Comparative and International Approaches to Race and Ethnicity

The course will focus on how concepts such as “race” and “ethnicity” can and have been used to understand social phenomena in different places around the world, and the extent to which concepts, theories and methods used to understand “race” and “ethnicity” in the U.S. are applicable elsewhere. We will examine some major empirical studies and debates that have been made in Canada, Latin America, Europe and elsewhere, as well as studies that attempt to draw connections and/or make comparisons between different places. Overall, the course aims to give students a better grasp of central concepts in the field, paying particular attention to processes of classification and group-definition. We will examine how scholars, policymakers, activists, and people more broadly understand and make use of and, in the process, shape and transform “racial” and “ethnic” categories. We will also examine the extent to which categorization and group definition by these different social actors inform and shape inequality and power relations in different societies, the production of our knowledge about “race” and “ethnicity”, and the institutionalized efforts to mitigate these inequalities.

The titles of the different sections of the course outline roughly organize the emphasis of each week. Weeks 2 to 4 will provide students with some analytical perspectives that allow us to think about “race” and “ethnicity” across national borders. Weeks 5-7 will look at “macro-geographies of race and ethnicity”, looking at the variability of how racial, ethnic and related categories are related to social phenomena in different countries, as well as examining nationhood as a category that in itself needs to be problematized and examined in relation to racial and ethnic categories, as well as how historical and contemporary social processes that have shaped racial and ethnic categories and relationships precede, transcend and interact with national borders. Weeks 8-10 will examine some of the “building blocks” of race and ethnicity, looking at how people’s bodies and practices are read, coded and institutionalized to shape racial and ethnic categories and social relationships. Finally, in the last two weeks (11 and 12) we will discuss how “racial”, “ethnic” and related classification processes are implicated in our understanding and attempts to address major contemporary social problems.

However some recurring themes will come up in multiple weeks that do not have a “section” for them. For instance, most weeks include a reading that talks about the topic at hand from the perspective of, or in relation to, Indigenous peoples in Canada. Another example of a recurrent theme is the idea of “hybridity” or “mixture” and how it gets deployed differently in different contexts. Finally, while the readings are not organized around methods, the course is also supposed to showcase different approaches or methods for studying race and ethnicity by including empirical studies that examine the substantive issues at hand.

This course is not designed for graduate students to familiarize themselves with particular groups, their fates and their history, but rather to give you a set of tools for thinking about social processes related to categories of “race” and “ethnicity.” It thus
leaves out the experiences of many racial and ethnic groups in Canada, and leaves some regions of the world unexamined. It also leaves out many intersecting categories (such as sexuality, disability etc) that determine how race and ethnicity are lived. The hope is that the student can take what was learned and be able to apply it to contexts, topics and experiences of their interest, with adequate further investigation of the particular contexts, topics and people whose experiences they choose study.

Readings
Readings are listed in the course outline below. Readings are available electronically on Blackboard.

Assignments, responsibilities and grading

Grading breakup

weekly memos: 25% (10 memos, 2.5% each)
paper proposals: 5%
paper presentations: 10%
leading discussion in class: 10%
final paper: 50%

Reading and participation: It is expected that students will have done all the required readings for that week and are prepared to discuss it as class starts. Recommended readings are listed primarily as a resource for further reading depending on the students’ interests and there is no formal expectation with regard to these readings.

Weekly memos. These are short (one single-spaced typed page) written responses to the readings for each week. The point of this exercise is to get you in the habit of writing as a natural accompaniment to critical, reflective reading. It is also meant to ensure that everyone comes to class prepared for a critical discussion. The memos should not summarize the week’s reading, but critically engage it. Specifically, your memos should do the following:

(1) identify a central issue at stake in this set of readings;
(2) identify the points of agreement on this issue (if there are any);
(3) identify the core disagreements;
(4) state and explain your position on the issue;
(5) list two questions that you would like to discuss in class about the readings.

Memos should be emailed to the class list by [deadline TBA]. You should do 10 memos during the semester. As I do not expect a memo in the first week, this means that you can opt out of doing the memo during one week.
Leading discussion

Each student should choose one week where they will serve as the facilitators for the discussion. Facilitators can start with summarizing points in the reading that they found interesting, going straight into questions, or asking other students to express their general opinions on the readings. You are also encouraged to use some of the questions in your classmates’ memos as a basis for discussion. Discussants should try to keep the conversation lively and engaging, but should also give the opportunity for other students to intervene, express their opinions and ask their questions. The professor will participate in the discussion, intervene with clarifications and background information, and ask additional questions to the class when appropriate.

