



**The University of Western Ontario**  
**SOCIOLOGY 9177A**  
**The Social Context of Racial Inequality**  
**Fall 2022**

**Wednesdays, 9:30am–12:30pm, SSC 5230**

**Professor:** Patrick Denice

**Office Hours:** Wednesdays, 2:00–4:00pm (<https://calendly.com/patrickdenice/15min>)

**Email:** [pdenice@uwo.ca](mailto:pdenice@uwo.ca)

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### Enrollment Restrictions

Enrollment in this course is restricted to graduate students in the Department of Sociology, as well as any student who has obtained special permission to enroll in this course from the course instructor and the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) from the student's home program.

### Course Description

This course provides an in-depth overview of sociological understandings of race and ethnicity, with a particular focus on the institutional underpinnings of racial and ethnic inequality in the United States and Canada. The core question we seek to address is: What are the sociological origins of racial inequality? To answer this, we begin by investigating how sociologists understand racial and ethnic distinctions. What comprises a racial or ethnic group? We then shift our attention to patterns of racial and ethnic inequality, focusing on the major institutions through which racial inequality is generated: the housing market, the labor market, schools, and the criminal justice system.

Students will be asked to review and critically engage with course material prior to class meetings. Class time will consist of student presentations, structured class discussions, and small group activities. Additionally, students will complete both shorter writing exercises and a longer final paper on the topic of racial/ethnic inequality, which are intended to help push their own research agenda forward.

Because you cannot participate and actively engage with the materials and your colleagues if you are not here, to receive a passing grade, students are expected to attend at least 80% of the class meetings for this course. This requirement will only be waived in exceptional circumstances with documentation. While attendance is not an explicit part of the evaluation breakdown, you will see your final grade lowered if you miss an excessive number of class sessions. Please inform me as soon as possible if you are unable to attend a class for medical or personal reasons.

### Learning Outcomes

1. Synthesize and critically evaluate theoretical arguments and current empirical research relating to the sociological study of race/ethnicity.
2. Critically assess the role of social institutions and processes in generating, maintaining, or attenuating racial/ethnic inequality.
3. Demonstrate an ability to present and discuss ideas clearly through effective oral and written communication.
4. Demonstrate an awareness and appreciation of the complexity of knowledge, the potential of other interpretations, methods, and disciplines, and the limitations of one's own work and of the discipline more generally.

## Course Materials

All required readings, assignment prompts, and other course materials will be made available through our OWL course site.

## Methods of Evaluation

**Class Participation (20%):** Your active participation in class discussions is crucial to your success in this class. Active participation means that you consistently ask and answer questions, reflect thoughtfully on the readings, and engage respectfully with your colleagues. Additionally, throughout the term, we may complete short, low stakes writing activities prior to or during class. Some of these will be collected, and we will talk about them during our seminars, either among the full class or in smaller groups. They are intended to help you complete the final paper assignment as well as engage more deeply with the material.

**Presentation (30%):** All students will present on at least one reading over the course of the term. More information will be given on the first day of class, but in general presenters have the following 3 responsibilities:

1. Provide a clear and concise summary and critical analysis of the assigned reading(s). Identify the authors' argument and the evidence used to support that argument, evaluate the effectiveness of the argument, and discuss what you learned from the reading(s).
2. Highlight the ways in which the day's reading material fits (or doesn't fit) with material we've already covered.
3. Respond to clarification questions from your colleagues and jumpstart the conversation by posing discussion questions to the class.

**Final Paper (50%):** Graduate students will write a final paper due no later than **Friday, December 16<sup>th</sup> at 10:00am**. There are three options for this assignment:

1. *Empirical study:* Carry out an original analysis of a research question on racial/ethnic inequality. Due to the time constraints of the term, students are encouraged to carry out a secondary quantitative analysis of publicly available data. Papers should be formatted like an academic journal article, with the following sections: introduction, brief literature review, data/methods, findings, and discussion/conclusion.

2. *Front-end of an academic journal article or a research grant proposal:* Papers should include an introduction, literature review, and a proposed data and methods section. Unlike the empirical paper, you will not need to actually carry out the proposed analysis. You will, however, need to spend more time here developing the literature review and conceptual framework.
3. *Book review:* Students may choose to write a book review on a recently published book having to do with institutionalized forms of racial/ethnic inequality. As a condition of this option, students must submit their review to a sociological academic journal (while they do not need to do so by the assignment deadline, they do need to indicate their target journal and a timeline for submitting it). Thus, students must identify a journal that accepts unsolicited book reviews and follow their length and formatting guidelines.

Students writing options 1 or 2 should aim for roughly 20 pages (12-point, Times New Roman font, double-spaced). Students writing a book review should consult their target journal's instructions (typically, they are about 5-6 pages). While shorter, book reviews can be a challenge! Not only do they require that you read an entire book, but you'll also need to be very conversant in the related literature. If you select this option, please let me know which book you would like to review early on in the term (see course schedule at the end of this outline).

