

SOC 367: Race, Class, Gender
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“I am what time, circumstance, history, have made of me, certainly, but I am, also, much more than that.”

(James Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son 1955)

fleeing

everything i do comes down to the fact that i've been here before.
in some arrangement of my atoms i was allowed to be free
so don't ask me when freedom is coming
when a certain eye of mine has seen it,
a cornea in a convoluted future recalls my freedom.
when asked about the absence of freedom, the lack of it
i laugh at the word *absence*, which always suggests
a presence that has left. but absence is the arena
of death, and we call the dead free (*went on to glory*), what
is the absence of freedom but an assumption of it?
i have never longed for something
which was not once mine. even fiction is my possession,
and flight is an act of fleeing as much as an act of flying.

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Course Rationale

This fall, our focus is on learning about race, class, and gender through the particular provocations of Black intellectuals or those working in Black Studies. These scholars, activists, artists, poets, essayists, have contributed in central ways to our understanding of identity, social inequality, social transformation, and their interrelation.

When Black feminist Law Professor Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality,” in 1989, she gave us a lens, a framework, a means for thinking in more complex ways about the key axes of identity that come together to comprise social experience. This is important because so many institutions want to simplify categories to more effectively name and sort people, excising how life is lived and experienced by people in so doing. Intersectional reckoning lowers the frequency with which people are disenfranchised or rendered invisible. Of course, as sociologists, we look at patterns of identity formation because we realize they are keys to understanding differential entitlement – to resources, to respect, to self-actualization, and life itself.

The course is devoted to Black intellectual work this term because it afforded us the lens of intersectionality and made the space for this academic framing – Race, Class, Gender. The syllabus is dedicated to the work of *Black Lives Matter* and the life of Regis Korchinski-Paquet. The focus is a provocation to the Department of Sociology here at UofT to develop anti-racist and Black Studies in its curriculum and to hire Black faculty.

We’re guided by the seriousness of this political moment and this pandemic. At the same time, this will be a gentle journey of learning and exploration of important ideas, at a pace most people, regardless of their learning environment, can benefit from and do well within.

No one should be hired in the broad fields of law, health, policy, culture, media and governance without being trained to think intersectionally. You are an asset to the causes, communities and organizations to which you will devote yourself if you’ve been trained to reflect on matrices of oppression, multiplicity in identity and interrelation across difference in ways that are honest and complex. Most people begin to think in intersectional terms first when they are themselves being overlooked, disallowed, stereotyped, curtailed or targeted, with deleterious effects. This is one of the reasons why this aspect of sociological practice derives from Black Studies and Black Feminist Thought. The standpoint of Blackness or Black experience has generated considerable knowledge about inequality and transformation to which sociology is indebted.

Epistolary

For this term, we will be reading or watching texts that are like letter-writing. They have a person or set of people in mind as they write, and they have an imperative of communication that has deep stakes for them. Everything you write for this class will be a letter, too. This kind of writing is also called *epistolary*. A short story or poem can be a kind of correspondence, and so can a piece of theorization or social research. Sometimes we write to those with power, sometimes those without. Sometimes we write within community or family and

sometimes to those outside of it. Sometimes we write for the next generation, or to the generation past. And sometimes we write to ourselves.

Letters are usually full of sentiment, and most sociological writing reads as devoid of sentiment, as if the most proper thing for a professional to do is to be without social location, and without hope. But who can afford to write dispassionately and without political objective? And is this something to which we should aspire all the time? As we read, you will develop answers to these questions for yourself.

In this class, you will write five letters. The letters can be to anyone but me, since most papers are written implicitly for the professor, and you are likely tired of this singular audience by this point in your studies. I'd like you to practice writing to a range of people. Each letter affords you the opportunity to explain the significance of texts and sometimes to explore their relation to your own life -- your own race, class and gender locations, and those of others.

