

**Fall 2016 Seminar: Special Topics in American Politics: American Courts, Race, and Social Issues**

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Course Meetings: MWF 1:25 – 2:15pm, Journalism 501  
Office Hours: W 12:15pm, Bank of America 404

*I encourage you to ask questions during office hours and class. Plan to discuss the material we cover with your classmates during and outside of class, and email me in advance with questions you want to discuss during office hours. Consider attending office hours in groups with your classmates so that you can learn from each other's perspectives.*

**What is American Courts, Race and Social Issues About?**

American Courts, Race and Social Issues (American Courts) is situated at the intersection of race and voting rights, criminal justice, and higher education in American Society. This course merges case law, government publications, book chapters, articles, current events, policy, politics, and academic research to take a multifaceted approach towards understanding the dynamic relationship (if any) between race and these three social issues.

**What will you get out of American Courts, Race and Social Issues?**

Expect to wrestle with difficult questions, exploring them from multiple perspectives, en route to cultivating critical thinking skills, communication skills, analytical skills, and research skills.

**What will you need to thrive in American Courts, Race and Social Issues?**

Flexibility. Always be willing to ask "Why?" Rely heavily on course materials when participating in classroom discussions and submitting course assignments. Commit to reading, writing, analyzing, and thinking critically about the relationship between American Courts, race and social issues.

**How will your grade be evaluated in American Courts, Race and Social Issues?**

This course combines written evaluation with oral evaluation and class participation as outlined below.

Exam 1 – worth 13.3% of your course grade

Exam 2 – worth 13.3% of your course grade

Exam 3 – worth 13.3% of your course grade

*Exams – 40% of your final grade*

Paper 1 – worth 11.7% of your course grade

Paper 2 – worth 11.7% of your course grade

Paper 3 – worth 11.7% of your course grade

*Papers – 35% of your final grade*

In-class Discussion 1 – worth 6.67% of your course grade

In-class Discussion 2 – worth 6.67% of your course grade

In-class Discussion 3 – worth 6.67% of your course grade

*In-Class Discussions – 20% of your final grade*

In class contribution to daily discussions – worth 5% of your final grade

### **Attendance**

Attend class prepared to engage and connect. Your presence is a necessary prerequisite to your contribution. Throughout this course, you will be evaluated based on the **quality** of the content you present rather than the quantity. As much as possible, utilize the course content we have covered to inform your contributions. Exams, course papers, discussions, and class contributions will be evaluated primarily on the comprehensive quality of the research and/or analysis you present. Throughout course assignments, please pay close attention to spelling and grammar.

The schedule for course readings and assignments is included in the Course Schedule below.

Please provide official documentation to excuse unavoidable absences (e.g. doctors note).

### **Required Reading**

Readings come primarily from assigned cases, articles, and media. When possible I will email links to assigned readings via the eLC. Additional course handouts, readings, materials, and media covered in class are considered part of the required reading for the course.

### ***A Special Note about Readings***

Due to the rapidly changing landscape of American courts, race, and the social issues addressed in this course, the readings listed in this syllabus are not comprehensive. This course is designed to incorporate current events. As such, please pay close attention to the eLC. I communicate extensively via email, and will include links to readings, and add to the list of required readings where necessary. I will do my best to provide these links in advance of class.

I will also be incorporating excerpts and snippets that will not be assigned in advance but which we will review and discuss in class. As noted above, these excerpts are considered required course materials.

### **Exams, Papers and Briefings/Discussions**

No less than two weeks prior to the due date of each paper and briefing/discussion date, I will provide you with the assigned paper or briefing/discussion topic. I will provide specific instructions or additional course details as needed via the eLC.

### **Grading Scale**

The grading scale reflects the official University of Georgia grading scale as follows:

A	93 points or higher
A-	90 – 92 points
B+	87 – 89 points
B	83 – 86 points
B-	80 – 82 points
C+	77 – 79 points
C	73 – 76 points
C-	70 – 72 points
D	60 – 69 points
F	59 points

## **American Courts, Race and Social Issues Seminar Notices**

### **What do I expect from students?**

I expect you to engage in respectful yet vigorous classroom discussion, having prepared in advance by reading the course materials.

I expect that throughout the course, your ability to critically examine and discuss course materials will expand as you build on the material we've covered to make substantive contributions to our classroom discussions.

I expect you to ask difficult questions, and that together, we will look to the material to work through those questions, avoiding the trap of looking for quick answers.

Throughout this course, students will be rewarded for the content of the thoughts they contribute.

### **The Honor Code**

I expect you to abide by the Honor Code throughout each activity and assignment during this course. To that end, please sign and attach a copy of the Honor Code to each assignment submitted throughout this course. I will provide copies of the Honor Code for each exam.

### **Additional Course Details**

I reserve the right to update this syllabus as needed throughout the duration of this course. If I do so, I will notify you and provide access to the updated syllabus via the eLC.

No less than two weeks prior to each exam, I will poll the class to inquire about interest in a pre-exam review session. If more than 50% of students are interested in a review session, I will reserve a room and hold a review session.

Exams and papers will be blind-graded.

