RACE, RACISM AND RESISTANCE: 
*Theories of Race and Ethnicity*

*Sociology 410*

*Section 20*

*Spring 2023*

Instructor:
Quincy Thomas Stewart  
q-stewart@northwestern.edu

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** For years we have understood that race is an exceedingly complex matter and that preconceived biases much more than biology govern the way people think about race. In this course, we will discuss both the biological myth and social reality of race. Specifically, this course provides an overview of the prominent theories/theorists of race and ethnicity, and is concerned with: 1) Understanding the early science of race used to justify racial classification and thinking, 2) reviewing the theories regarding the nature and persistence of race and ethnicity as meaningful social groupings in society, and 3) explaining the social significance of these group identities (e.g., how they are related to social stratification, social-cultural relations, and the political and economic dynamics in society) in the United States.

We will begin our review with the origins of the concept race. Then, we will move from early perspectives to the present in an aim to understand the influential theories and theorists. As we proceed in our investigation we will continuously ask: 1) What are the key assumptions, propositions and concepts of each theory? 2) How is it situated within the larger theoretical tradition? 3) Does the theory agree or disagree with other views in the field? 4) What was/is the level of empirical support for the theory? 5) To what extent does the theory help to explain patterns of race and ethnicity across time and space in the United States? And 6) what type policies or actions would be the optimal response to alleviate racial and ethnic inequality in the respective theoretical landscape?

A survey of theories of race and ethnicity is an ambitious undertaking. We will cover a large amount of complex material over a relatively short period. In order to be successful, we require maximum commitment and effort from all participants. Since this is a graduate seminar, the format will involve presentations/overviews/summaries of assigned readings for the day to be followed by a critical discussion of the readings and related source materials.

Students are required to play an active role in this process sharing the responsibility of presenting, leading discussions, and critiquing with the instructor. Given the requirements of
the course, you are encouraged to think and work collaboratively. Specifically, you should form small working groups to provide a forum for discussing course readings outside class.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:** The requirements include: class attendance and participation (10%), regular short reaction papers (20%), leading discussions (20%), and a final paper (50%).

**Attendance and participation:** Class attendance is based on your regular presence in class. Attendance is mandatory. Students will be penalized 4% of their final grade for each unexcused absence. I will excuse absences for sickness, religious holidays, in-patient hospital admissions, and military service. Please do not bring me documentation for any other reason.

Class participation will be measured through participating in classroom discussions, the submission of discussion questions each week, and responses to discussion questions posed by others. Students are expected to actively engage in classroom discussions—more voices greatly add to the learning environment, and I would like each student to contribute their insights to our ongoing discussions. In addition to participating through discussion, students are required to submit 2 discussion questions prior to Wednesday’s class each week that they do not lead the discussion during the quarter. A single sentence question is sufficient, although longer questions are welcome. Discussion questions/comments should be submitted by email to q-stewart@northwestern.edu on the Tuesday (before 5pm) prior to each class meeting. Lastly, students will also participate by formally answering discussion questions during Wednesday writing breaks. The goal of these writing breaks is to get students into the flow of writing, and to encourage a deeper engagement with the respective theory.

**Short reaction papers:** You are required to submit weekly short reaction papers over the course of the quarter. The short reaction papers should be approximately 1-2 paragraphs. You should engage a particular reading or topic. You will be cursorily graded on your ability to develop an argument or critique of the respective reading and incorporate alternative insights to formulate a novel argument. These short papers are not summaries of the readings. Rather, they embody your short, scholarly response to the reading of interest. (Time permitting: we will read these aloud in class on Wednesdays.)

