

**SC 043 – Introduction to African-American Society:
Commonalities, Differences, and Power within “the” Black Experience
Spring 2006**

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People of African descent have a unique relationship within the United States. In 1896, distinguished scholar W.E.B. DuBois became convinced that the experience of Africans in the Americas was so distinctive that it was imperative to study Black people in order to understand power dynamics at all levels of society. While paying particular attention to the many ways that racial power dynamics have impacted all people of African descent in the United State, this course does not assume a uniform Black experience. We shall see that gender, class, and sexuality greatly shape the differing experiences of African-Americans; both in regards to other ethno-racial groups as well as between other Black Americans. As a Core course, we explore these matters by addressing the following issues:

Perennial Questions : This course will interrogate some of the on-going debates within sociology as well as the larger scholarship on African-Americans, race, class, and gender. For instance, we will ask: What drives human behavior, biology or culture? Do people shape society or does society shape people? What is “freedom”? What are the limits of our ability to overcome oppression and inequality? What is the meaning of progress?

To help tackle these questions, this course will be explicitly guided by four central themes from critical race feminism (CRF). This perspective asserts that:

- 1) Social identities are historically and culturally specific and change over time.
- 2) Race, class, gender, and sexuality are not separate identities that are easily distinguishable from one another. These social identities intersect and reinforce each other. For example, one cannot talk about race without examining its implications for gender and vice versa.
- 3) CRF acknowledges the importance of laws, policies, and institutions in the perpetuation of inequalities.
- 4) Finally, CRF is skeptical of concepts such as objectivity, neutrality, and meritocracy. Therefore, ideas of equality must be critically examined.

Cultural Diversity: Cultural diversity is at the heart of this course. We will focus on African-Americans and discuss their unique relationship to the United States. However, we will not only look at distinctions *between* groups, but also *within* group variation. Black women and Black men, for example can experience “Black life” very differently.

Historical Perspective: In the first assigned reading sociologist C. Wright Mills outlines the “sociological imagination,” which highlights the connections between history, social structure, and personal biography. This course nurtures the sociological imagination through its socio-historical foundation, its emphasis on multiple perspectives, and an examination of how history and social structure converge to impinge on the life chances of different types of people.

After situating this course within the “sociological imagination,” we turn to W.E.B. DuBois’ ideas of “the color line” and how the socio-historical construction of this color line impacts Black Americans of various class, gender, and sexual backgrounds. We will then look at how these social identities shape – and are also shaped by – four general subject areas: (1) wealth and poverty, (2) education, (3) families, children, and youth and (4) crime, law, and politics. Although this course is separated into subject areas, we shall see that these areas greatly overlap and are mutually influenced by one other.

Methodology: Methodologies are the procedures that are used to guide research. The course materials are purposely eclectic and draw from a wide range of sources and methods. We will utilize the work of both “positivist” scholars who often obtain data from social surveys and controlled experiments as well as more “interpretative” researchers who frequently derive data from fieldwork and interviewing. We will also discuss the strengths and weaknesses of particular methodologies.

Writing Component: Throughout the semester you will be compelled to use your “sociological imagination” in essays for exams, in-class writing, and, if you choose, extra-credit assignments. The writing component will help you develop critical thinking skills and to engage the world sociologically.

Creating A Personal Philosophy: This course will challenge you to critically examine: yourself in the social order; how you benefit from and/or are oppressed by your social location; your ideas of freedom and social justice; your vision for yourself and society in the future; and the best ways to realize that vision considering the very real social constraints that bind us all. Hopefully, this will encourage working for the betterment of human kind from a culturally competent standpoint that is informed by the complex intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Course Expectations and Evaluation:

- 1) This is a *reading* and *participation* intensive course. Readings are due *on the date they are listed*. Come to class ready to discuss them.
- 2) If you miss class, you are responsible for getting notes from a classmate.
- 3) There will be three exams. Exam One is worth 20%, Exam Two is 30%, and the Last Exam accounts for 35% of your final grade.
- 4) Fifteen percent of the final grade will consist of class participation. This includes contributing to class discussions, in-class writing assignments, and pop quizzes. You cannot make up in-class assignments or pop-quizzes if you are not present unless you have an excused absence.
- 5) A doctor, school administrator, or other certified official must verify an absence in order for it to be excused. Notes from parents or legal guardians will not be accepted.
- 6) Students will also be given the *option* to write up to five response statements for extra credit. These statements should be in response to readings. You should take the time to craft a thoughtful critique because there is no guarantee that you will receive credit. In order to get credit, statements will be evaluated based on the following criteria: (a) an introduction that distinctly states your topic and why it is important; (b) responses should have a logical flow with

