week 11: Race and the criminal justice system 2

Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Chapter 1: "Introduction--Prison Reform or Prison Abolition?" and Chapter 6: "Abolitionist Alternatives"

Unit 4: Intersectional issues

Week 12: Race and gender

Naomi Zack, "Gender Theory in Philosophy of Race"

Sally Haslanger, "Gender & Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?"

Week 13: Race and immigration

José Jorge Mendoza, "Philosophy of Race and the Ethics of Immigration"

Seyla Benhabib, "The Right to Have Rights"

Week 14: Race, climate, and COVID-19

Olúfẹ̀mí O. Táíwò, "Cops, Climate, COVID: Why There Is Only One Crisis"

Olúfẹ̀mí O. Táíwò, "Why Reparations Cannot Ignore Climate Change"

Week 15: Course conclusion -- catch up and review