

PS 201: US Racial and Ethnic Politics

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Department of Political Science

Sample Syllabus (16-week semester, in person)

Revised and expanded version of the department's course taught by the instructor in Spring 2025

Instructor:	Younghyun Lee
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Website:	www.younghyunlee.com
Class Meetings:	Two 75-minute meetings per week
Office Hours:	Twice weekly (in person or via Zoom) and by appointment (sign-up link on Canvas)
Course Site:	Canvas (all readings, discussion posts, and assignment submissions)

Course Description

This course is about racial and ethnic politics in the United States, focusing primarily on African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and Whites. It explores conceptual and methodological issues while examining how racial and ethnic groups shape — and are shaped by — the American political system. Topics include the meaning and measurement of race and ethnicity, the history of racial and immigration politics, prejudice and racial attitudes, group mobilization and participation, political institutions and representation, and public policy.

Why take this course? Race and ethnicity remain among the most powerful forces in American political life, and claims about them circulate constantly in the news, in policy debates, and in everyday conversation. This course will help you — regardless of your major or prior interest — become a more careful consumer of political information and a more analytical evaluator of policy impacts, particularly the implicit or unintended consequences that proposals can have for different groups in society.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Apply your knowledge of American politics (institutions, policies, behavior) to the study of race and ethnicity in the United States.
- Summarize, analyze, and critically evaluate competing understandings and measures of race and ethnicity.
- Compare how theories and policies apply to different groups in society.
- Explain and evaluate how racism is studied at the level of individuals, policies, and institutions.
- Construct a survey, produce and analyze survey results, and evaluate how well your data fit pre-existing theories.

Course Structure

This is a 3-credit-hour course that meets twice weekly over a 16-week semester. The course is organized into eight content modules; most modules span two weeks, and the semester also includes a dedicated exam week and the Thanksgiving break. Class meetings combine short lectures with structured discussion and in-class activities, so **readings should be completed before the first meeting of each week**. Canvas hosts all readings and media, the weekly discussion posts, and assignment submissions. You should expect to dedicate approximately 6–8 hours per week to the course outside of class.

How to Approach the Readings

This course assigns 2–4 readings each week. You are not expected to read every word of every article or chapter with equal care. Instead, focus on identifying each author's main argument, contribution, and the evidence offered in support. In Week 1, I provide a short guide to active reading strategies for social-scientific texts; the university library's resources on how to read a scholarly article are also linked on Canvas.

Course Components

- **Module Overviews** Each module opens with an overview on Canvas explaining what the module is about, its learning goals, expected time commitment, and activities, along with all due dates.
- **Participation & In-Class Activities (5%)** Class meetings include small-group exercises, short in-class writing, and structured debates. Credit is based on prepared, active engagement rather than on being right.
- **Readings & Media** Each week assigns required readings and media (documentaries, podcasts, and short clips). All materials are provided on Canvas at no cost; there is no required textbook.
- **Weekly Discussion Posts (20%)** Each week you will post a short response to the week's discussion prompt on Canvas before our first meeting and engage substantively with at least two classmates' posts before our second meeting. These posts prepare you for in-class discussion and give me a sense of where the class stands before we meet.
- **Reflection (2%)** One structured reflection exercise (Module 3) asks you to connect the course material on racial attitudes to your own observations and experiences.
- **Course Project (38%)** A four-milestone survey research project, described below.
- **Exam (35%)** One in-class exam (Week 16) covering all the lectures and required readings.

Course Project: Studying Public Opinion on Race and Ethnicity

The centerpiece of this course is a project in which you design, field, and analyze your own original survey on a question related to race, ethnicity, and politics. Rather than only reading about how scholars measure racial attitudes and group identities, you will do it yourself — and discover firsthand both the power and the pitfalls of survey research. The project proceeds in four milestones:

- **Milestone 1 (Week 2, 6%):** Research question and theoretical expectations. Choose a topic, formulate a researchable question, and state what existing theories from the course would predict.
- **Milestone 2 (Week 8, 6%):** Survey design. Draft your questionnaire, justify your question wording and response options, and identify the concepts each item is intended to measure.
- **Milestone 3 (Week 12, 1%):** Data collection check-in. Field your survey and confirm your responses have been collected.
- **Milestone 4 (Week 16, 25%):** Final report. Analyze your results, compare responses across groups, and evaluate how well your data fit — or challenge — the theories discussed in the course.

Discussion Norms: Empathy and Evidence

Race and ethnicity are topics on which thoughtful people disagree, sometimes deeply. Disagreement is not a problem to be avoided in this course; it is part of what we are studying. Two norms govern our discussions, in class and online:

- **Understanding disagreement requires empathy.** We engage with one another's perspectives seriously and in good faith, and we attack arguments, never people.
- **Persuasion requires evidence.** Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but if you want others to take your argument seriously, you must support it with evidence — from the readings, from data, or from carefully reasoned examples. Learning to distinguish assertion from argument, and anecdote from evidence, is a central goal of this course.