I will provide a list of the grading criteria I will use to evaluate papers, in-class discussions, and class participation.

To the extent that I am able, course readings and materials (articles, book chapters, video links etc.) will be uploaded or directly linked to for electronic access. In the event that a reading is not available electronically, each student is responsible for locating and reading the assigned text prior to each class session.

Course handouts may be provided over the course of the semester. These handouts are part of the course materials.

Where appropriate, I will provide specific pages to focus on within larger readings. These page numbers will be provided during class in the day(s) leading up to the reading assignment.

**Special note: This course is heavily discussion oriented. Due to the subject matter covered by this course, it is likely that we will encounter words/dialogue/writing that is derogatory and/or inflammatory. Though we may refer to this material, under no circumstances will insults or inflammatory terms be used when discussing these materials.**

### **American Courts, Race, and Social Issues Course Schedule**

#### **August 12                    Introductory Discussion #1 (series of 3)**

*Is it even worth exploring the intersection of race, voting rights, criminal justice, and higher education? If so, how will we proceed into this challenging exploration?*

[We need to talk about an injustice](#) (TED Talk)

[Does racism affect how you vote?](#) (TED Talk)

[Racial Bias Even when We Have Good Intentions](#)

[The Danger of a Single Story](#) (TED Talk)

[The power of vulnerability](#) (TED Talk)

#### **August 15                    Introductory Discussion #2**

*Should race play a role in our examination of voting rights, criminal justice, and higher education? If so, what should that role be?*

[There Is No Such Thing As Race](#)

[Skin Color is an Illusion](#) (TED Talk)

**August 17**                    **Introductory Discussion #3**

*Can we just stop seeing color?*

[Implicit Bias: Scientific Foundations](#) (945 – 952)

[Barriers to the Ballot Box: Implicit Bias and Voting Rights in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century](#) (24 – 34)

[Color-Blindness Is Counterproductive](#)

**August 19**                    **Race & Criminal Justice in American Courts**

*Utah v. Strieff* (Lead Opinion)

**August 22**

*Utah v. Strieff* (Lead Opinion)

**August 24**

*Utah v. Strieff* (Lead Opinion)

**August 26**

*Utah v. Strieff* (Sotomayor Dissent)

**August 29**

*Utah v. Strieff* (Sotomayor Dissent)

**August 31**

*Utah v. Strieff* (Sotomayor Dissent)

**September 2**

Investigation of the Baltimore City Police Department (DOJ)

Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department (DOJ)

**September 5**                      **Labor Day**

**September 7**

**First Paper Due**

*Community Policing Conversation: Captain Dan Silk, Ph.D.*

**September 9**

**First In-Class Policy Discussion**

**September 12**

In-Class Race & Criminal Justice Q & A

**September 14**

**Exam I**

**September 16**                      **Race & Higher Education in American Courts**

*Fisher II* (Lead Opinion)

**September 19**

*Fisher II* (Lead Opinion)

**September 21**

*Fisher II* (Lead Opinion)

**September 23**

*Fisher II* (Lead Opinion)

**September 26**

*Fisher II* (Alito Dissent)

**September 28**

*Fisher II* (Alito Dissent)

**September 30**

*Fisher II* (Alito Dissent)

**October 3**

[Diversity Is Not Equity](#)

[Asian Americans and the Future of Affirmative Action](#)

**October 5**

**Second Paper Due**

Race, Admissions, and Equality Conversation

**October 7**

**Second In-class policy discussion**

**October 10**

Race & Higher Education Q & A

**October 12**

**Exam II**

**October 14**

**Race & Voting Rights in American Courts**

*Shelby County v. Holder* (Lead Opinion)

**October 17**

*Shelby County v. Holder* (Lead Opinion)

**October 19**

*Shelby County v. Holder* (Lead Opinion)

**October 21**

*Shelby County v. Holder* (Lead Opinion)

**October 24**

*Shelby County v. Holder* (Lead Opinion)

**October 26**

*Shelby County v. Holder* (Ginsburg Dissent)

**October 28**

**Fall Break**

**November 2**

*Shelby County v. Holder* (Ginsburg Dissent)

**November 4**

*Shelby County v. Holder* (Ginsburg Dissent)

**November 7**

*Shelby County v. Holder* (Ginsburg Dissent)

**November 9**

[Federal Court Rules Texas' ID Law Violates Voting Rights Act](#)

[Stricter Rules for Voter ID's Reshape Races](#)

**November 11**

**Third Paper Due**

Race, Voting and American Courts Conversation

**November 14**

**Third In-Class Policy Discussion**

**November 16**

Race & Voting Rights Q & A

**November 18**

**Exam III**

**November 21**                      **Thanksgiving Break**

**November 23**                      **Thanksgiving Break**

**November 25**                      **Thanksgiving Break**

**November 28**                      **Where do we go from here?**

**Course Wrap-Up: Discussion**

**November 30**                      **Where do we go from here?**

**Course Wrap-Up: Discussion**

**December 2            Where do we go from here?**

**Course Wrap-Up: Discussion**

**December 5            Last Day of Class**

**Concluding Conversations**