

**SOCIOLOGY 322: Minority Groups in the U.S.**  
Professor Tressie McMillan Cottom  
Fall 2015

Last updated: 8/19/15

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00 Pm – 3:15 Pm  
MPC Academic Learning Commons 2107  
Online at Blackboard and Rampages: <http://rampages.us/socy322cottom/>

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**Course Description**

Sociology is interested in how groups of people in societies are *stratified*, or have different access to resources like power, representation, wealth, jobs and citizenship. When we talk about “majority” and “minority” groups we do not mean the number of people in each group. Instead, we are referring the power dynamics of groups that have different access to resources. Race and ethnicity are a primary way that modern societies stratify access to resources, i.e. some groups have more than others. We all have a racial/ethnic category and identity. Consequently, we will all bring lived experiences to this course. While those experiences are valuable, this class’s primary objective is to learn how to define, observe, and explain race and ethnicity as sociologists. Generally, that means learning how to apply social theory to social problems that may and may not include our personal lived experiences of race and ethnicity. Sociologists understand race and ethnicity as institutionalized (part of our social organizations and, thus, the social structure), cultural (part of collective meaning making), and social psychological (part of our unconscious psychologies). A sociological perspective suggests that racial and ethnic conflict is not simply a matter of prejudice. Instead, race is created through structural processes that reproduce inequalities whether or not an individual makes it so.

This course will provide an overview of the sociology of race and ethnicity with a focus on various minority groups in the U.S. We will examine the dominant theories of race and ethnicity, or the ways in which sociologists understand how race and ethnicity are

formed and to what ends. The course will cover the historical emergence of race; how race and ethnicity are constructed and change; and contemporary debates of both race and ethnicity. You will learn how to read scholarly and popular culture texts for sociological concepts. And, you will become familiar with how sociologists measure racial and ethnic inequality in a variety of ways.

### **General Course Requirements**

*Attendance:* Attendance is a requirement of the course, though I will not use class time to take roll. **IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO PASS THIS CLASS WITHOUT REGULAR ATTENDANCE.** That is absolutely by design. I value being in the classroom with you and if you could pass the course without ever showing up, then I have failed you horribly. You will be expected to obtain and review any materials you missed due to an absence. In addition, you will be graded on group work and quizzes you do during class. Not participating in these groups and taking these quizzes will lower your grade.

*Classroom Expectations:* You are expected to come to class having read the assigned readings. Active participation in class—by speaking up in class, contributing to the course wiki/Rampage, asking questions, actively listening—is required for a good grade (and solid education).

As you will learn during this course, I embrace digital media and technology. However, both are to be used in service to class discussions. There will be times when I ask you to use your phones and laptops to participate in activities. I will tell you when ahead of time. Beyond those times, research shows Yik Yak makes it hard to focus on deep learning. Therefore, as a normal course of business all electronic devices—including phones, tablets, and laptops—should be “screen down” during lectures and class presentations.

In this class we will sometimes explore sensitive subject matter. I ask that you be civil in class at all times—both in class discussions and in your written blog posts and comments. This is not a place for moral judgments of other people. **In this class, we will make arguments based on theory and data. Such data may include your personal experiences but you absolutely should learn to argue from data that does not include only your personal experiences.** I encourage all students to be willing to play devil’s advocate—arguing for a position that is not your own, to test other people’s assumptions and arguments. Since this will be normal in the class, you should not assume that what students say (or what I or Adam say) reflects their personally held opinions.

*Homework Expectations:* A rule of thumb is that for each credit you are taking during a semester, you should expect to spend 2 to 3 hours per week **outside of class** completing readings, homework, and assignments and studying for exams. Depending

on how you learn, you should expect to spend between **6 to 9 hours per week studying** outside of our 3-credit class.

*Communication:* Adam and I are happy to answer your questions in person during our office hours. If you cannot make that week's scheduled office hours, please let us know and we can set up a separate appointment. Do not expect email responses except during 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.

