

SOCI 217.20 – Race and Identities – Winter 2020 – Course Syllabus

Time: Tuesday Evenings - 18:30-21:30

Room: MULH 4030

Instructor: Deirdre M. Smythe

Office Hours: *By Appointment*. Office: 604 Nicholson Tower.

INTRODUCTION

The Wire is a Greek tragedy in which the postmodern institutions are the Olympian forces. It's the police department, or the drug economy, or the political structures, or the school administration, or the macroeconomic forces that are throwing the lightning bolts and hitting people in the ass for no decent reason.

David Simon (2007)

Using an exceptional television series set in Baltimore, Maryland (*The Wire*, which was broadcast from 2002 until 2008), this course will investigate two broad sociological concepts: 'race' and identity, as they relate mainly to the Canadian and American contexts. *The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* states: [T]he placing of the term 'race' in inverted commas is now seen by some sociologists as a useful way of indicating that this way of categorizing individuals and population groups is not based on any biologically valid distinctions between the genetic make-up of differently identified 'races'. Racial categorization is frequently, (though not always) based on phenotypical differences; that is, differences of facial features, skin colour, and so forth. These do not correlate with genotypical differences (differences in genetic make-up). Nor, reliable scientific opinion now agrees, are there innate differences of personality or intelligence, between populations categorized on either of these bases. The sociology of 'race' is largely concerned with examining the causes and consequences of the socially constructed separation of social groups according to their so-called 'race'.

In the case of the sociological study of identities, this tradition is linked to symbolic interactionism and emerges from the pragmatic theory of the self discussed by William James and George Herbert Mead. The self is a distinctively human capacity which enables people to consider their nature and social world through communication and language. In contemporary sociology, there is no clear concept of identity. It is used widely and loosely to refer to one's sense of self, and one's feelings and ideas about one's sense of self, as for example in the terms 'gender identity' or 'class identity' or, in relation to this course, 'racialized identity'.

This course will investigate racial identities from a sociological perspective. Beginning with theories of 'race' we will also survey some theories of identity. We then look at the social construction of 'race' and how it emerged as a concept in the scientific racism of the eighteenth-century European thinkers. Throughout the course we examine the following subjects: processes of racial identity formation, prejudice and discrimination, white privilege and white supremacy, 'race' and social movements, racial stereotypes and the mass media, Indigenous Canadians, racial identities and the arts, and 'race' in deviant subcultures (for example, the drug economy).

Professor William Julius Wilson of Harvard University was the first scholar to use *The Wire* in a sociology course. In a seminar on the series he stated: "*The Wire's* exploration of sociological

themes is truly exceptional. Indeed I do not hesitate to say that it has done more to enhance our understandings of the challenges of urban life and urban inequality than any other media event or scholarly publication, including studies by social scientists ... *The Wire* develops morally complex characters on each side of the law, and with its scrupulous exploration of the inner workings of various institutions, including drug-dealing gangs, the police, politicians, unions, public schools, and the print media, viewers become aware that individuals' decisions and behaviour are often shaped by – and indeed limited by – social, political, and economic forces beyond their control” (Harvard University Seminar about *The Wire*, 4 April 2008). To date, the series has acquired a great deal of attention from intellectuals and has been the subject of many academic publications in a variety of disciplines and has been the central theme in a range of sociology courses.

REQUIRED READINGS

There is no textbook for this course. Articles will be distributed by mass e-mail in a PDF file on a weekly basis, giving you a week to complete the reading. Class time will be set aside for discussion of the reading, and there will be a question on the final exam relating to the content of the readings, so it is strongly recommended that you keep up on the course reading materials.

VIEWING EPISODES OF *THE WIRE*

The course is based on Season Four of *The Wire*. Viewing episodes 1-13 will be provided in the classroom on a weekly basis. For those interested in viewing all five seasons, the STFX Library has the Season One of *The Wire*. The Peoples Place Antigonish Town and Country Library has all five seasons, which can be borrowed for three weeks. *The Wire* is an HBO Series, and can also be viewed by subscribing to **Crave TV** in Canada: <https://www.crave.ca/en/hbo>.

