

**SWRK 798-306: Critical Race Theory**  
**School of Social Policy & Practice**  
**University of Pennsylvania**

Class day and time: Wednesdays 6.45-9.15pm  
Room location: Caster A19  
Fall Semester 2012

Instructor:  
Office Location & Hours:  
Email:  
Phone:

### **Course Description**

This course explores Critical Race Theory (CRT) and critical theories of race. CRT refers to a body of work that emerged during the 1980s and 1990s among legal educators to try and explain why there seemingly has been racial progress on the one hand through laws and court decisions that outlaw the most visible symbols of racial discrimination, but growing signs of racial inequality on the other in education, health, criminal justice, housing, politics, and other areas.

During the past ten years, a growing number of scholars in fields such as women's studies, sociology, education, gender studies, history, criminology, and postcolonial studies have begun to look to the insights developed by critical race theorists. Without a doubt, CRT has spawned and/or influenced new areas of inquiry such as Latino/a critical studies, queer studies, critical race feminism, and critical white studies. This new wider body of work may be called critical theories of race or critical race studies as distinct from Critical Race Theory. Although social work researchers have begun to use CRT ideas such as intersectionality, the application of Critical Race Theory to the field remains largely unexplored.

In the post World War II era, economic transformation, political reforms, demographic transitions and the growth of new forms of media have all helped to dramatically change how we think about race and how race continues to shape and be shaped by policies and institutions in the United States and the broader world. Indeed, a significant development during this period has been the now widely accepted view that race itself is a social construction, shifting over time and place according to the needs of various population groups. In a way, race is something that is "practiced" or "performed," to name terms that many scholars use, but with real structural implications for populations judged as "different" or as an "other."

### **Views and Objectives**

Scholarship in critical race studies has largely revolved around three points:

- Critical Race Theory tries to advance a social justice framework. Unlike earlier research that tries to explain race and racism, CRT explicitly aims to address social inequity.

- Critical Race Theory is interdisciplinary in nature and embraces multiple research methods and interpretive frameworks from law, the social sciences, and the humanities. What are essential are the core questions that guide research, not the disciplinary frameworks that gave birth to education, history, law, sociology, history, education, social work, etc.
- Critical Race Theory draws upon paradigms of intersectionality. Recognizing that race and racism work through gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, language, religion, and/or the nation-state as systems of power, critical race theorists rely on and draw upon these intersections and overlapping frameworks.

This course will hopefully address these points and raise new questions as well through substantive readings and a research paper. At the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand and discuss the legal roots and main ideas of Critical Race Theory and critical race studies that can guide future research and advocacy;
- Examine the workings of contemporary racism, in particular, colorblind racism in a global context; and
- Investigate the theoretical relationships between race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation.

### **Prerequisites and Linkages to Other Courses**

Although it is recommended, it is not necessary to require taking preparatory courses on race, racism, colonialism, African American history, or the history of racial minorities prior to enrolling in Critical Race Theory. For students in the MSW program, this course builds on readings in race theory introduced in SWRK 603: American Racism and Social Work Practice and provides substantially more depth. For students in other departments and programs on campus, the course will hopefully complement their planned program of studies on race, oppression, and marginalization more generally. A general liberal arts background at the undergraduate level that encouraged the development of critical thinking and research skills should be sufficient preparation for taking this course.

### **Required Texts** (available at A House Of Our Own Bookstore, 3920 Spruce Street)

1. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).
2. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2008).
3. Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).
4. Gregory Maguire, *Wicked, The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (New York: Harper, 2007).

5. Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement From Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Vintage, 2011).
6. Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness, Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

Additional readings will be available on Blackboard: <https://courseweb.library.upenn.edu/>.

## **Assignments and Grades**

### Class Participation (50% of final grade)

Because this class meets once per week, it is essential that you come on time, stay for the entire class, and come prepared. Class participation will be evaluated by:

1. Your overall attendance;
2. The quality of your weekly reflective essays;
3. The quality of your in-class presentations on weekly assigned readings; and
4. The quality of your participation in class discussions.

*Weekly Reflective Essays:* Race is best analyzed through a multitude of disciplinary and theoretical approaches including history, sociology, philosophy, education, literature and law. The sources we will examine must be analyzed for their main ideas and overall arguments. We want to encourage deep and critical thinking, not coverage.

To ensure that everyone is prepared for an informed discussion, each week, you are required to write a 1 page reflective essay that:

- a) Summarizes the main ideas of the reading(s); and
- b) Analyzes some dimension of the author's argument including evidence, logic, implications, etc.

The purposes of these essays are to help stimulate your thinking and imagination and get your ideas on paper. They will be graded pass/fail; they do not have to be grammatically precise, but they should be interesting. Essays should focus on the main ideas of the authors and your interpretation and/or assessment of those ideas. My hope is that in thinking through the readings this way, your classroom participation will be all the better.