*Email Policy:* I sure do enjoy engaging with you, but I do not have 24 hour access to email. Here are several good rules of thumb to help us use email effectively and in a way that does not encourage me to burn it to the ground:

1. I aim to respond to emails within 24 hours.
2. Because of number one, emailing me about an assignment due within in 24 hours is a very bad idea. You are unlikely to get assistance in time to complete the assignment.
3. However, you should assume that I may not respond to emails on weekends and generally not after 10 PM on weekdays.
4. Email is good for clarification (e.g. "is the critical analysis due online or in class?") and bad for counseling (e.g. "can you explain sociology?"). If your email does not have a question I can address in 3-4 sentences, I will likely encourage you to schedule a meeting instead.
5. Using complete sentences, referring specifically to the text/lecture/assignment about which you have questions helps me respond with what you actually need as opposed to what I have to imagine you need.

### **Important Dates for Fall 2015**

- The FIRST CLASS is Thursday, August 20
- LATE REGISTRATION ENDS on Wednesday, August 26
- READING DAYS are September 19-27
- CLASS DOES NOT MEET on Tuesday October 13 and Thursday October 15
- The LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW is Friday, October 30.
- The LAST CLASS is Thursday December 3.

For the most up-to-date information, please refer to the calendars on VCU's website at: <http://academiccalendars.vcu.edu>

### **Course Textbooks and Reading Sociology**

This course has two required texts:

Fitzgerald, K. (2014). *Recognizing race and ethnicity: Power, privilege, and inequality*. Westview Press. ISBN: 9780813349305

Lewis-McCoy, R. *Inequality in the Promised Land: Race, Resources, and Suburban Schooling*. Stanford University Press, 2014. ISBN 9780804792134

Other readings listed on the syllabus can be found online in the course Blackboard.

**NOTE:** Developing a familiarity with academic journal articles is one of the course objectives. There are several academic journal articles assigned in this course. We will spend several sessions in class learning how to “read” an academic article. Generally, these articles cannot and should not be read the same way that one reads a popular press (or “fun”) book or even a textbook. In journal articles, information is organized differently and the goals for reading comprehension can be different. In general, you should NOT try to read a journal article once or in one sitting. You may find yourself reading one section of an article several times to digest the themes and concepts. This is an upper-division course. Therefore we will spend some time on the basics of some of the methods – or the science of how the data is collected and analyzed – in these articles. It is perfectly okay to not understand every method. Sociologists rarely understand every research method. But it is useful to skim those methods sections for a sense of how we systematically measure and observe the messy social world that we live in. **I have marked journal articles with an asterisk (\*) to signal to you that you should allow enough time to complete the assigned reading.**

### Assignments

Assignments in this course are designed to assess how well you comprehend the readings, understand how the readings relate to the social contexts we will mostly cover in class, and your ability to apply key sociological concepts of race and ethnicity.

There are two exams, three quizzes, and a critical analysis essay/presentation. There is also a “participation” scoring. “Participation” is broadly defined. It includes in-class exercises, online prompts and in-class participation. Everyone starts with the full ten percent. The grade can decline if you do not participate in any form or frequently fail to turn in assignments.

*Exams (40%)*

There are two exams in this class, the mid-term and final. The final exam will be cumulative. Exams draw on readings, discussion, and all content covered in class. Exams are a combination of short answer questions and matching terms learned in class to definitions and an essay question.

### *Quizzes (30%)*

There are three online quizzes in this course for a total of 30 percent of your grade (30%). The dates the quizzes are DUE are posted on the syllabus. Quizzes go live on Blackboard at 7 PM the night before they are due and close at 9 am the day they are due. You must take the quiz in one setting. Therefore, when you log on and start the quiz you should be prepared to finish it. (Note: See “accommodations” if you require them to complete quizzes. You should contact me no later than the end of the first week of class to notify me of accommodations so that the quizzes can be modified as necessary).

### *Critical Analysis Essay/Presentation (20%)*

Sociology is a social science of how we live. Therefore, almost everything is sociology. Critical analysis of “sociology in the wild” an exercise in applied sociology. There are ten case studies uploaded to Blackboard under “Assignments”. You have many options for this assignment. They can be overwhelming if you do not plan ahead.