Remember to attend to the years these authors are writing in as you write your disappointments or critiques. 20% each. 3 pages double spaced. Titled. Consistent citation practice. You must include affixed to each letter an outline in which you map the topics and arc of the letter, introduce, discuss, conclude. Letters can exceed the page limit. You may include drawings, pictures, but confine the discussion to materials assigned in the class, except under rare circumstances when citation of outside work is necessary for making an argument.

If you require accommodation, please register with accessibility services: <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/task/register-with-accessibility-services/> and please communicate with me about your needs at the start of term.

Please consider these A&S programs for studying and support:

Recognized Study Groups (RSG) are voluntary, peer-led study groups of 3 – 6 students enrolled in the same course. They're available for all A&S courses and are now fully online. In addition to supporting students' study habits and academic success, RSGs also encourage student participants to be socially connected with their peers. Last year, over 2,000 A&S students participated in RSGs for courses spanning all streams and class sizes.

Meet to Complete are online drop-in study sessions held exclusively for A&S undergrads. Offered multiple times per business day and led by trained A&S student-staff, these study sessions help students to stay motivated and productive by offering daily goal-setting and the opportunity to study alongside their A&S peers.

The university also has 14+ writing centres, available to help you with workshops and assignment specific advising. <https://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres/>

How to read a letter in this class

1. Identify the author/ maker – who are they? When did they write? What are their disciplines or practices?
2. Identify the audience, or audiences for the letter.
3. What is the purpose of the letter? What does it seek to explain or explore, affirm or critique?
4. How does the author make arguments?
5. What axes of identity and their interrelation are the author's focus?
6. Identify neglected aspects of their analyses - - things authors don't name, and do, without dismissing the import of their work.
7. Name aspects of texts you find useful, appealing, or disappointing.
8. What does reading the letter with an intersectional lens enable you to see and understand?

Readings: Please give yourself ample time to read and source the readings. *Brother* by David Chariandy is available at any bookstore real or on line. Other than that the readings are available by link below or by going on the UofT library site and connecting to the text there. Please do research on each author before you begin reading. Who are they and when are they writing? What is their social location, disciplinary training, political orientation?

Course Schedule

1. Sept. 14: The Stakes of the Intersectional

Kimberle Crenshaw

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akOe5-UsQ2o>

1989. Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. University of Chicago Legal Forum.

<https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf>

Crenshaw. 2000. Round the Kitchen Table. *Baltimore*. 107: 6.

<https://search-proquest-com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/docview/199611075?accountid=14771&pq-origsite=summon>

2. Sept. 21: Turn of the Century Intersections

W.E.B. Dubois. 1903. The Souls of Black Folk. 1-IV

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm>

3. Sept.28: Between Experiential and Observational

Hurston, Zora Neale. 1928. How it Feels to be Me. *The World Tomorrow*.

<https://www.casa-arts.org/cms/lib/PA01925203/Centricity/Domain/50/Hurston%20How%20it%20Feels%20to%20Be%20Colored%20Me.pdf>

Hurston, Zora Neale. 1950. I Saw Negro Votes Peddled. *American Legion Magazine*.

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9s85d8sw>

4. Oct. 5: Resisting Greedy Institutions

King, Martin Luther. 1963. Letter from a Birmingham Jail.

https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html

James Baldwin. 1962. A Letter to my Nephew. *The Progressive*.

<https://progressive.org/magazine/letter-nephew/>

Oct. 12: Thanksgiving Holiday

5. Oct. 19 Feminist and Queer Interventions

Lorde, Audre. 1978. The Uses of the Erotic.

https://uk.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/11881_Chapter_5.pdf

Lorde, Audre.1981. The Uses of Anger. Women Responding to Racism.

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1981-audre-lorde-uses-anger-women-responding-racism/>

Riggs, Marlon. 1989. *Tongues Untied*.