supporting evidence from the readings and lecture; (c) a succinct critique of the pertinent issues; (d) and all papers should be typed, double spaced, and NO MORE than two pages. Once we have finished discussing a particular reading, you *cannot* write a statement on it. Also, statements must be on different subject areas. For example, you cannot write two statements on education. These statements may also be read allowed to the class to spark discussion (names, however, will be kept confidential). Each response statement is worth a one-percentage point increase to your final grade. For example, if you do (and receive credit for) all five statements a final grade of 85% will be bumped up to a 90%. There will be no other extra credit options.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a standard of utmost importance in this class. Guidelines for academic integrity in written work are posted on the Boston College website at:

bc.edu/bc_org/avp/enmgt/stserv/acd/univ.html#integrity *

If you have any questions pertaining to the academic integrity guidelines, please come and talk with me or with the teaching assistant. If you are caught violating Boston College's policies on academic integrity, you will receive a failing grade for the assignment and the appropriate Dean will be notified in accordance to the rules set forth by Boston College.

Required Readings:

Hill Collins, Patricia. 2004. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. New York: Routledge.

Patillo-McCoy. 1999. *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle-Class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Roberts, Dorothy. 1997. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. New York: Vintage Press.

Royster, Deirdre A. 2003. *Race and the Invisible Hand: How White Networks Exclude Black Men from Blue-Collar Jobs*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Readings marked with an (*) indicates that it is from one of these books.

Ereserve Readings.

Reading Schedule:

Race, Class, Gender, Sexuality, and the Souls of Black Folk

Jan. 17: First Day of Class – No Readings

Jan. 19: Introductory Concepts – Mills, C. Wright. 1959. Ch. 1 “The Promise,” pp. 3-24, In *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.

AND

W.E.B. DuBois. 1903 [1994]. Ch. 1 “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” pp. 3-11, In *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Gramercy Books.

Jan. 24: Gregory W. Streich. 2002. “Is There a Right to Forget? Historical Injustices, Race, Memory, and Identity.” *New Political Science* 24(4): 525-542.

Jan. 26: Harris, Cheryl I. 1995. "Whiteness as Property," pp. 276-291. In *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, edited by K. Crenshaw, N. Gotanda, G. Peller, and K. Thomas. New York: New York Press.

Jan. 31: Patricia Hill Collins. 1990. Ch.1 "The Politics of Black Feminist Thought," pp. 3-18, In *Black Feminist Thought*. New York. Routledge.

AND

*Roberts, Dorothy. "Introduction" and Ch. 1, "Reproduction in Bondage," in *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, pp.1-55

Feb. 2: Siobhan B. Somerville. 2000. Ch. 1 "Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body," pp. 15-38, In *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.

AND

*Patricia Hill Collins. Ch. 3 "Prisons for Our Bodies, Closets for Our Minds: Racism, Heterosexism, and Black Sexuality," in *Black Sexual Politics*, pp. 87-116.

Feb. 7: Robin D.G. Kelley. 1997. Ch. 1 "Looking for the 'Real' Nigga: Social Scientists Construct the Ghetto," pp. 15-42, in *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Feb. 9: *Patricia Hill Collins. Ch. 4 "Get Your Freak On," Ch. 5 "Booty Call," and Ch. 6 "Very Necessary," from *Black Sexual Politics*, pp. 119-212.

Feb. 14: FIRST EXAM!!!

Wealth and Poverty

Feb. 16: Lipsitz, George. 2000. "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics." In *The Meaning of Difference*, pp. 351-360, edited by Rosenblum and Travis. McGraw-Hill Publishing.

AND

Oliver, Melvin and Thomas Shapiro. 1997. *Black Wealth/White Wealth*, Ch. 5 "A Story of Two Nations: Race and Wealth," pp.91-125. New York: Routledge.

Feb. 21: *Mary Patillo-McCoy. Introduction, Ch. 1 "The Black Middle Class," and Ch. 2 "The Making of Groveland" from *Black Picket Fences*, pp. 1-43.

Feb. 23: *Mary Patillo-McCoy. Ch. 3 "Generations Through a Changing Economy" and Conclusion from *Black Picket Fences*.

Feb. 28: *Deirdre Royster. Introduction, Ch.2 "Invisible and Visible Hands," and Ch.3 "From School to Work...in Black and White" from *Race and the Invisible Hand: How White Networks Exclude Black Men from Blue-Collar Jobs*, pp. 1-59.

March 2: *Deirdre Royster. Ch. 5 "Evaluating Market Explanations," Ch. 7 "Networks of Inclusion, Networks of Exclusion," and Ch. 8 "White Privilege and Black Accommodation" from *Race and the Invisible Hand: How White Networks Exclude Black Men from Blue-Collar Jobs*.

March 7-9: NO CLASSES!!! ENJOY YOUR BREAK!!!