**Reflective essays are due each week on Tuesday by 11:59pm.**

### Final Project – Portfolio Option (50% of final grade)

A portfolio is a notebook or binder that contains documentation of your accomplishments in the course. If possible, you may be able to do this in electronic format (such as a PDF file). At minimum, portfolios must contain the following:

1. Cover Page and Introductory Material: This should contain complete information on the course, e.g., name, date, title, institution, etc. as well as a table of contents with page numbers of items included in the portfolio.
2. Analytical Essay: For this portion of your portfolio, your analytical essay should demonstrate critical thinking that engages a main or ideas idea of critical race theory. The analytical essay should be approximately 8-10 pages, excluding references. You have three options for fulfilling this portion of the assignment: (a) an intellectual autobiography; or (b) a literature review. The purpose of this assignment is for you critically to assess and synthesize material related to course content.
  - a. Choice #1: Intellectual Autobiography: This option may be best suited for those who cannot come up with a “topic” of interest. Your intellectual autobiography should summarize your intellectual development in this course. The primary focus of the essay should be on your engagement with the main ideas of the course, not simply your internal state of mind. This essay is best written after reviewing your class notes, the weekly reflective essays you submitted throughout the semester, and the annotated bibliography assignment. It is your opportunity to examine main ideas of critical race theory that stand out for you.
    - i. With hindsight, how would you assess the corpus of work that you completed for this seminar? What patterns do you see in your own work?
    - ii. How did the course readings and discussions shape your thinking about the guiding questions of the seminar? Be specific. Cite ideas from specific works. Cite patterns that you see across the readings and/or class discussions.
    - iii. How did the course readings and discussions shape your thinking about your current and/or future scholarship and/or intellectual production? Be specific. Cite ideas from specific works. Cite patterns that you see across the readings and/or class discussions.
  - b. Choice #2: Literature Review: This option may be best suited for students who wish a more in-depth analysis of existing literature on some aspect of race and racism. It should include additional readings and provide an analysis of some aspect of the readings. It should also demonstrate a grasp of some key themes, questions and/or insights of the course. For instance, you may want to do a review of literature that critiques critical race theory scholarship for its tendency to focus too much on a black/white paradigm.
3. Appendix: Include copies of weekly reflective essays that you submitted throughout the semester, as well as any comments that I sent to you about them.

Final Project – Research Paper Option (50% of final grade; 15-20 pages)

You must define a topic, research it, and write an essay for this option. Your paper may be on any subject you wish as long as you use CRT as a theoretical lens, or perhaps you may wish to critique CRT itself as an imperfect theory. Papers may be either historical or contemporary in nature or contain elements of both. Since the class represents a multitude of disciplines, you should use the format (APA, Chicago, etc.) which you are most comfortable and familiar with.

Your paper may take a number of different formats, but as a general rule of thumb it should include:

- Introduction (1 page maximum)
- Literature review (7-9 pages)
- Main section (7-9 pages analyzing your sources that support the main thesis you stated in the introduction)
- Conclusion (1 page maximum that summarizes your main points)
- Bibliography of sources or reference list

**Final Projects are due by April 25.**

## **Class Schedule**

### **Part One: Foundations of Critical Race Theory and Critical Race Studies**

- Wk 1, 1/11: Course Introduction
- Wk 2, 1/18: Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, p. 1-160 (chapters 1-6); *Brown v. Board of Education I & II* (1954 & 1955); *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974), Opinion (Burger) and Dissent (Marshall)
- Wk 3, 1/25: Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, p. 161-309 (chapters 7-12); Cho and Westley, “Historicizing Critical Race Theory’s Cutting Edge”; MacKinnon, “Keeping It Real”
- Wk 4, 2/1: Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*, p. 1-129 (chapters 1-5); *McKleskey v. Kemp*, (1987); *Ricci v. DeStefano* (2009)
- Wk 5, 2/8: Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*, p. 131-275 (chapters 6-10); Harris, “Whiteness as Property”
- Wk 6, 2/15: Joint class with SWRK 604: Foundations of Social Work Practice, “Critical Race Theory and Postcolonial Theory”; readings TBA

### **Part Two: Topics in Critical Race Studies**

- Wk 7, 2/22: Deloria, *Playing Indian*, p. 1-94; Roediger, “White Skins, Black Masks”; Smith, “How Race Is Made”

Wk 8, 2/29: Deloria, *Playing Indian*, p. 95-191; Carbado, "Straight Out of the Closet"; Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens"

### **Spring Break March 5-9**

Wk 9, 3/14: Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*, p. 1-145; Ladson-Billings and Tate, "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education"; Auerbach, "Why Do They Give the Good Classes to Some and Not to Others?"

Wk 10, 3/21: Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*, p. 146-277; Abrams and Moio, "Critical Race Theory and the Cultural Competence Dilemma in Social Work Education"; Freeman, "Teaching Obama"

Wk 11, 3/28: Class cancelled

Wk 12, 4/4: McGuire, *At The Dark End Of The Street* (entire book); Johnson, "Race and the Immigration Laws"; Volpp, "The Citizen and the Terrorist"

### **Part Three: Solutions and Storytelling**

Wk 13, 4/11: Maguire, *Wicked*, p. 1-228

Wk 14, 4/18: Maguire, *Wicked*, p. 231-519

### **Final Projects Due April 25**