<https://utoronto.kanopy.com/video/tongues-untied>

6. Oct. 26 Being a Race Traitor

Segrest, Mab. 1994. *Memoir of a Race Traitor*. Boston: South End Press.

https://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Segrest_On_Being_White_and_Other_Lies.pdf

7. Nov. 2 Intergeneration

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. 2015. *Between the World and Me*. Pp. 5-71.

Twine, France Winddance. 2004. A white side of Black Britain: The concept of racial literacy *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 27(6)

https://journals-scholarsportal-info.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/details/01419870/v27i0006/878_awsobbtcorl.xml

Nov. 9 reading week

8. Nov. 16 Solidarity and Visibility

Cornell West and Prince. 2004. *Dear Mr. Man*

<https://diffuser.fm/prince-cornel-west-dear-mr-man/>

Cole, Desmond. 2020 *The Skin We're In*. A Year of Black Resistance and Power. 1-17; 107-123.

Maynard, Robyn. 2017. *Policing Black Lives*. 1-16. 116-127.

9. Nov. 23 Familial and Structural

Chariandy, David. 2017. *Brother*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.

<https://www.cbc.ca/books/canadareads/how-david-chariandy-brought-his-novel-brother-to-life-1.4310129>

10. Nov. 30

Jordan, June. Where is the Love?

<https://blackfeministmind.wordpress.com/2009/01/29/where-is-the-love-session-ii/>

Adrienne Marie Brown. 2019. Love as Political Resistance.

<https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/love-time-political-resistance/transform-valentines-day-lessons-audre-lorde-and-octavia>

Onuorah, Nneka. 2015. The Same Difference. View using the following link:

<https://utoronto.kanopy.com/node/1687435>

Ferguson, Roderick. Chapter 6 The Relevance of Race for the Study of Sexuality. In *A companion to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer studies*. Malden, MA: Blackwell. Eds. George E. Haggerty Molly McGarry.

<https://search.library.utoronto.ca/details?10498786>

11. Dec. 7 Sociology for What?

Collins, Pat Hill. 2019. *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*. Ch. 1 Intersectionality as Critical Inquiry.

Letters

Due Sept 28 Letter 1: Write a letter to W.E.B. Dubois explaining how Kimberle Crenshaw is building on his legacy. Note their commonalities and differences. Make sure to compliment his work, noting its effectiveness, and you may also say what you hoped to see in analysis, that the future brings with KC.

Alternatively, write a letter to Kimberle Crenshaw, explaining how Dubois does and does not do intersectional analytical work, and what the contributions of his analysis are to our understanding of race, class and gender.

Oct 19 Letter 2: We might say that the roots of intersectional analysis rest in despair, incredulity, and hope. Intersectional analyses need not be emotionally vacant. Write a letter to a friend focusing on the emotional intellectual work of Baldwin, King and Hurston. First describe their intentions and then their emotions – where is there sincerity and where sarcasm? How do emotions help us think about different axes of identity?

Due Nov 23. Letter 3. Solidarity is a key aspect of intersectional work. Explain to someone why this is so using Maynard, Cole, Segrest, Twine.

Due Dec 7. Letter 4: This class is called Race, Class and Gender, and yet scholars also see sexuality as a key axis of identity through which we define ourselves, are defined, and structure our central institutions. Write to a friend about intimacy as an aspect of intersectionality, drawing on relevant texts in weeks 5, 9, and 10 and explaining how intimacy is both constraining and enabling.

Due Dec 14. Letter 5: Pat Hill Collins wants you to make observations about and conduct research in the world in particular ways. Write to her about the research or work you plan to undertake and how her framing, and other readings in the class, have influenced your plans. You can outline intentions, questions, doubts, hopes about someone who will generate knowledge and ideas in the world.

Alternative letter 5: Using Coates as a model, write a letter you wish had been written to you by a parent figure, or a letter you will write to someone you one day hope to parent. What life experiences will you draw on to explain the world and your experiences and relations in it? Draw liberally on any course readings that help you in this endeavor. You may footnote so as not to interfere with the flow of your letter.