COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a graduate level theory course designed to examine the social, institutional, political, cultural and ideological contents of modernity, and its discontents. We will approach our inquiry through the intellectual framework of racial capitalism.

My learning objectives for you in this course are four-fold. I want you to: 1) further develop a disciplined practice of close reading—a practice that is crucial to the work of a social theorist, 2) enhance your level of theoretical sophistication (which comes from being well read in your field, and others), 3) put into practice the art of asking beautiful questions (don’t you just abhor those long non-question questions that folks ask at conferences? Me too! Asking profound, thought provoking, expansive-yet-concise questions actually comes from intentioned practice), and to 4) walk away with a more historically-based and nuanced understanding about race, racism and processes of racialization.

EXPECTATIONS:

My expectation for you in this class is that you be a ferocious reader. Read the things you like, and those that you do not. Read the folks with whom you agree, and read especially close those thinkers whose ideas who make your skin crawl. The point is not to convert you to any particular school of thought, it is to get you to become an interlocutor in a broad scholarly conversation.

This is the job of the intellectual.

My role as the professor is to be a steward over the terms of engagement of the class, which means that I am here to push you all and redirect the class when we stray too far from the topic at hand. Of utmost importance, I am here to keep us close to the readings. I am also here to teach, mostly in the form of a short lecture at the end of each class.

At the end of this ten weeks, I want you to be a more agile thinker (which is distinctly different than simply being smart(er)). I believe that this will happen not only as a result of the things we will read together, but also, because you enhanced your practice of engaging theory, close reading, and asking really dope questions.

It is likely that you will not have this much time for reading, deliberation, and deep thinking beyond graduate school. I beg to take advantage of this time.
REQUIREMENTS

Class Participation (25%): Participation includes engaging in the weekly discussion on assigned readings and posing informed questions. Your attendance is expected and necessary. Should there be any extenuating circumstances that prevent class attendance, please inform me in a timely manner via email.

Discussion Leaders (25%): Each seminar participant will co-lead one class per quarter. During that class, the co-leaders are responsible for facilitating an engaging and robust class discussion. Presenters are expected to deliver an in-depth and nuanced reflection on the readings for that week, delivering a presentation equivalent to a course lecture. You should assume that everyone has done the reading, and therefore the aim is for your discussion presentation is to deconstruct and contextualize the readings, as opposed to simply describing them. What are the arguments? What is the underlying logics and assumptions that the authors are employing to advance those arguments? What kinds of research questions might this particular method be useful in answering? What are the limitations? What is the origin story of this method (i.e. what scholar, school, or subfield originated and/or innovated it, and what prompted its emergence in a particular time and place?)

Concept Paper (50%): Your final assignment is to produce a polished paper exploring one concept refracted through a lens of racial capitalism. Be it “sugar”, “negro”, “white”, “settler”, “land”, “hair”, “race” or something else. Your job is to rely primarily on the reading we engage throughout the quarter to develop a refined thought piece on racial capitalism. You have 5,000 words.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction to a Framework: Racial Capitalism
10/1

***Please read before class and be prepared to discuss***:

Introduction:

Provocation:

Responses by:
Peter James Hudson
Week 2
10/8

Thinking through Racial Capitalism with Cedric Robinson, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Karl Marx

Readings:


Week 3:
10/15

The Columbian Devastation: 1492 and the Immaculate Conception of Modernity

Readings:

Bartolomé de Las Casas Describes the Exploitation of Indigenous Peoples, 1542


[Make sure you read this version]
Week 4:
10/22

Africa and the Making of the Modern World

Readings:


Week 5:
10/29

Settler Colonialism

Readings:


Week 6:
11/5

Racial Slavery

Readings:

Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study, With a New Preface*. Harvard University Press, 2018. [*Introduction, and Chapters 1, 2, & 3*]

Week 7:
11/12

Readings:

White Nationalism


Week 8:
11/19

Readings:

If it Ain’t About the Money


Week 9:
11/26

Black Land

***No Class***

Readings:

Newkirk II, Vann. “*The Great Land Robbery: The shameful story of how 1 million black families have been ripped from their farms*” in September 2019 issue of *The Atlantic*

*Pigford v. Glickman*: The largest class action settlements in U.S. history

Week 10:
12/3
More on Land, Property, and Blackness

Readings:


COURSE CAVEATS

Syllabus is subject to change: This syllabus and schedule are subject to change in the event of unforeseen circumstances. I will provide announcements of changes and include them in email messages to students.

Statement of academic integrity: Academic integrity is key for this course, and plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and will be reported according to university guidelines. Moreover, I strictly adhere to university regulations concerning academic integrity, meaning that I report all suspected violations of the policy (including suspicion of plagiarism and/or cheating). Please familiarize yourself with the university’s policy on academic integrity. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty, I strongly encourage you to discuss it with me.