Course objectives: This course is a general introduction to the sociology of race and ethnic relations, with a particular emphasis on the situations and experiences of African-Americans. A sociological approach to the topic begins with the assumption that race and ethnicity are socially and politically constructed phenomena: They are phenomena that vary significantly across time and place, and that ultimately rest on supra-individual processes of group boundary formation, segregation, and the creation of inter-group (racial) hierarchies. Theoretically, this approach involves a sustained critique of both the concepts of assimilation, and the assumption that prejudice, individual attitudes, or representations of race are the ultimate foundations of segregation or racial hierarchy. Methodologically, it implies that race and ethnicity in general, and the circumstances of African Americans in particular, can best be grasped via theoretically informed, comparative and historical analyses of group dynamics and social structure. The basic objective of the course is to understand: 1) the social, political and historical conditions under which segregation, racial hierarchies and racial conflict emerge, and 2) the institutions through which racial boundaries and hierarchies are produced and reproduced in the United States.

Course outline: The course pursues these objectives in four steps. Part one introduces the sociology of race and ethnicity as an analytical approach concerned first and foremost with social context, the construction of group boundaries, and the structural bases of identity formation. Here, we develop and critique theories of assimilation. We identify the contradictions or dilemmas assimilation can pose for African-Americans. And we highlight the need to ground arguments about integration and identity within an analysis of structural constraints, racial hierarchies, and their institutional foundations.

Part two develops the major theoretical approaches to race and ethnicity in sociology. Under what conditions do segregation, group boundaries and racial hierarchies emerge, become salient, or crystallize in enduring institutions? We address *macro approaches* that emphasize class relations and internal colonialism; *interactionist and social-psychological approaches* that foreground the role of face-to-face relations and other micro-level processes in the construction of race; and *middle-range structuralist* approaches that emphasize ethnic competition, split labor markets, ethnic enclaves, and the cultural division of labor.

Part three uses these approaches to explore the institutional foundations and historical development of African American race relations. Here, we expand our analyses of segregation and racial hierarchies by taking on William Julius Wilson’s path-breaking arguments about the declining significance of race, and by examining the key institutions involved in the creation and reproduction of racial boundaries and inequality in the United States. Topics include the racial state; the rise and fall of slavery and Jim Crow; residential segregation and the development of the “underclass;” the role of schools, prisons and the criminal justice system in creating racial
divisions; and the welfare state. As we move through this section, we will also use the theoretical approaches from part one to explain the rise and mobilization of these institutions, while deepening our appreciation of the role that institutions and public policy have played in segregating and subordinating African Americans.

Part four moves beyond black and white to revisit assimilation and racial and ethnic dynamics in the context of contemporary immigration. Our agenda here is to provide a very brief introduction to the debates and issues raised by immigration since the Civil Rights movement, to move beyond crude determinist arguments, and to consider how race and ethnic boundaries are made, unmade, revised and mobilized as historical conditions change, transnational processes emerge, and new groups of people flow into and across the social landscape.

Course prerequisite: Sociology 211, Introduction to Sociology, is required for this course. In particular, the course assumes a background in classical sociological theory and its modern applications; a basic introduction to social stratification and political sociology; and familiarity with some elementary analytical concepts and techniques, including correlational analysis, p-values, and the logic hypothesis testing.

Readings and writing assignments: This is a reading and discussion based course whose success hinges critically on students’ preparation and active participation. The reading is varied, ranging from historical and ethnographic materials to multi-variate statistical analyses, and often difficult, requiring a collective “piecing-together” of the argument, evidence and method within the conference. It is also cumulative in character. Thus, falling behind in the reading or failing to prepare for conference is not an option.

To facilitate careful reading, focussed group discussion, and cumulation, students will write four two to four page memos over the course of the semester and a short final paper. These writing assignments will begin with a basic explication of a theory or research monograph. They will then involve more advanced exercises, like applying theories to a case, formulating competing hypotheses about an outcome, conducting a comparative analysis of mobility or discrimination across two ethnic groups, and designing a research project. Memos will be announced one week in advance. The final paper is due in class on April 30. I accept no late work.

The following books are required reading and can be purchased from the Reed College Bookstore. To minimize the costs of books, I’ve ordered paperback and used copies whenever possible. These books are also available on 2-hour reserve at the Reed College library.

Also highly recommended:


Articles and book chapters required for this course are available on the course Moodle.

READING ASSIGNMENTS

PART I:
FRAMING THE PROBLEM: ASSIMILATION, GROUP BOUNDARIES AND THE CREATION OF RACIAL HIERARCHIES

Week 1: (January 29, 31)

Introduction: What is race? What is the sociology of race?

Assimilation theory: The disappearance of race and ethnic identity?


Week 2: (February 5, no class Feb 7)

Identity, institutions, history and the social construction of boundaries


Elijah Anderson. Streetwise (selections)

Week 3: (Thursday, February 14 and Saturday, February 16; no class February 10.)

Social and historical construction of boundaries 2:

Orlando Patterson. Slavery and Social Death (Tuesday: Intro, 1-3; Thursday: 11-12)
PART II: EXPLAINING BOUNDARIES, SEGREGATION AND RACIAL HIERARCHIES

A. Social psychological and interactionist approaches

Week 4: (February 19, 21)

Attitudes


Interactions and relations in public


B. Macro approaches: internal colonialism, race and class

Week 5: (February 26, 28)

Internal Colonialism


Class Approaches


C. Middle range structuralism in sociology

Week 6: (March 5)

Middleman Minority Theory, Ethnic Enclaves and the Cultural Division of Labor


Week 6, continued: (March 7)

Split Labor Market Theory


Week 7: (March 12, 14)

Ethnic Competition Theory and the Political Construction of Ethnic Boundaries


Spring Break (March 16-24)

PART III: INSTITUTIONS AS SITES OF SEGREGATION

Week 8: (March 26, 28)

The rise and fall of the racial state?

William Julius Wilson. *The Declining Significance of Race* (Tuesday: 1-5; Thursday: 6-7)

Reread Feagin. “The Continuing Significance of Race…."

Week 9: (April 2, 4)

Residential segregation and the markets for housing

Week 10: (April 9, 11)

Schools and racial sorting

Jonathon Kozol. Savage Inequalities (Tuesday 1-4; Thursday 5-7)

Week 11: (Thursday April 18 and Saturday April 20, no class April 16)

Crime and unequal punishment


PART IV: IMMIGRATION AND ETHNICITY IN THE CURRENT MOMENT

Week 12: (April 23, 25)

Immigration and its trajectories: current debates


Week 13: (April 28, 30)

Immigration, state policies and labor regime


All for Tuesday with memo. A big push at the end, but then done!

**** FINAL PAPERS DUE IN CLASS THURSDAY APRIL 30 ****