Grading

Assignment	Weight
Participation & In-Class Activities	5%
Weekly Discussion Posts (14)	20%
Reflection (1)	2%
Exam (1)	35%
Course Project — Milestone 1	6%
Course Project — Milestone 2	6%
Course Project — Milestone 3	1%
Course Project — Milestone 4 (Final Report)	25%

Grade	Percent	Grade	Percent
A+	97–100	C+	77–79
A	94–96	C	74–76
A-	90–93	C-	70–73
B+	87–89	D+	67–69
B	84–86	D	64–66
B-	80–83	D-	60–63
		F	Below 60

Course Policies

Late Work

If you are unable to meet a deadline, **it is your responsibility to make prior arrangements with me for that week.** Otherwise, late work receives a reduction of one-third of a letter grade per day, and work submitted more than 12 days late will receive a failing grade unless prior consent has been given. If you are dealing with an emergency, **contact me as early as you can and we will find a solution.**

Regrading

The regrade procedure is intended to correct serious errors in grading, not to relitigate judgment calls. You may request a regrade within one week of receiving a grade by describing, in a paragraph, why you believe the grading was in error. Note that the grader reserves the right to regrade the entire assignment, which may raise or lower your grade.

Academic Integrity

All work must be your own and completed in accordance with the University of Illinois Student Code (Article 1, Part 4). Violations — including plagiarism and unauthorized use of AI tools to generate submitted work — will result in penalties up to loss of all credit for the assignment and referral to the college.

Accommodations

To obtain disability-related academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids, please contact both the instructor and Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) as soon as possible: 1207 S. Oak Street, Champaign, (217) 333-1970, or disability@illinois.edu. If you need captioned or transcribed versions of any course media, let me know right away so your request can be prioritized.

An Inclusive Learning Environment

The value of this course comes from the diversity of experiences and perspectives that students bring to it. I am committed to a classroom where every student is treated with respect and where no one's standing to participate is questioned. If anything in the course inhibits your ability to learn fully, please reach out to me; if you are more comfortable doing so, you may also contact the department or use the university's reporting channels.

Course Schedule and Readings

All readings are provided on Canvas. Required media (short documentaries, podcast episodes, and clips) are listed with each week. *The schedule is subject to minor revision; any changes will be announced in class, on Canvas, and by email.*

Module 1: Conceptualization and Measurement

What are race and ethnicity, and how do we measure them? We begin with the social and legal construction of racial categories and the politics of counting.

Week 1: What is race?

- Diamond, Jared. 1994. "Race Without Color." *Discover* 15: 82–89.
- Haney López, Ian. 1996. *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, Ch. 3 ("The Prerequisite Cases"). New York: NYU Press.

Week 2: Measuring Race

- Skerry, Peter. 2000. *Counting on the Census? Race, Group Identity, and the Evasion of Politics*, Ch. 3 ("Creating Racial and Ethnic Categories"). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Waters, Mary C. 1990. *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*, Ch. 3 ("Influences on Ancestry Choice"). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Module 2: Intergroup Competition and Cooperation

How do groups form, and when do they compete or cooperate? We examine linked fate, ethnic options, and pan-ethnicity.

Week 3: Group interests and ethnic options

- Dawson, Michael C. 1994. *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics*, Ch. 4 ("Models of African-American Racial and Economic Group Interests"). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Media: "Robber's Cave" (5-Minute History Lesson, Ep. 3), Center for the History of Psychology, University of Akron.

Week 4: Intergroup relations and identity politics

- Wong, Janelle, S. Karthick Ramakrishnan, Taeku Lee, and Jane Junn. 2011. *Asian American Political Participation*, Ch. 5 ("National Origin, Pan-Ethnicity, and Racial Identity"). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- McClain, Paula, et al. 2006. "Racial Distancing in a Southern City: Latino Immigrants' Views of Black Americans." *Journal of Politics* 68: 571–584.
- Lilla, Mark. 2016. "The End of Identity Liberalism." *The New York Times*, November 18.
- Edsall, Thomas B. 2018. "White Identity Politics Aren't Going Anywhere." *The New York Times*, December 20.

Module 3: Racial Attitudes

Where does prejudice come from, and how do social scientists detect it — in individuals, in politicians, and even in algorithms?

Week 5: Prejudice

- Devine, Patricia G. 1989. "Stereotypes and Prejudice: Their Automatic and Controlled Components." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 56: 5–18.
- Kinder, Donald R., and Cindy D. Kam. 2010. *Us Against Them: Ethnocentric Foundations of American Opinion*, Ch. 1 ("Four Theories in Search of Ethnocentrism"). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Media: *Frontline*, "A Class Divided" (PBS, to min. 19:43); clip from *The Wire* ("The Bogus Pipeline").