I encourage you to think carefully about where you are in your graduate career when deciding which final paper option to pursue. For any of the three options, you may draw upon your own existing research agenda (effectively altered based on what we have covered in class), a topic you presented on, or something entirely new.

## How to Contact Me

I can be reached via email at [pdenice@uwo.ca](mailto:pdenice@uwo.ca). During the academic year, I try to respond to emails within 24 business hours. Questions that require long explanations are best asked in class or during office hours.

Students are encouraged to come to office hours. To set up either an in-person or Zoom meeting during my office hours, go to the following link: <https://calendly.com/patrickdenice/15min>. Students may also drop in (without setting up a meeting) to my office hours on a first-come/first-serve basis. If my office hours do not work, students are welcome to set up an appointment at a different time, or to approach me before or after class.

## How to Get Important Information

You will find course content and announcements posted to our OWL course website. I will also announce any upcoming deadlines or changes to the course schedule in class. If you miss a class, check first with a classmate for any notes or other materials.

## Important Policies

**Assignment Deadlines:** Students must submit their assignments by the date and time stated in the course outline and on the OWL website. Late assignments will be penalized 10% for each day they are late. Any assignment not received within 5 days of the due date will not be accepted, except in the event of a documented medical or family emergency. If a student anticipates an issue with an assignment, they are encouraged to speak to the professor as early as possible to make alternative arrangements.

**Academic Offences:** Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offense: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf).

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com ([www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com)).

**Completion of Course Requirements:** Course requirements must be completed by the end of the term in which the course is offered (Fall-December 31; Winter-April 30, Summer-August 31). Only in exceptional circumstances may a student take additional time to complete the course requirements. In such a case, the student must first meet with the Graduate Chair to request permission to carry the incomplete. Medical documentation, where required, will be kept on file in the Sociology graduate program office. More details regarding incompletes are outlined in the Graduate Handbook: [http://www.sociology.uwo.ca/graduate\\_handbook/course\\_information.html](http://www.sociology.uwo.ca/graduate_handbook/course_information.html)

**Standards of Professional Behaviour:** It is the responsibility of all members of the Department of Sociology to adhere to and promote standards of professional behaviour that support an effective learning environment. These include:

- **Respect for others** both in and out of the classroom through words and actions (be professional, fair, and respectful in interactions with people on-line and in-person; understand and respect differences among classmates and colleagues; avoid disrupting the learning environment; respect others' expectations of confidentiality and privacy).
- **Active engagement in learning** and commitment to quality (being prepared for classes; participating and listening actively to other; using technology and social media appropriately, striving to do your best). Take responsibility for your own learning by: relating course content and projects to your own professional interests; monitoring your own understanding; seeking clarification and assistance when necessary.
- **Personal integrity** (following through on commitments; doing one's own work).

Students should also be aware of the **UWO Student Code of Conduct** found at: <https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/board/code.pdf>.

**Accessible Education Western (AEW):** Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program.

Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.

**Health and Wellness Services:** Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

**Laptops and other Electronics/Phones in Class:** I encourage you to take notes without a computer if you are able. If you need a laptop to take notes during class, please refrain from browsing the internet, texting, or going on social networking sites. Students who disrupt their colleagues' learning through the use of their laptop or tablet will be told to put away their device, and they will not be permitted to use it for the remainder of the class. Be sure that all cell phones are silenced and put away at the beginning of class.

**Recording Devices:** Recording devices may not be used in this class. Some of the topics we discuss may be of a sensitive nature. In order to cultivate an atmosphere in the classroom where we all feel comfortable sharing our ideas, questions, and personal stories or experiences, we need to be free from worry about being recorded. If you require a recording device for medical, accessibility, or other reasons, please see me.

**Lectures and Other Course Materials:** Any materials created by the instructor (e.g., notes, handouts, summaries, slide decks, assignments, exams, etc.) are protected by copyright law and may not be copied or distributed in any form without the explicit permission of the instructor. Any non-authorized use of these materials constitutes an academic offence.

**Disputing a Grade:** Students who wish to dispute an assignment, exam, or course grade must write a one-page explanation justifying why their work should be re-evaluated. Such explanations should focus on the merit of the work itself. Work will not be re-evaluated on the basis that students were sick or feeling stressed when completing the assignment. Please be advised that a student's mark may go up or down upon re-evaluation.

**Extraordinary Circumstances:** The content and/or evaluation of this course is subject to change in the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's or instructor's control.

## Course Schedule

This outline should give you a sense of the topics we will cover and the overall flow of the course. Readings will be determined prior to the start of the term.

*Please note: Readings should be completed prior to class on the date listed. This outline is subject to change over the course of the term in order to meet the needs of the class. Any changes will be announced in class and/or through our OWL course website.*

### **Part I: Sociological Understandings of Race and Ethnicity**

Sept. 14 – Getting started: What is race? What is ethnicity?

