Course Description:
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Race is one of United States’ most enduring problems. With a history that is rooted in slavery and then the Civil War, race relations have never been entirely “normalized” despite the tremendous progress of the past two generations. Well publicized public opinion surveys provided ample evidence of the racial divide in the early 21st century. For example, racially divergent assessments of the fairness and legitimacy of law enforcement and the judicial system routinely produce polls showing that African Americans are much more likely to believe that a black suspect is innocent, while whites are more likely to believe he or she is guilty. George W. Bush’s victory in the 2000 presidential elections was viewed as tainted by a much larger percentage of African Americans than of whites, partly because of the allegations of discrimination in the voting process in Florida. Similar allegations were made, especially in Ohio, in the 2004 election. Barack Obama’s presidency has raised many more questions about race and politics, prompting some to note an “end to black politics” while others argue that race is still very central to American politics.

This course examines the sources and policy implications of the racial divide by analyzing a range of issues. We will examine the historical background of race relations and the current policy debates, with a focus on trying to find common-ground solutions. We will examine issues such as affirmative action in the workplace and in higher education, the use of black majority districts as a tool of enhancing the representation of minority interests in Congress, differences in public opinion between whites and blacks, and issues concerning multi-racial and ethnic tensions. The goal of this seminar is to stimulate critical thinking on this critical issue and get you think about race and politics in new ways.

Course Evaluation:
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The grades for the course will be based on seminar attendance and participation (22%), seven short (2-page) reaction papers (4% each for 28%) a paper (25%), and a final exam (25%). The format of the exam will be short essays. All reading material and seminar discussions will be fair game on the exam. I will pass out a handout on the paper assignment in a few weeks. Briefly, it will be a 10-12 page paper on a topic that interests you from the seminar. The class participation grade will be based on the following expectations:

(1) That you will attend each seminar.
(2) That you read the assigned readings before coming to seminar. I expect a critical reading of the material. You certainly will not agree with everything you are presented with in this class – indeed, I always try to present at least two points of view on every topic.
(3) That you come to class prepared to make a meaningful contribution to seminar discussion.
(4) Each of you will be responsible for one class presentation of five minutes in length that will highlight a current event that is relevant for the topic we are discussing that week (if you can’t find something on the specific topic, something generally related to race and politics would be fine).

The reaction papers should be critiques rather than summaries of the readings for that week. You will not be able to discuss all of the issues raised in a given week’s readings, so pick three or four topics for each two-page paper. Challenge a claim made by an author, question their use of evidence, integrate and
synthesize the various arguments presented by the authors and show how they relate to one another. These papers are good preparation for the seminar discussion, because this is the type of critical discussion we will be engaging in.

Books and Readings:
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The following books are required for the course and are available for purchase at the University of Wisconsin Bookstore on State Street. The rest of the assigned reading will be made available on Moodle.


Seminar Schedule and Reading Assignments:

**Part 1 – The Context of Race and Politics**

September 5th – Race and Politics on a personal level

This introductory seminar will start our conversation on race and politics by examining our experiences with race in our own lives. Given that there were no assigned readings for the initial seminar, we will talk about our own experiences with race and then observations about the communities in which we have lived.

September 12th – Identity, Discrimination, and Privilege

We begin the examination of race and politics with some basic questions concerning racial identity. To what extent are racial categories objective and to what extent are they historically and socially contingent?

Introduction and Chapter 1 in *Whitewashing Race*.


Samhita Mukhopadhyay, “The White Stuff,” *American Prospect*, July/August, 2008, 33-35 (you should also read a few items on the to blog, [http://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com/](http://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com/), which has had more than 91 million hits. The blog is no longer active, but you can access the old posts), Moodle.

September 19th – Historical background and the law

This discussion will focus on the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, different techniques used in the South to disenfranchise blacks, civil rights legislation aimed at reversing those restrictions, the idea of the “melting pot,” and the current status of racial classification in the law (with a focus
on racial redistricting).

V.O. Key, Chapter 25, “Southern Suffrage Restrictions,” in *Southern Politics* (1949), Moodle.
Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from the Birmingham Jail,” Moodle.
Chapter 2 in *Race, Redistricting, and Representation*.

September 26th – Affirmative action and Racial Discrimination (the date for this seminar will be changed to the weekend of September 28-30; we will have dinner at my house, 2521 Kendall Ave., and then the seminar after dinner).

What is the nature of racial discrimination today? Does affirmative action provide a necessary remedy for past discrimination and help produce a path out of poverty? Or does affirmative action constitute unfair reverse discrimination while producing no real benefits for minorities, as Amy Wax argues? These questions continue to be debated on our nation's campuses as affirmative action in college admissions has been upheld by the Supreme Court, but will be reconsidered in this term. We will examine how these debates may have an impact on University of Wisconsin policies. There is also one short article that examines discrimination toward Arab Americans.


**Part 2 – Race and Politics at the Individual Level**

October 3rd – Public opinion and race

What is the nature of the racial divide in public opinion? Are racial minorities and whites divided on all issues, or just some subset of issues? How firmly entrenched are racist opinions among white? Can they be changed with new information? How did racial considerations playing a role in Obama’s 2008 campaign and how do perceptions of Obama influence one’s opinions on other issues?