Week 6: Discrimination

- Butler, Daniel M., and David E. Broockman. 2011. "Do Politicians Racially Discriminate Against Constituents? A Field Experiment on State Legislators." *American Journal of Political Science* 55: 463–477.
- Sidanius, James, Pam Singh, John J. Hetts, and Chris Federico. 2000. "It's Not Affirmative Action, It's the Blacks." In *Racialized Politics: The Debate about Racism in America*, eds. David O. Sears, Jim Sidanius, and Lawrence Bobo. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sniderman, Paul M., Gretchen C. Crosby, and William G. Howell. 2000. "The Politics of Race." In *Racialized Politics*, eds. Sears, Sidanius, and Bobo. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Media: "Gender Shades" (MIT Media Lab).

Module 4: Who Is an American?

What does it mean to be American, and who gets counted as one? We take up national identity, assimilation, and the boundaries of membership.

Week 7: National identity

- Devos, Thierry, and Mahzarin R. Banaji. 2005. "American = White?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 88: 447–466.
- Schildkraut, Deborah. 2007. "Defining American Identity in the Twenty-First Century: How Much 'There' Is There?" *Journal of Politics* 69: 597–615.
- Media: "The Melting Pot: America and Assimilation," *BackStory* (podcast).

Week 8: Assimilation

- Huntington, Samuel P. 2004. *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, Ch. 8 ("Assimilation: Converts, Ampersands, and the Erosion of Citizenship"). New York: Simon & Schuster.

- Alba, Richard, and Victor Nee. 2003. *Remaking the American Mainstream* (excerpts). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Module 5: Institutions

How do parties, campaigns, and governing institutions engage — or capture, or ignore — racial and ethnic groups?

Week 9: Parties and racial realignment

- Frymer, Paul. 1999. *Uneasy Alliances: Race and Party Competition in America*, Chs. 2 and 4. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Schickler, Eric. 2016. *Racial Realignment: The Transformation of American Liberalism, 1932–1965*, Ch. 8. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Week 10: Campaigns and Representation

- Mendelberg, Tali. 2001. *The Race Card: Campaign Strategy, Implicit Messages, and the Norm of Equality*, Chs. 1 and 6. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Evans, Laura. 2011. “Expertise and Scale of Conflict: Governments as Advocates in American Indian Politics.” *American Political Science Review* 105(4): 663–682.
- Media: “Why Treaties Matter” (NPR, 2017).

Module 6: Public Policies

From welfare to redress to criminal justice: how does race shape what government does, and how the public reacts?

Week 11: Race and Public Policy I

- Gilens, Martin. 1999. *Why Americans Hate Welfare*, Chs. 5–6. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Peffley, Mark, and Jon Hurwitz. 2007. “Persuasion and Resistance: Race and the Death Penalty in America.” *American Journal of Political Science* 51(4): 996–1012.
- Kennedy, Randall. 1999. “Suspect Policy.” *New Republic*, September 13: 30–35.
- Media: clip from *13th* (dir. Ava DuVernay, to min. 19:00).

Week 12: Race and Public Policy II

- Hatamiya, Leslie T. 1993. *Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and the Passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988*, Chs. 1 and 10. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. 2014. “The Case for Reparations.” *The Atlantic*, June.
- Graham, Hugh Davis. 2001. “Affirmative Action for Immigrants? The Unintended Consequences of Reform.” In *Color Lines*, ed. John David Skrentny. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Week 13: Thanksgiving Break *No class meetings*

Module 7: Place and Power

Geography is political: redistricting, neighborhood context, and the spatial dimensions of racial politics.

Week 14: Place and Power

- Fraga, Bernard L. 2016. "Redistricting and the Causal Impact of Race on Voter Turnout." *Journal of Politics* 78: 19–34.
- Gay, Claudine. 2006. "Seeing Difference: The Effect of Economic Disparity on Black Attitudes toward Latinos." *American Journal of Political Science* 50: 982–997.
- Lublin, David. 1997. *The Paradox of Representation: Racial Gerrymandering and Minority Interests in Congress*, Ch. 3. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Module 8: Participation

Who participates in American politics, and why? We close with immigration, gender, religion, and the future of a diversifying electorate.

Week 15: Participation

- Jones-Correa, Michael. 1998. "Different Paths: Gender, Immigration and Political Participation." *International Migration Review* 32: 326–349.
- Leighley, Jan E., and Arnold Vedlitz. 1999. "Race, Ethnicity and Political Participation: Competing Models and Contrasting Explanations." *Journal of Politics* 61(4): 1092–1114.
- Ocampo, Angela X., Karam Dana, and Matt A. Barreto. 2018. "The American Muslim Voter: Community Belonging and Political Participation." *Social Science Research* 72: 84–99.
- Cho, Wendy K. Tam. 1999. "Naturalization, Socialization, Participation: Immigrants and (Non-)Voting." *Journal of Politics* 61: 1140–1155.

Week 16: Exam Week