Comparative Race and Ethnic Relations:
Latin America and the United States
(Course taught in English; all readings in English)

Professor Ted A. Henken

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I. Course Description: This course is examines the interrelated concepts of race, racism, ethnicity, and nationality as approached by the fields of Sociology and Anthropology. Given our dual focus on both Latin American (and the Caribbean) and the United States, the course is comparative in both its structure and content. Students are encouraged to constantly and actively compare and contrast the concepts, theories, groups, experiences, problems, and policies found in each region. My goal is to familiarize students with the social scientific literature (and related concepts, theories, social problems and policies, and intellectual traditions) that addresses race and ethnic relations in each region, but also to encourage students to critical question that literature, looking for gaps, silences, and contradictions, as well as overlaps and convergences.

The course is broken into four parts of 2-3 weeks each.

Part I covers competing theoretical and conceptual foundations to the study of race and ethnicity in the two Americas (mestizaje and the “color line”), as well as giving students an opportunity to go beyond the Hemisphere to learn about and report back on race and ethnic relations in other regions of the world (as a way to place the unique reality of the Western Hemisphere in historical and geographical context).

Part II introduces the peculiarities of the study of race and ethnicity in Latin America with a dual focus on Afro-Latin Americans and indigenous peoples and the tradition of racial mixture or mestizaje.

Part III shifts focus to the United States and its particular and pernicious “color line” of separation between its many different racial and ethnic groups. The focus here is on cutting edge sociological studies of racial and ethnic inequality and on a number of recent, critically-acclaimed works by African-American public intellectuals who have called attention to intractable institutional violence, continued educational segregation, and the inequities of the criminal justice system in the U.S.

Part IV concludes by looking at Creoles and Latinos as two American ethnic groups (one historic and one contemporary) whose experience in the U.S. allows us to examine the convergences between the two, normally separate racial regimes or “racial formations” of Latin American and the United States and their related literatures.

II. Course Texts: The following are the only two (2) texts which we will read in their entirety during the course. PDFs of both will be provided to you. The bulk of our other reading is drawn from a wide array of sources (academic journals, anthologies, readers, etc.). You will not have to purchase any of these materials as digital copies of them will be provided to you as well.


III. Course Assignments and Grading: Your grade for the course will be earned through a number of activities and assignments over the course of the semester, including attendance and participation (20%), two 3-page reading reports (20%), a two-person team oral presentation given in the third week of the course (15%) along with a class handout (5%), and a final research paper (30%) due at our final class meeting where each student will give an oral presentation on the topic of their paper to their peers (10%).

A. Attendance and participation: 20%

Attendance is mandatory. More than one unjustified absence will erode a student’s grade for the class by 10% each time. Participation is evaluated on the basis of the student’s preparation for and engagement with the discussion in class. This means that students should read (and take notes on) ALL the material listed on this syllabus for each week PRIOR to class and come ready to discuss it with me and one another.

B. Weekly reading reports: 20%

Each student will write two 3-page reports, due electronically 24-hours before the beginning of class. Students are free to decide which two weeks to do their reports (weeks 2-9). These reports should cover the assigned readings for that week. They should include: a) a short summary of the reading(s) that highlights the main arguments and evidence presented by the author(s) under review; b) a critical assessment of their contribution to the topic under discussion that week; and c) at least three stimulating questions for class discussion.

C. An oral presentation with a handout: 20%

In the third week of class, students in two-person teams will give in-class presentations on race and ethnic relations in a single country of their choosing. Students should describe that place’s a) history of racial and ethnic relations (including colonialism if applicable), b) ethnic composition today, c) current pressing issues or conflicts in race and ethnic relations, and d) social movements and/or government efforts aimed at ending racial and ethnic conflict and/or reducing racial and ethnic stratification. Each team will also distribute a data sheet with this same information summarized for their peers. The presentation (15%) and data sheet (5%) will together account for 20% of your course grade.

D. Final paper proposal, final individual research paper, and class presentation: 40%

Students will choose a topic of a comparative nature related to race and ethnic relations and use the best and up-to-date bibliography available to write a research paper on it. I will be available for consultation on paper topics and to give bibliographical assistance. However, students must decide on a topic by the fifth class meeting (the week of Feb. 12) and hand in a 1-2 page paper proposal at that time describing the topic of their paper, the research question that the student seeks to address, sketching a rough outline of the paper, and offering a tentative bibliography. The proposal will count for 5% of the course grade,
the research paper will count for 25% of the course grade, and the final presentation will count for 10% of the final grade. The papers are due on the last day of class (during the week of March 12) when students will also give their final oral presentations.

IV. Course Schedule

PART I: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations – Mestizaje and “One Drop”

Week 1: Jan. 15 – Course Introduction
   Activities: In-class videos and discussion

Week 2: Jan. 22 – Competing Theories & Conceptual Understandings of Race & Ethnicity
   Readings: Marger, Chs. 1-4; Desmond and Emirbayer, Ch. 1; Guest, chs. 6-7.
   Selections: Rethinking the Color Line, White Privilege, & Racism Without Racists

Week 3: Jan. 29 – The Comparative Approach: Country Presentations
   Readings: Schaefer, Schupin, and Marger; Marx; Geddes, et al and Alba and Foner.
   *Teams to do own reading/research as well (professor can provide guidance)
   Assignments: In-class country presentations and data sheets

PART II: Race and Ethnic Relations in Latin America

Week 4: Feb. 5 – Part I: The Anthropology of Race and Ethnicity in Latin America
   Readings: Wade, Chs. 1-4; Sanabria, ch. 5; Kephart, Ch. 13 (in Scupin); Wade, ch. 9 (in Poole).

Week 5: Feb. 12 – Part II: Race and ethnicity in postmodern and postcolonial nation-states
   Readings: Wade, Chs. 5-9; Appelbaum, et al, Chs. 1, 5, 7, and Afterword
   Assignments: Proposals for final papers due

PART III: Race and Ethnic Relations in the United States

Week 6: Feb. 19 – Part I: America Becoming
   Readings: America Becoming, Chs. 1, 2, 7, 8, 11, &13; Desmond & Emirbayer, Chs. 2 & 5; Marger ch. 5.

Week 7: Feb. 26 – Part II: New Voices on an Old Topic – Being Black in America Today
   Readings: Coates, Between the World and Me (entire text) and selections from We Were Eight Years in Power; Nikole Hannah-Jones (selected articles on school segregation); Michelle Alexander, selections from The New Jim Crow; Desmond & Emirbayer, Chs. 6 & 7.
PART IV: Convergence and Conclusion – Testing the Latin Americanization Thesis

Week 8: Mar. 5 – Creoles (then) and Latinos (now)
Readings (Creoles): Richard Campanella; G. Reginald Daniel.
Readings (Latinos): America Becoming, Ch. 4; C. Rodríguez; Bonilla-Silva & response; Fernández; Candelario; Bailey; Ojito “Worlds Apart”; Navarro “Other”; G. Rodríguez “Mongrels”; Pew Hispanic Center and US Census Bureau.

Week 9: Mar. 12 – PERLA, Pigmentocracies, and Mestizo Genomics; Final Presentations/Papers
Readings: Selections from PERLA project, Pigmentocracies, and Mestizo Genomics.
Assignments: Final in-class oral presentations and papers due