Sept. 21 – The social and political construction of race

Sept. 28 – Thinking structurally about racial/ethnic inequality and racism

### **Part II: Institutions of Racial and Ethnic Inequality**

Oct. 5 – Housing, part 1

Oct. 12 – Housing, part 2

⇒ *For students choosing to write a Book Review: deadline to inform me of your chosen book and target journal*

Oct. 19 – Labor market, part 1

Oct. 26 – Labor market, part 2

Nov. 2 – *Reading Week – Enjoy the break!*

Nov. 9 – Schools, part 1

Nov. 16 – Schools, part 2

Nov. 23 – Criminal justice, part 1

Nov. 30 – Criminal justice, part 2

Dec. 7 – Wrapping up

⇒ *Final paper due by Friday, December 16, at 10:00am via OWL*

## Recommended Reading

*This is a collection of books, articles, and films that (at least for now) just missed inclusion in our class. If you are interested in delving further into a given topic, these are good places to start. I am happy to suggest others!*

### Part I: Sociological Understandings of Race and Ethnicity

- \*Bonilla-Silva, E. 2018. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Denis, J. S. 2015. "Contact theory in a small-town settler-colonial context: The reproduction of laissez-faire racism in Indigenous-white Canadian relations." *American Sociological Review* 80(1): 218-242.
- Frederickson, George M. 2002. *Racism: A Short History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Goodman, Philip. 2014. "Race in California's Prison Fire Camps for Men." *American Journal of Sociology* 120: 352-394.
- Gould, Stephen Jay. 1996. *The Mismeasure of Man*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc.
- Mueller, Jennifer C. 2017. "Producing colorblindness: Everyday mechanisms of white ignorance." *Social Problems* 64(2): 219-238.
- \*Ray, V. 2019. "A theory of racialized organizations." *American Sociological Review* 84(1): 26-53.
- \*Saperstein, Aliya, and Andrew Penner. 2012. "Racial Fluidity and Inequality in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology* 118: 676-727.
- Telles, Edward E. 2004. *Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

### Part II: Institutions of Racial and Ethnic Inequality

- \*Bertrand, M., and Mullainathan, S. 2004. "Are Emily and Greg more employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A field experiment on labor market discrimination?" *The American Economic Review* 94(4): 991-1013.
- Billingham, Chase M., and Matthew O. Hung. 2016. "School Racial Composition and Parental Choice: New Evidence on the Preferences of White Parents in the United States." *Sociology of Education* 89: 99-117.
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. 2015. *Between the World and Me*. Spiegel and Grau.
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. 2017. "My President Was Black." *The Atlantic*, January/February issue.
- Cottom, Tressie McMillan. 2017. *Lower Ed: The Troubling Rise of For-Profit Colleges in the New Economy*. The New Press.
- Desmond, Matthew. 2016. *Evicted*. Crown.
- Massey, Douglas S. 2007. *Categorically Unequal: The American Stratification System*. Russell Sage.

- \*Massey, Douglas S., and Nancy Denton. 1998. *American Apartheid*. Harvard University Press.
- Posselt, J. R., Jaquette, O., Bielby, R., & Bastedo, M. N. (2012). Access Without Equity: Longitudinal Analyses of Institutional Stratification by Race and Ethnicity, 1972–2004. *American Educational Research Journal*, 49(6), 1074–1111.
- Rosenfeld, Jake, and Meredith Kleykamp. 2012. “Organized Labor and Racial Wage Inequality in the United States.” *American Journal of Sociology* 117: 1460–1512.
- \*Sharkey, Patrick. 2013. *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress toward Racial Equality*. University of Chicago Press.
- Stainback, K., Jason, K., and Walter, C. 2018. “Organizational context and the well-being of black workers: Does racial composition affect psychological distress?” Pp. 137-164 in *Race, Identity, and Work (Research in the Sociology of Work, vol. 32)*, eds. E. L. Mickey and A. H. Wingfield. Emerald Publishing Limited.
- \*Sugrue, Thomas J. 2014. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton University Press.
- Wilson, William Julius. 1978. *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions*. University of Chicago Press.
- Wilson, William Julius. 1997. *When Work Disappears*. Vintage Books.
- *13th* (documentary). 2016. Directed by Ava DuVernay. Starring Melina Abdullah, Michelle Alexander, and Cory Booker.
- *Fruitvale Station* (film). 2013. Directed by Ryan Coogler. Starring Michael B. Jordan, Melonie Diaz, and Octavia Spencer.
- *When They See Us* (mini-series). 2019. Directed by Ava DuVernay. Starring Blair Underwood, John Lequizado, and Michael K. Williams.

\*Graduate students are especially encouraged to read the titles marked with an asterisk.