Preface, Introduction, and Chapter 1 in *Race, Redistricting, and Representation*.


Sasha Issenberg, “It All Comes Down to Race,” Slate.com, June 1, 2012, Moodle.


October 10th – Elections, political parties, and race

This seminar will examine the racial divide in public opinion discussed in the previous week and examine how these differences play out in partisan politics. We will examine the basic contours of the racial divide in electoral politics, whether the Democratic party is an adequate vehicle for representing racial interests, the impact of the “supply side” on racial representation in Congress, and various issues concerning race and the 2012 presidential election.

Chapter 6, “Color-Blindness as Color Consciousness,” in *Whitewashing Race*.

Chapters 3 in *Race, Redistricting, and Representation*.

Paul Frymer, “Race, Parties and Democratic Inclusion,” in *The Politics of Democratic Inclusion* (2005), Moodle.


**Part 3 – Race and Politics in Institutions**

October 17th – Black majority districts and Representation in Congress

The black-majority districts that were created in 1992 to provide more representation for African Americans in Congress have come under attack. In a series of cases starting in 1993 with *Shaw v. Reno*, the Supreme Court has questioned the constitutionality of these districts, arguing that race cannot be the predominant factor in their creation. What determines the type of racial representation that will be provided in black majority districts? I argue that both sides of the debate on this topic are using the same stereotype – that black politicians only represent black constituents – while reaching different normative conclusions about the value of that type of representation. Both sides of the debate are wrong: a careful assessment of the nature of representation in these districts shows that most black House members represent their entire district, not just the African American voters. Carol Swain present an alternative view on the impact of black-majority districts on racial representation. Shotts and Lublin debate their impact on conservative policy outcomes in Congress.

Chapters 4 and 5 in *Race, Redistricting, and Representation*. 


October 24th – The Obama Presidency
The election of Barack Obama as president in 2008 was a historical moment. But what does it mean for race and politics in the U.S.? An end to black politics, as Matt Bai suggests? How has Obama fared in attempting to pursue various racial issues while not alienating whites? What do you make of his recent CBC speech and the reaction to it? What is the critique of Obama from the left?


October 31st – Voting Rights
Important sections of the Voting Rights Act were set to expire in 2007. We will examine the debate over VRA renewal from the summer of 2006 (the extension was signed into law in July, 2006). A central debate over voting rights that may have important consequences for the national elections next week concerns voter fraud and vote suppression; we will discuss both sides of that debate.

Christina Rivers, "Conquered Provinces"? The Voting Rights Act and State Power,” Publius 36: 3 (Summer 2006), Moodle.
Part 4 – Race and Politics in Policy

November 7th – Immigration and Latino Politics

Immigration reform has been one of the hot issues of the past several years. Now it appears that Congress will duck the issue until after the elections (again), but this issue is not going away. From the perspective of broader issues of race and politics, the issue raises some of the fundamental questions addressed in the class concerning discrimination and racial identity. It also raises difficult issues of cross-racial coalitions and tensions.


FAIR, “Seven Principles of True Comprehensive Immigration Reform, fairus.org, Moodle.


November 14th – Family, Poverty, and Health

Some of the most complicated questions concerning race are tied up in questions of poverty and family life. To what extent are the problems faced by racial minorities due to discrimination and structural obstacles and to what extent should responsibility be placed on individuals? Bill Cosby stirred up the pot by arguing that more responsibility should be placed on individual behavior (a. We will also examine health care as another dimension of this topic.


November 21st – Residential Segregation, Housing Discrimination, and Crime (we will probably want to reschedule this to a different day, given that it is the day before Thanksgiving break).

Most American cities are still very segregated by race. Is this because of discrimination, or personal choice? What implications does segregation have for larger questions of race relations? How is this related to crime? In general, how is race relevant for debates about crime and criminal justice? What impact does the jury system have on racial bias in criminal justice?


November 28th – Welfare reform and race

Welfare reform continues to generate a lot of attention 15 years after its enactment, including the recent controversy over the flexibility granted to the states by the Obama administration for work requirements. Overall, was this the “worst thing Bill Clinton has done” or has it been a good thing for America? How has welfare reform affected race relations and partisan politics in the United States?

December 5th – Education policy and segregation in schools

Racial politics has shifted from a politics of confrontation (as in the 1960s) to a politics of avoidance (simply moving apart). This has been evident in residential segregation but also in public education. What implications does this have for the quality of education in the inner cities? The other central debate concerns the racial gap in academic achievement and how best to address it.

Amy Wax, Race, Wrongs, and Remedies, Chapter 3, pp. 47-52, 61-top of 71.

December 12th – Various Issues and Concluding Thoughts

Our last seminar will go back to some of the big questions that we started with. Are color-blind policies possible or desirable? How can the problems of race best be addressed by the political system and by our society? What do you think of Barack Obama’s “more perfect Union”? What are new research questions concerning race that political science should be engaged in?

Conclusion, “Facing Up to Race,” in Whitewashing Race.
Amy Wax, Race, Wrongs, and Remedies, Chapters 4 and 5, pp.95-125.
Chapters 6 in Race, Redistricting, and Representation.

*** FINAL EXAM, Location, day, and time TBA ***