

Topics in CRES: Racial universalisms

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Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture
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CRES 27538 (cross-listed as PLSC 21538)

Tues/Thurs 9:40am-11am, CST

Course description:

This course will discuss the relationship between race and universalism. At first glance, one might think of their relationship as one of opposition: the particularity of racial hierarchies is transcended by claims to universal rights. The universalism of equality, this view would suggest, stands against divisions drawn along racial lines. But closer inspection reveals that the interplay between race and discourses of universalism is a more complex one, such that the affirmation “Black Lives Matter” can open up a horizon of universality whereas it is precisely the universalism of “All Lives Matter” that speaks to the violence of white supremacy. What is the relationship between the struggle for black rights and the struggle for universal rights? Can universalism operate by way of race? Could it be that the universal has a color? Or are there counter-hegemonic ways of staging discourses of universality that break the links between universalism and whiteness, such as, for instance, in the universalist claim to self-determination among colonized peoples? Moving from the Haitian Revolution and the politics of anti-colonialism to contemporary debates about the relationship between “identity politics” and struggles for universal justice, this course will provide an introduction to debates around race and the language of rights. Particular attention will be given to “epistemologies of ignorance,” which have provided theoretical tools to understand the systematic and racialized blinding effects that universalist discourses might entail.

Course objectives:

In this class, students will

... acquire detailed knowledge about the interplay of race and universalism, in particular through an introduction to “epistemologies of ignorance” and an intellectual history of the contradictory and contested deployments of universalist discourse in the Black Atlantic.

... learn to critically assess the legacies of modern struggles for emancipation (civil liberties, equality of class, race, and gender) and the implication of modern thought in imperial histories.

... develop analytical tools through the methods of political theory.

... question their assumptions about democracy, universal rights, justice, and identity.

... practice their academic skills through class discussion, critical reading, and the production of original scholarship.

Course requirements and grading:

Class participation: 20 %

– This includes showing up on time, engaging with your classmates, and actively participating in discussions.

Canvas discussion posts: 30%

– 5 reading responses per quarter on readings of choice (approximately 2 pages, double-spaced). Dates are assigned at beginning of the quarter.

– 10 peer replies to another student's discussion post on Canvas. You can choose freely when you would like to write these replies and what post you would like to respond to.

– Reading responses must be posted on Canvas 24 hours before the session (the latest), peer replies can be posted up to 1 hour before the session.

– The first reading responses are due Week 2.

Group presentations: 25%

– You will present three times in the quarter in a group of 5. The group presentations run for 20-25 minutes.

– Each group presentation includes the following roles:

Presenters 1 + 2: Give a succinct summary of the reading(s) and articulate 1-2 theses that emerge from them.

Presenter 3: Presents a potential challenge to the reading presented by 1+2 and/or a counter-argument to the author's theses.

Presenter 4: Responds to the challenges offered by 3.

Presenter 5: Opens the discussion by introducing questions for the audience. These questions will first be discussed in breakout rooms and then guide the conversation with the whole of class in the second half of each session.

Final paper: 25%

The final paper consists in an individual research paper of about 10-12 pages double spaced that brings 2-3 authors from the course into conversation with a historical or contemporary case that speaks to the politics of race and universality. This can either be done in response to a prompt (distributed Week 6) or by working on a self-chosen research question in connection to the class (determined via email exchange/office hours by Week 7).

PROGRAM

Week 1: Race and the Universal

Session 1.1: Race between Particular and Universal (January 12)

W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Souls of White Folk," in *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, 29-56.

George Yancy and Judith Butler, "What's Wrong With "All Lives Matter?"" Interview, New York Times.

Étienne Balibar, "Translation and Conflict: The Violence of the Universal," Interview, Verso.

Session 1.2: Imperial Universalism (January 14)

Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930*. Stanford 1997, excerpt tbd.

Frantz Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness" in *Black Skin, White Masks*.

Week 2: Universalisms in the Black Atlantic

Session 2.1: Hegel and Haiti (January 19)

Susan Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti"

Hegel, excerpt on the Master-Slave dialectic, *Phenomenology of Spirit*

Take note of: Celucien L. Joseph, "On Intellectual Reparations: Hegel, Franklin Tavarès, Susan Buck-Morss, Revolutionary Haiti, and Caribbean Philosophical Association (CPA),"

<https://networks.h-net.org/node/28765/discussions/111914/discussion-intellectual-reparations-hegel-franklin-tavar%C3%A8s-susan> (Connexions vers un site externe.).

Session 2.2: Universalism in the Black Atlantic (January 21)

Paul Gilroy, *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Verso, 1993, 1-72.

Week 3: Epistemologies of Ignorance

Session 3.1: Epistemologies of Ignorance I: Epistemic Injustice (January 26)

Miranda Fricker, "Epistemic Injustice and the Preservation of Ignorance," in Rik Peels and Martijn Blaauw (eds.), *The Epistemic Dimensions of Ignorance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 160–177.

Charles W. Mills, "White Ignorance"

José Medina, "Ignorance and Racial Insensitivity"

Session 3.2: Epistemologies of Ignorance II: Standpoint Epistemology (January 28)

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York and London: Routledge 1999), chapters 2 and 11.

Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House"

Optional: Tracey Reynolds (2002) Re-thinking a black feminist standpoint, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 25:4, 591-606

Week 4: White Innocence, White Guilt

Session 4.1: Epistemic Friction and Epistemic Deference (February 2)

José Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, introduction + chapter 1

Olúfémí O. Táíwò, "Being-in-the-Room Privilege: Elite Capture and Epistemic Deference," *The Philosopher*, vol. 108, no. 4, 2011. Available at: <https://www.thephilosopher1923.org/essay-taiwo> (Connexions vers un site externe.)

Optional: Melanie Bowman, Privileged Ignorance, "World"-Traveling, and Epistemic Tourism. *Hypatia*, 35(3), 475-489.

Session 4.2: White Innocence, White Guilt (February 4)

Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*, 2016, Introduction

Shannon Sullivan, "The Dangers of White Guilt, Shame, and Betrayal: Toward White Self Love," in Sullivan, *Good White People: The Problem with Middle Class White Antiracism*, SUNY Press 2014, 117-151.

Week 5: The Haitian Revolution and Black Universality

Session 5.1: Black Revolutionary Universalism (February 9)

Haitian Constitution of 1805 + Julia Gaffield's post

<https://uniqueatpenn.wordpress.com/2015/12/21/race-and-the-haitian-constitution-of-1805/>

Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, Duke UP 2004, Introduction and chapter 11 ("Foundational Fictions")

Session 5.2: Universalism as/or Strategic Essentialism (February 11)

Interview with Sibylle Fischer: <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/sibylle-fischer/>

Adom Getachew, "Universalism after the Postcolonial Turn," *Political Theory*, Vol. 44, No. 6, 2016, 821-845.

John K. Thornton, "'I am the Subject of the King of Congo': African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution," *Journal of World History*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Fall, 1993), 181-214.

For presenters: Entries on "Catachresis" and "Essentialism/Strategic Essentialism," in Gareth

Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, and Bill Ashcroft, eds., *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, London and New York: Routledge 1998.

Week 6: Decolonial universalism(s)

Session 6.1: Universalism against Empire (February 16)

Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World*, Duke UP 2015, 1-37 and 250-259.

Session 6.2: Césaire's Anti-Colonial Universalism (February 18)

Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, translated by Joan Pinkham, with an introduction by Robin D. G. Kelley, New York: Monthly Review Press 2001.

Aimé Césaire, "Letter to Maurice Thorez [1956]," *Social Text*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (103), 2010, 145–152.

Week 7: Difference as a "Threat" to Universalism in France

Session 7.1: Decolonial Theory and the "Crisis" of French Universalism (February 23)

Mandatory readings:

Étienne Balibar, "Racism as Universalism" (1989)

Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Aphasia" (2011)

+ News articles on current debates on "Islamо-Leftism"

Optional but recommended:

Excerpts from Souleymane Bachir Diagne and Jean-Loup Amselle, *In Search of Africa(s): Decolonial Thought and Universalism* (see Modules)

Session 7.2: Universalism and the the Racialization of Islam (February 25)

Mayanthi L. Fernando, *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism*, Duke UP 2014, 1-32 mandatory, 33-67 optional.

Rachid Benzine, "Could Islamophobia be the Start of a New Identity-Based Bond in France?," in Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, Dominic Thomas, eds., *The Colonial Legacy in France: Fracture, Rupture, and Apartheid*, Indiana UP 2017, 311-319.

Elsa Dorlin, "The Great Strip Show: Feminism, Nationalism, and the Burqa in France," in Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, Dominic Thomas, eds., *The Colonial Legacy in France: Fracture, Rupture, and Apartheid*, Indiana UP 2017, 272-285.

Week 8: Rethinking Universality for Radical Democracy: Potential and Limits

Session 8.1: Universality after/out of Identity (March 2)

Mandatory readings:

Ernesto Laclau, "Universalism, Particularism, and the Question of Identity," in *Emancipation(s)*, London and New York: Verso 1996, pp. 20-35.

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation," in *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, Chicago: Haymarket Books 2016, pp. 191-221.

Highly recommended:

Robin D. G. Kelley, "Births of a Nation, Redux: Surveying Trumpland with Cedric Robinson," *Boston Review*, November 5, 2020.

<http://bostonreview.net/race-politics/robin-d-g-kelley-births-nation> (Connexions vers un site externe.)

Session 8.2: Insurgent Universality (March 4)

Massimiliano Tomba, *Insurgent Universality: An Alternative Legacy of Modernity*, Oxford UP 2019, introduction and chapter 5.

Week 9: Antiracism, Solidarity, and the Problem of the Universal

Session 9.1: Rethinking the Terms of Solidarity (March 9)

Asad Haider, *Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump*, Verso 2018, selections under Modules.

khana miraya ross, "Call It What It Is: Anti-Blackness," *New York Times*, June 4, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/04/opinion/george-floyd-anti-blackness.html> (Connexions

[vers un site externe.](#)).

Optional but recommended: Myrtle P. Bell, Daphne Berry, Joy Leopold, and Stella Nkomo, "Making Black Lives Matter in academia: A Black feminist call for collective action against anti-blackness in the academy," *Gender, Work & Organization*, Vol. 28, no. 1, 2021, 39-57.