

PLPT 4500: Racial Politics

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Office Hours: by appointment
(over Zoom)



Pan American Unity by Diego Rivera (1940)

This course explores the broad contours of racial politics through the lens of political theory. Doing so entails not simply understanding the various ways racial identity influences politics, but rather how the “political” itself is constituted by race and its modern history. Focusing in particular on the Atlantic world, we will consider three overarching themes and their implications for contemporary debates on racial justice: the ways slavery and colonialism shaped liberal and republican political ideals (unit I); contested concepts of political community and possibility in that history’s wake (units II and III); and alternative visions of freedom in Black, Indigenous, and Latinx political thought (unit IV).

Grading

Participation (20%)

- a. Attendance is mandatory for every session, absent unavoidable scheduling conflicts. Students with more than one unexcused absence will receive a penalty to their class participation grade. Please email me if you will not be able to attend.

- b. Each of the texts assigned deserve careful, respectful reading (I will offer some guidelines on effective reading practices on our first day). Students are expected to bring assigned readings to class.
- c. Participants in this seminar are expected to post three questions and provocations on the course's Collab forums each week. Constructive engagement with other students' responses is strongly encouraged and counts toward your three posts! When coming up with your thoughts, try to connect the day's readings to the themes of other texts we have explored, and to the overarching themes which have emerged for you in the course as a whole.

Reviews (20%)

Digital Zine (20%)

Final Research Paper (40%)

Assignments

1. Reviews

Students are expected to complete 750-word reviews of three assigned readings. Reviews should cover the basics of the author's argument, and then offer questions, challenges, and creative connections to at least two other readings; the latter may be from any week. Placing these reviews in conversation with current events, outside readings, and media is encouraged! Students are exempted from posting questions on Collab the week they complete their review. Reviews are **due a week after** that reading is to be discussed.

2. Digital Zine

Zines are DIY publications with limited circulation. Historically, they have their own cut and past aesthetic, blending original writing and illustrations with copied image and excerpted text. A digital zine, for our purposes, offers the broader possibility of using sound, video, and links. Your assignment is to create a "digital zine" on a concept or debate from our readings, consisting of a number of key passages you find illuminating, combined with text, image, and sound from other sources you think reveal interesting connections to your topic. The second component of this project is a 500-word statement elaborating on the connections you have formed, and what light you think they shed on your topic you explore.

For example, one could place Juliet Hooker's readings on race and solidarity in conversation with selections from articles on the recent controversies over the meanings of white allyship against police violence, passages from King's 1963 "Letter from Birmingham Jail," selections from our Derek Bell readings, clips and news articles on multiracial social movements like Rev. William Barber's New Poor People's Campaign or the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, moments from HBO's series *Watchmen*, sections on the "brotherhood" in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, improvised music and collage.

Midterm projects are due by **11:59pm on Sunday, October 18.**

3. *Final Research Paper*

The final research project takes inspiration from the 1619 Project, and asks students to engage the ways race's history does/doesn't structure the present terms on which it is theorized. Each paper will take the texts and themes of one week's readings and connect them to a debate or development in contemporary racial politics. The papers can build on insights from the midterm Zine project, or they can be a new topic entirely. Final drafts should be 8-10 pages in length, double-spaced, and are due by **11:59pm on Wednesday, December 9.**

Possible topics include:

- Ida B. Wells and the contemporary BLM movement
- Liberalism and critiques of "post-racial" ideology
- *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*
- The history of settler colonialism in Rana or Anzaldúa and the politics of immigration
- Colonialism and international demands for reparations

Books

With the exception of Jesmyn Ward's novel *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017), I will provide electronic copies or excerpts of every book assigned.

Assistance and Access

If you require any additional assistance with the class's coursework, please do not hesitate to contact me, or contact UVa Student Health service, SDAC@Virginia.edu.

Schedule

I. Liberalism, Slavery, and Empire

9/1 Some Beginnings

- Charles Mills, "The Racial Polity"
- Joel Olson, "A Political Theory of Race"
- Michel Rolph-Trouillot, "An Unthinkable Event"
- Keeyanga-Yahmatta Taylor, "How Do We Change America?"

9/8 Race and Settler Society

- Aziz Rana, "Settler Revolt and the Foundations of American Freedom"; skim 37-45; skip 69-bottom of 79
- Anthony Marx, "Trajectories from Colonialism"

9/15 Violence and the Body Politic

- Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (excerpts)

- Ida B. Wells, *A Red Record*
 - Saidiya Hartman, “Innocent Amusements: The Stage of Sufferance”
- II. Race, Memory, History
- 9/22 The Souls of White Folk
- W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Souls of White Folk”
 - Cheryl I. Harris, “Whiteness as Property”
 - Nikhil Pal Singh, “The Whiteness of Police”
- 9/29 Past and Possibility
- Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, chapters 1 and 5
 - Glenn Coulthard, “Ressentiment and Reconciliation”
- 10/6 History’s Present (pt. 1)
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (excerpts)
 - Derek Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* (excerpts)
 - [Melvin Rogers’ review of Coates](#)
 - Begin reading Jesmyn Ward, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*
- 10/13 History’s Present (pt. 2)
- Finish reading Jesmyn Ward, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*
- III. Solidarities
- 10/20 Redefining Solidarity
- Juliet Hooker, *Race and the Politics of Solidarity*, Introduction and chapters 1, 2 (skim), and 3
- 10/27 Troubling Unity (pt. 1)
- Cristina Beltrán, *The Trouble with Unity: Latino Politics and the Creation of Identity*, Introduction, chapters 1 and 2
- 11/3 Troubling Unity (pt. 2)
- Cristina Beltrán, *The Trouble with Unity: Latino Politics and the Creation of Identity*, chapters 4, 5, and Conclusion
- IV. Freedom Dreams
- 11/10 Abolition Now
- Angela Davis, *Abolition Democracy*
- 11/17 Otherwise and In-Between
- Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (excerpts)
- 11/24 Decolonization and Self-Determination

- Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, Introduction, chapters 1 and 3