Final paper

You should write a final paper with 5000 to 10000 words in length. Papers need to be well-written, coherent and original, and must relate in some way to the topic of the class.

The topic of the paper is flexible, but here are some options:
(1) Write a paper that investigates more deeply a theoretical, conceptual or methodological discussion raised in the class. This paper should not be just a review of the literature but should be centered around an original argument that the student wants to make.
(2) Write a paper using empirical data to support an argument on an issue related to the class discussion
(3) Write a paper that uses some issue raised in the class to help illuminate some of the literature about race and ethnicity in Canada, or in another context of your choice, or making a link between different contexts.
(4) Write a research proposal for an empirical research project that you want to conduct in the near future, or in your dissertation, and that is related to the class materials. If you do this, the proposal should contain the theoretical justification for your project, that is, a discussion of the controversies in the literature that your empirical study would try to resolve.
(5) If you have been working on a paper for another class and want to revise it for this class to send it for publication, you can do it, but you need to show me the original paper in the beginning of the semester, and you must show significant improvement of the paper during the course of the semester.

Paper-related assignments

Paper proposal (required, due Week 4):
You must do a 1-3 page proposal of your paper, explaining the main theoretical or empirical questions that you plan to engage, how you will go about doing that (what kinds of methods, what kind of literature, etc), and a brief outline of your paper. Proposals submitted on time will generally get full credit, but good proposals will help
me guide you toward writing a good final paper. Students would be advised to consider carefully the comments they receive on their proposals.

**Come to my office and talk about your paper (optional but highly recommended)**

Although I will not grade you based on whether you come to my office and talk about your paper, exchanging ideas with me about it is highly recommended. I will give you written feedback on your proposal but you'll get much more out of me if you actually come talk to me. Come to my office hours or, if you can't make it on that schedule, email me and we can schedule an appointment.

**Paper presentation**
You will be required to do a short (10-minute) presentation of your research paper in class. You should present as you would do in a conference, talking about your main ideas in a clear and concise way.

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**Course Outline**

**Week 1. Introduction: legacies, challenges, projects and approaches**

*Required reading:*


*Note:* I do not expect a memo for the first week, but I do expect you to familiarize yourself with the Truth and Reconciliation report listed above (in case you haven’t yet), which we will use as a point of departure in our discussion in the first class.

**A. Conceptual Approaches**

**Week 2. “Race” always, everywhere?**


*Recommended:*


Wacquant, Loic. “For an Analytic of Racial Domination” *Political Power and Social Theory* 11: 221-234


**Week 3. Groupness, categories and boundaries**


Recommended:


Calhoun, Craig. 2003. “‘Belonging’ in the cosmopolitan imaginary” Ethnicities 3(4):531-568


Wimmer, Andreas. Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks

Tilly, Charles. Durable Inequality.
**Week 4. Post-/De-colonial approaches**


*Recommended:*


Dei, George J. Sefa, “Blackness and Colonial Settlerhood: A Purposeful Provocation.” Chapter 4 in: *Reframing Blackness, Anti-Blackness, and Decoloniality*

**B. Macro-geographies of “race”**

**Week 5. Meanings of “race” (and related categories) in national contexts**


Recommended


Week 6. "Race" and nationhood


in Latin America and Spain: republics of the possible. Cambridge University Press, pp. 329-355. [26]


Recommended


Week 7. “Race” (and nationhood) beyond borders


**Recommended**


**C. (Socially constructed) building blocks of “race” and “ethnicity”**

**Week 8. The social construction of genetic "race"**


**Recommended**


**Week 9. Skin color**


Recommended


Week 10. Language and religion


Recommended


D. Problems, solutions, and their categories

Week 11. Race, ethnicity and violence


Recommended


Connor, Walker. “Beyond Reason: The Nature of the Ethnonational Bond” Ethnic and
Racial Studies. 16(3) 1993: 373-389


Week 12. Classification struggles and the institutionalization of multiculturalism and anti-racism


Bleich, Erik. 2002. "Integrating ideas into policy-making analysis frames and race policies in Britain and France." Comparative Political Studies 35(9): 1054-1076. [22]


Recommended:


