Course Description

What is racism? Is it in the heart (a feeling), or in the head (a belief)—or both, or neither? Has it always been around? If not, why is there racism now?

Given racial injustice, what program of racial justice ought we to pursue? Are reparations for past injustice a necessary part of that program? How might we achieve the fair political representation of racial minorities? What is the connection between racial justice and other egalitarian ideals, such as integration and equality before the law?

The seminar will be run in conjunction with a visiting-speaker series. Philosophers working on these issues will discuss with us their recent work on racial justice and injustice.

Required Texts

No books have been ordered for this course. All readings will be made available via Moodle. You will need to print those readings ahead of time. Philosophy is not best read from a computer screen, or while checking email, reading the news, etc. Please make sure that you bring those hard copies of the readings to the relevant class.

Assignments/Grading:

Final Paper (2000-2500 words) 50%
Weekly reading responses (200-300 words) 25%
Attendance/Class participation 25%

Policies/Requirements:

1. Academic Honesty

Upon entering Amherst College, you each signed a pledge to uphold the honor code. According to the Honor Code’s Statement of Intellectual Responsibility, “the College considers it a violation
of the requirements of intellectual responsibility to submit work that is not one’s own or otherwise to subvert the conditions under which academic work is performed by oneself or by others.”¹ I expect you will all honor the pledge you signed. Therefore, everything you turn in should be your own work and in your own words. If your discussions of class topics with your friends, parents, etc., are helpful, cite them. Credit all sources appropriately, even (especially) Wikipedia and anything from your Googling bounty.


If questions remain about what constitutes academic honesty or dishonesty, come speak to me about them.

The penalty for plagiarism in my course is failure, absolutely no exceptions.

2. Attendance

You should attend class regularly, on time, and well-rested. If you should miss a class because of illness or family emergency, or some other pressing matter, please let me know ahead of time by email. Of course, things happen. But you are expected to attend every class.

3. Participation

In order to get full credit for attendance/participation, you must also regularly participate in class. Be ready to explore ideas critically, boldly, and creatively with others.

Your participation grade turns on the quality, not the quantity of your contributions, and the extent to which you exhibit the respect and care necessary to promote good discussion. Contributions do not have to be in the form of “answers” or completed “theories” about a text or position—thoughtful questions are highly encouraged, and you will certainly not be penalized for a spirit of humility. While good contributions obviously vary immensely, I especially value comments and questions that pay close attention to the relevant text and those that build on, and reflect attention to, others’ contributions.

Office hours: Professor Hasan holds regular office hours from 3-5pm on Tuesdays and 10am-12pm on Wednesdays. The sign-up sheet for the following week will always be placed on his door at the end of my office hours on Wednesday. It is a good idea to come sign up if you want to meet with me. I cannot guarantee that there will be room if you just drop by (though there might be).

4. Reading Responses

Each week you will be given a short response assignment on the next session’s readings. The question(s) will be emailed to you. Your response should be between 200-300 words (~1 page,

¹ https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/dean_faculty/fph/policies/sir
double-spaced, 12 pt. font) and be organized like a mini-essay. In other words, there should be a central claim, distinct paragraphs with topic sentences, etc.

Late reading responses will not be accepted for credit. The goals of these assignments are for you to practice working through and understanding the readings on your own and prepare for class discussion. These goals are defeated if you do not complete the assignment on time.

5. Accommodations
This course is open to all students who meet the academic requirements for participation. Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should make an appointment to speak with an Accessibility Services Staff Member. In order to receive reasonable accommodations for a disability, you must register with the Office of Accessibility Services at Amherst College (even if you are a 5-College student). (https://www.amherst.edu/offices/student-affairs/accessibility-services). This office will provide a letter describing the appropriate accommodations. Once you have this letter, set up an appointment with me and we will discuss how to accommodate you.

Reading Schedule

Note: This schedule is not a contract. It is entirely provisional. We may speed up, slow down, skip readings, or add readings, depending on where our discussion leads and the interests of members of the class.

Week 1 (1/25): Race and Racism
  • Blum, I’m Not A Racist But..., Chs 1 & 6

Week 2 (2/1): Race as a Social Construct
  • Benn Michaels, “The Trouble With Race”
  • Gooding-Williams, “Race, Multiculturalism and Democracy”
  • Optional: Ian Hacking, “Making Up People”

Week 3 (2/8): Racism: Its Site and Scope
  • Re-read Blum, Chapter 1, pp. 22-26
  • Garcia, “The Heart of Racism”
  • Shelby, “Is Racism in the Heart?”

Week 4 (2/15): Reparations I: Philosophical Principles
  • Locke, Second Treatise of Government (Cambridge), pp. 269-278
  • Boxill, “A Lockean Argument for Black Reparations”

Week 5 (2/22): Reparations II: Public Debates


● Horowitz, “Ten Reasons Why Reparations for Blacks is a Bad Idea for Blacks—and Racist Too.” Paid Newspaper Advertisement, January 3, 2001, archived at frontpagemag.com

● Coates, “The Case for Reparations”

Week 6 (3/1): Meena Krishnamurthy (Michigan)

● Krishnamurthy, “(White) Tyranny and the Democratic Value of Distrust”
● Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”

Lecture: Krishnamurthy, “White Blindness” (5pm Pruyn)

Week 7 (3/8): Affirmative Action

● Anderson, The Imperative of Integration (2010), chap. 7

Spring Recess: 3/10-3/18

Week 8 (3/22): Michelle Moody-Adams (Columbia)

● Moody-Adams, “Moral Progress and Human Agency”
● Moody-Adams, “Martin Luther King and the Path of Conscientious Citizenship”

Lecture: Moody-Adams, “Creating Space for Justice” (5pm Pruyn)

Week 9 (3/29): Segregation and Integration

● Rothstein, The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How our Government Segregated America, pp. 4-14

Week 10 (4/5): Crime and Political Obligation

• Shelby, “Punishment” in *Dark Ghettos*

Week 11 (4/12): Robert Gooding-Williams (Columbia)

• Gooding-Williams, “Autobiography, Political Hope, Racial Justice”


Week 12 (4/19): Presentations on seminar papers

Week 13 (4/26): Brandon Terry (Harvard)

• Terry, “MLK Now,” *Boston Review* (Jan. 9, 2018)

  **Lecture: Terry, “Martin Luther King Now”**