COURSE EVALUATION

Assessment Component	Description	Weight
Reflexive Research Paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-7 pages, double spaced. • Plus 6-7 scholarly references • MLA style 	30 marks
Analytical Paper on Racial Identity in <i>The Wire</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-7 pages, double spaced • Plus 6-7 scholarly references • MLA style 	30 marks
Final Exam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paper-based, 3-hour • definitions, short-answer and essay questions 	40 marks

1. Reflexive Research Paper

In sociology, the reflexive method includes both a subjective process of self-conscious inquiry (self-awareness) and the study of social behavior (in this case linking race and identity) with reference to relevant theories. In this paper, I would like you to choose one question in the sociology of race and identity that interests you. It can be either historical or contemporary. Be sure that the field you choose is focused; it is better to write a lot about a small subject than to try to cover a large research area in a ten-page paper. Begin with a brief introduction (one paragraph) where you state clearly what you intend to cover. Follow with one or two paragraphs describing a theoretical framework that we have taken up in the course that relates to your topic. Then carefully analyze your choice of subject matter. Your selection of a theoretical framework and the topic of analysis should be well-matched, in other words, you should not have to force fit sociological concepts on the issue to produce the paper. The conceptual framework for this assignment should emerge from the data, the problem itself. To conclude your paper, suggest a possible resolution or reconciliation to the social situation or set of circumstances. **Six (6) pages, double-spaced. Six (6) scholarly references over and above the six pages of written text. MLA Style, 8th Edition, 2016. REFLEXIVE RESEARCH PAPER DUE IN CLASS: TUESDAY FEBRUARY 25, 2020.**

2. Analytical Paper on Racial Identity in *The Wire*

Each student will write a short essay (6-7 pages) analyzing a specific character from Season Four of *The Wire* from a sociological perspective. The paper should analyze the character's behavior, attitudes, social status, and racial identity using theories, ideas, and concepts discussed in class and the readings. In other words, provide a detailed explanation of how this character illustrates, challenges, and/or complicates what we have learned about race and identity in the course. Begin with a description of the circumstances in which the person enters the narrative. Then answer the following questions. Does the character exemplify a principled or unprincipled moral authority? How does the character's set of social circumstances change over the course of the season? For the better or for the worse? To what extent does the character represent a racialized stereotype? Complete the paper by analyzing the barriers to improvement of the character's social condition that can be correlated with this person's racialized identity. **Six (6) pages, double-spaced. Six (6) scholarly references over and above the six pages of written text. MLA Style, 8th Edition, 2016. ANALYTICAL PAPER ON RACIAL IDENTITY DUE IN CLASS: TUESDAY MARCH 10, 2020.**

IMPORTANT COURSE INFORMATION AND POLICIES

Late Policy

Late papers submitted without prior permission will incur a late penalty of 5% of the total assignment per day, including weekends.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

Since this course requires you to complete a written assignment, you should familiarize yourself with standards for proper **MLA style referencing** of all materials cited (i.e. books, journals, and films, government documents, etc.). Students who attempt to pass off someone else's work as their own (plagiarism) will be dealt with through the university policy on academic honesty. Please ensure that you fully understand this policy (see section 3.8 in the calendar).

Classroom Technology Policy

The use of laptops during class time for anything other than note-taking will result in the loss of laptop privileges. **The use of cell phones, i-phones, smart phones or Blackberries is strictly prohibited. Please make sure your phone is turned off.**

Accommodations

If you develop a prolonged illness that will affect your progress in the course, please notify Nauvneet Kaur in the Office of the Dean of Arts (nkaur@stfx.ca) as soon as the problem becomes apparent. If you have problems of a personal or emotional nature that will impact your work, do not hesitate to contact me immediately if I can be of assistance.

Students with a disability and those who need special accommodation are encouraged to notify the instructor at the beginning of the year, and to register with the Tramble Centre for Accessible Learning located on the first floor of the Angus L. MacDonald Library, Room 108. They are open between 8:00am and 4:30pm, Monday to Friday. To register with the Centre, students require supporting documentation. **The contact person is Elizabeth Kell, Coordinator, at (902) 867-3633 or by e-mail, ekell@stfx.ca.**

LECTURE SCHEDULE AND REQUIRED READINGS

Week One: January 7

Overview of course topics, assignments, expectations and Final Exam.
Definitions of 'race' and identity. Introduction to *The Wire*.