**FIRST OPTION:** You can choose to write an essay analyzing the case. The case study should first summarize the thesis, theory and evidence presented in the case study. Then, drawing on theories and evidence from readings and lectures, you should “translate” the popular press article into sociological terms. We will discuss more in class including looking at a few examples. **The essay will be due December 3.**

**SECOND OPTION:** You can choose to do an in-class presentation, approximately 15 minutes in length. The presentation should include some aspect of digital visualization (charts, video, etc.), an explanation of the case, the theoretical frameworks and brief discussion of how it highlights a class theme/objective. Presentations will be scheduled to occur between November 12 and December 1. The assignment is graded for completion, accuracy of case description, and application of sociological terms and evidence. **YOU MUST CHOOSE AN OPTION NO LATER THAN OCTOBER 22 BY POSTING TO THE WIKI POST ON BLACKBOARD.** Please note, that you cannot change options once chosen.

### *Participation (10%)*

Participation includes in-class exercises, online prompts and in-class participation. Everyone starts with the full ten percent. The grade can decline if you do not participate in any form or frequently fail to turn in assignments.

The grading scale is:

Grading

97-100 - A+

93-96 - A

90-92 - A-

87-89 - B+

83-86 -B

80-82 -B-

77-79 -C+

73-76 -C

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Date	Class	Reading Due	Assignment Due
Foundations of Race and Ethnicity			
Th Aug 20	The Big Questions: What is sociology? What is race? What is ethnicity? What is this class? Is it on the syllabus?	Syllabus	
Tu Aug 25	Principles of Stratification: Race, Ethnicity and Resources	“Defining Concepts and Race as a Social Construction” Fitzgerald (p.9-26)  Mills “The Promise of Sociology”	
Th Aug 27	“What can Rachel Dolezal, Tiger Woods and Raven Symone tell us about race and ethnicity?” Structure, Agency and Myths	“Toward a Sociology of Racial Conceptualization in the 21st Century” (Morning) **	
Tu Sept 1	“The Stories We Tell”	“White Negroes and Smoked Irish” Ignatiev (p. 34-59)	
Th Sept 3	Where Do “Race” and “Ethnicity” Come From	“The Emergence of U.S. Racial Hierarchy” Fitzgerald (p.105-124)	QUIZ 1
Tu Sept 8	You Can’t Have Racism Without Capitalism?	“Slaves/The Capital That Made Capitalism” Ott	
Th Sept 10	Making Race: Culture, Censuses, and Capitalism	“Advanced capitalism and black/white race relations in the U.S.” Bonacich **	
Making Sense of Social Complexity: Major Theories of Race and Ethnicity			
Tu Sept 15	First Contact: Assimilation and Contact Theories		

Th Sept 17	Problem of the 20th Century: DuBois, Wells-Barnett	Science and the Sociology of Race (Fitzgerald p.69-97)	
Tu Sept 22	NO CLASS Reading Days	SUGGESTION: Read ahead for the TWO readings due on Sept 29	
Th Sept 24	NO CLASS Reading Days	SUGGESTION: Read ahead for the TWO readings due on Oct 1	
Tu Sept 29	Class v. Race Debates	“Race Relations in Flux” Fitzgerald (p.175-184)  “Declining Significance of Race: Revised and Revisited” (Wilson) **	
Th Oct 1	Continued Significance of Race	“Anything but racism: how sociologists limit the significance of racism” (Bonilla- Silva and Baiocchi) **  “Ideology, Identities and Institutions” (Fitzgerald p.54- 65)	QUIZ 2
Tu Oct 6	Continued Significance of Race	(Fitzgerald p.261-301)	
Th Oct 8	“Finding Your Roots”		
Tu Oct 13	Do Not Meet: Podcast		
Th Oct 15	Do Not Meet: Research Day for Critical Analysis		
Tu Oct 20			MIDTERM Critical Analysis Choice Due on Class Wiki