March 14: *Roberts, Dorothy. "The Welfare Debate," Chapter 5 in *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, pp.22-55

AND

Kenneth J. Neubeck and Noel A. Cazenave. 2001. Ch. 6 "Welfare Reform as Race Population Control," pp. 147-176, In *Welfare Racism: Playing the Race Card Against America's Poor*. New York: Routledge.

Education

March 16: Prudence Carter. 2003. " 'Black' Cultural Capital, Status Positioning, and Schooling Conflicts for Low-Income African American Youth," *Social Problems*, v.50 n.1, pp. 136-155.

AND

Karolyn Tyson. 2003. "Notes from the Back of the Room: Problems and Paradoxes in the Schooling of Young Black Students." *Sociology of Education*, 76(October): 326-343.

March 21: Anthony M. Platt. 2000. "End Game: The Rise and Fall of Affirmative Action in Higher Education. Reconfiguring Power: Challenges for the 21st Century," pp. 319-328, In *Structured Inequality in the United States*, edited by Aguirre, Jr. and Baker. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

AND

John Larew. 2000. "Why Are Doves of Unqualified, Unprepared Kids Getting into Our Top Colleges? Because Their Dads Are Alumni." In *The Meaning of Difference*, pp. 273-278, edited by Rosenblum and Travis. McGraw-Hill Publishing.

March 23: SECOND EXAM!!!

Family, Children and Youth

March 28: Kyle D. Crowder and Stewart E. Tolnay. 2000. "A New Marriage Squeeze for Black Women: The Role of Racial Intermarriage by Black Men." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62 (August): 792-807.

AND

Erica Chito Childs. 2005. "Looking Behind the Stereotypes of the 'Angry Black Woman:' An Exploration of Black Women's Responses to Interracial Relationships." *Gender & Society* 19(4): 544-561.

March 30: Newman, Katherine. 1999. *No Shame in My Game*, Ch.7 "Family Values," pp.186-205. New York: Russell Sage.

April 4: Francis Windance Twine. 1997. "Brown-Skinned White Girls: Class, Culture, and the Construction of White Identity in Suburban Communities" in *Displacing Whiteness*, edited by Frankenberg. Durham: Duke University Press.

AND

*Mary Patillo-McCoy. Ch. 5 "Growing Up in Groveland" from *Black Picket Fences*.

Crime, Law, and Social Politics: Inter-Racial and Intra-Racial

Inter-Racial

April 6: Philip A. Klinker with Rogers M. Smith. 1999. "Introduction" and pp. 317-328. *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

AND

Glenda E. Gilmore. 1996. Ch. 6 "Diplomatic Women," in *Gender and Jim Crow*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina.

April 11: Marc Mauer. 1999. Ch. 7 "African Americans and the Criminal Justice System," pp. 141, in *Race to Incarcerate*. New York: The New Press.

AND

Harris, David A. 2002. Ch. 4 "The Hard Numbers: Why Racial Profiling Doesn't Add Up," pp.73-90 in *Profiles in Injustice: Why Racial Profiling Cannot Work*.

April 13: NO CLASS – Have A Good Break!

April 18: *M. Pattillo-McCoy. "Neighborhood Networks and Crime," Chapter 4 from *Black Picket Fences*.

AND

*Roberts, Dorothy. "Making Reproduction a Crime," Chapter 4 in *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, pp.150-200.

April 20: Boris I. Bittker. 1973 [2003]. Ch. 2 "The Case for Compensation," pp. 8-29, in *The Case for Black Reparations*. Boston: Beacon Press.

AND

*Roberts, Dorothy. "The Meaning of Liberty," Chapter 7 in *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, pp.294-312.

Intra-Racial

April 25: Aaron Celious and Daphna Oyserman. 2001. "Race From the Inside: An Emerging Heterogeneous Race Model." *Journal of Social Issues* 57(1): 149-165.

April 27: Kendall Thomas. 1997. "'Ain't Nothin' Like the Real Thing: Black Masculinity, Gay Sexuality, and the Jargon of Authenticity," pp. 116-132, In *The House that Race Built*, edited by Lubiano. New York: Vintage Press.

AND

Rhonda M. Williams. 1997. "Living at the Crossroads: Explorations in Race, Nationality, Sexuality, and Gender," pp.136-153, In *The House that Race Built*, edited by Lubiano. New York: Vintage Press.

May 2: Reuel Rogers. 2004. "Race-Based Coalitions Among Minority Groups: Afro-Caribbean Immigrants and African-Americans in New York City." *Urban Affairs Review* 39(3): 283-317.

May 4: Wrap up and Review – No Readings (**Last day of regularly scheduled classes**)

LAST EXAM will be given during finals week (TBA)

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