***The Wire* - Season Four – Episode 1 - Boys of Summer**

Week Two: January 14

Theories of 'Race.'

Required Readings:

Smedley, Audrey. 'Race' and the Construction of Human Identity. *American Anthropologist*, vol. 100, no. 3, 1998, pp. 690-702.

Winant, Howard. Race and Race Theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 26, 2000, pp. 169-185.

***The Wire* – Season Four – Episode 2 – Soft Eyes**

Week Three: January 21

Theories of Racial Identity.

Required Reading:

Schutz, Alfred. The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology. *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 49, no. 6, 1944, pp. 499-507.

Creese, Gilliam. “Where are you from?” Racialization, belonging and identity among second-generation African Canadians. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 42, no. 9, 2019, pp. 1476-1494.

***The Wire* – Season Four – Episode 3 – Home Rooms**

Week Four: January 28

The Social Construction of ‘Race’: Scientific Racism

Required Reading:

Appiah, Anthony. The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race. *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1985, pp. 21-37.

***The Wire* – Season Four – Episode 4 - Refugees**

Week Five: February 4

Processes of Racial Identity Formation

Required Reading:

Kerrison, E. M., Cobbina, J. and Bender, K. “Your Pants Won’t Save you”: Why Black Youth Challenge Race-Based Police Surveillance and the Demands of Black Respectability Politics. *Race and Justice*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2018, pp. 7-26.

***The Wire* – Season Four – Episode 5 - Alliances**

Week Six: February 11

Prejudice and Discrimination: anti-black racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

Required Reading:

Pager, Devah and Hana Shepherd. 2008. The Sociology of Discrimination: Racial Discrimination in Employment, Housing, Credit, and Consumer Markets. *Annual Review of Sociology* 34: 181-209.

***The Wire* – Season Four – Episode 6 – Margin of Error**

FEBRUARY 17 – 21, 2020: STUDY BREAK

Week Seven: February 25

***Reflexive Research Paper Due in Class**

White Privilege and White Supremacy

Required Reading:

MacIntosh, Peggy. White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack. *Peace and Freedom*, July/August 1989, pp. 1-3.

Price, John. Canada, White Supremacy, and the Twinning of Empires. *International Journal*, vol. 68, no. 4, 2013, pp. 628-638.

***The Wire* – Season Four – Episode 7 – Unto Others**

Week Eight: March 3

‘Race’ and Social Movements

Required Reading:

Wotherspoon, Terry and John Hansen. The "Idle No More" Movement: Paradoxes of First Nations Inclusion in the Canadian Context. *Social Inclusion*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2013, pp. 21-36.

***The Wire* – Season Four – Episode 8 – Corner Boys**

Week Nine: March 10

***Analytical Paper on Racial Identity Due in Class**

Racial Stereotypes and the Mass Media

Required Reading:

Mahtani, Minelle. Representing Minorities: Canadian Media and Minority Identities. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2001, pp. 99-133.

***The Wire* – Season Four – Episode 9 – Know Your Place**

Week Ten: March 17

Indigenous Canadians

Required Reading:

Gardam, Kevin and Audrey R. Giles. Media Representations of Policies Concerning Education Access and their Roles in Seven First Nations Students' Deaths in Northern Ontario. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2016, pp. 1-21.

***The Wire* – Season Four – Episode 10 - Misgivings**

Week Eleven: March 24

Racial Identities and the Arts

Required Reading:

Nakamura, Naohiro. The Representation of First Nations Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario. *International Journal of Canadian Studies*, no. 45-46, pp. 417-440.

***The Wire* – Season 4 – Episode 11 – A New Day**

Week Twelve: March 31

Deviant Subcultures

Required Reading:

Wakemen, Stephen. 'No one wins. One side just loses more slowly': *The Wire* and Drug Policy. *Theoretical Criminology*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2014, pp. 224-240.

***The Wire* - Season 4 – Episode 12 – That's Got His Own**

***The Wire* - Season 4 – Episode 13 – Final Grades**