**Lead Discussion:** All students are required to lead/co-lead at least 2 discussions over the course of the quarter. Discussion leaders have 4 distinct duties:

1. **Provide a Clear and Concise Summary:** The first and most important obligation of discussion leaders is to put before the rest of the class for discussion the core ideas and evidence contained in the readings for the day. Fulfilling this duty involves: 1) motivating an interest in the specific issue or problems, 2) reviewing in reasonable detail the core questions and objectives of the research (i.e., the central argument), 3) highlighting the evidence developed in the research, and 4) noting any major conclusions drawn in the work. The best way to accomplish this task is to think of oneself in the role of the author(s): specifically, present the material as someone who is an advocate for the position taken.
2. **Highlight Positives**: The second obligation of the discussion leader is to address what you see as the strengths of the research. Be explicit about the strong points, interesting observations, useful contributions, or provocative insights offered in the work. What are the important contributions of the work and why do you feel that way?

3. **Highlight Negatives**: The third obligation is to address the weaknesses of the research. Again, be explicit about the shortcomings or failings of the work.

4. **Guide Discussion through Questions**: The final obligation is to engage in a discussion with the class about the important aspects of the readings. Those who present may draw upon the cache of discussion questions submitted to realize this final duty. They may also develop additional questions on their own or with co-presenters. The challenge is to hit on the main points of the readings and connecting the respective articles/books.

The materials included in the “positives” and “negatives” sections above should proceed at two levels of analysis. **First**, take the material on its own terms. That is, within the confines of the research problem as defined in the work, what does it deliver on well and what does it fail to deliver on? **Second**, consider how the work bears on the larger questions and themes of the course. Does it make a clear and meaningful contribution to our understanding of how race and ethnicity may affect social behaviors and outcomes?

Indeed, it is tempting to make the “summary” section of the presentation the longest portion of the discussion. However, we are particularly interested in talking about the main points of the work. Thus, you should leave considerable time to talk with the class about various issues brought up in the readings. You may use **handouts, tables, figures, illustrations, videos/film clips, and discussion questions** (mentioned above) to help facilitate your discussion.

**Final Paper (Due at 11:59pm on 06/06/2023)**: The final paper for the course is a research proposal. The proposal must engage a topic/theory that we covered in class, and develop a rationale for conducting a traditional, empirical social scientific research project (using quantitative and/or qualitative data) on the topic/theory. In addition to developing a rationale, proposals should highlight how the study fits into the literature, develop hypotheses/state expectations, and describe the data/data collection strategy.

This final paper should not exceed 20 double spaced pages in 12-point Times New Roman font—and be no less than 15 double spaced pages in 12-point Times New Roman font. Furthermore, the background section (i.e., literature review) should encompass the majority of the project.

**CLASS AND OFFICE HOURS**: The class meets on Wednesdays between 2:00 p.m. and 4:50 p.m. My office is located on the third floor of 1810 Chicago Ave in Room 322. I will be available in via Zoom on Mondays between 4:00 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. and by appointment. I encourage you to make an appointment before you come during my office hours because I often schedule appointments with other students for portions of that time. If/when you come to my office for a meeting in person, please **DO NOT** wear perfume or cologne. I will have to ask you to
reschedule our meeting if you wear perfume or cologne to an office meeting. My office phone number is 847-491-7044. My email address is q-stewart@northwestern.edu.

TEXTBOOKS
(Available at the NU Bookstore, Amazon, NU Library Reserve; *online; ^provided):


**READINGS**

(Articles Available on Canvas)

**COURSE OUTLINE**

1. **Introduction and Aim, 03/29/23**


2. **Background and Biology of Race, 04/05/23**


**Supplemental Reading:**


3. Early Perspectives, 04/12/23 (Traveling; Pre-/In-Class Assignments)


Supplemental Reading:


4. Traditional Theories, 04/19/23


5. New Formulations of Race, 04/26/23


Supplemental Reading:


6. Race and Class, 05/03/23


7. Modern Race, 05/10/23


Supplemental Reading:


8. Race and Attitudes, 05/17/23


**Supplemental Reading:**


9. Race and Education, 05/24/23


**Supplemental Reading:**


10. **Race in the Labor Market & Conclusion, 05/31/23**


**Supplemental Reading:**