Race, Ethnicity and Institutions			
Th Oct 22	The Tangled Web We Weave: Race/Ethnicity + Institutions	“Race Relations in the 19th and 20th Century” (Fitzgerald p. 137-172)	
Tu Oct 27	Race/Ethnicity + Work: Intersecting Oppressions	“Marked” (Pager, p.86-116)	
Th Oct 29	Race/Ethnicity + Work: From Legal Discrimination to Job Quality”	“Negotiating the Model Minority Image” (Eguchi & Starsota) **	
Tu Nov 3	Race/Ethnicity + Education: Overview	“Inequality in the Promised Land” (Lewis)	
Th Nov 5	Race/Ethnicity + Education: Opportunity Hoarding	“Inequality in the Promised Land” (Lewis)	
Tu Nov 10	Race/Ethnicity + Education: Pathways to Higher Stratification	“Inequality in the Promised Land” (Lewis)	Quiz 3
Th Nov 12	Emerging Race/Ethnicity Debates: “Multiracial Identities”		
Tu Nov 17	Emerging Race/Ethnicity Debates: “Cultural Representation”	“Race in the Cultural Imagination” (Fitzgerald p.345- 368)  “White Men Loving Black Women on TV” (McMillan Cotton)	
Th Nov 19	Emerging Race/Ethnicity Debates: “Intimacies and Mate Markets”	“Some Multiracial Daters Get Bonus Points in the Dating Game” (Currington)	
Tu Nov 24	Emerging Race/Ethnicity Debates: “Digital Contexts”	Civil Rights, Big Data, and Our Algorithmic Future (Robinson & Yu)	
Th	NO CLASS Holiday		

Nov 26			
Tu Dec 1	Emerging Race/Ethnicity Debates: "Digital Contexts"		
Th Dec 3	Exam Review		Critical Analysis Essays Due
Tu Dec 8	Final Exam (1-3:50)		

## **Important Information from the Provost's Office**

I am required to remind you of the following university policies:

### **VCU Email Policy**

Email is considered an official method for communication at VCU because it delivers information in a convenient, timely, cost-effective, and environmentally aware manner. Students are expected to check their official VCU email on a frequent and consistent basis in order to remain informed of university-related communications. The university recommends checking email daily. Students are responsible for the consequences of not reading, in a timely fashion, university-related communications sent to their official VCU student email account. This policy ensures that all students have access to this important form of communication. It ensures students can be reached through a standardized channel by faculty and other staff of the university as needed. Mail sent to the VCU email address may include notification of university-related actions, including disciplinary action. Please read the policy in its entirety:

<http://www.ts.vcu.edu/kb/3407.html>.

### **VCU Honor System: Upholding Academic Integrity**

The VCU Honor System policy describes the responsibilities of students, faculty and administration in upholding academic integrity, while at the same time respecting the rights of individuals to the due process offered by administrative hearings and appeals. According to this policy, “Members of the academic community are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity.” In addition, “All members of the VCU community are presumed to have an understanding of the VCU Honor System and are required to:

- “Agree to be bound by the Honor System policy and its procedures;
- Report suspicion or knowledge of possible violations of the Honor System;
- Support an environment that reflects a commitment to academic integrity;
- Answer truthfully when called upon to do so regarding Honor System cases;
- Maintain confidentiality regarding specific information in Honor System cases.”

More information can be found at in the VCU policy library at

<http://www.assurance.vcu.edu/Policy%20Library/Honor%20System.pdf>.

### **Student Conduct in the Classroom**

According to the *Faculty Guide to Student Conduct in Instructional Settings* (<http://www.assurance.vcu.edu/Policy%20Library/Faculty%20Guide%20to%20Student%20Conduct%20in%20Instructional%20Settings.pdf>), “The university is a community of learners. Students, as well as faculty, have a responsibility for creating and maintaining an environment that supports effective instruction. In order for faculty members (including graduate teaching assistants) to provide and students to receive

effective instruction in classrooms, laboratories, studios, online courses, and other learning areas, the university expects students to conduct themselves in an orderly and cooperative manner.” Among other things, cell phones and beepers should be turned off while in the classroom. The Student Code of Conduct also prohibits the possession of or carrying of any weapon. For more information see <http://register.dls.virginia.gov/details.aspx?id=3436>.

### **Students with Disabilities**

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended, require that VCU provide “academic adjustments” or “reasonable accommodations” to any student who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity. To receive accommodations, students must request them by contacting the Disability Support Services Office on the Monroe Park Campus (828-2253) or the Division for Academic Success on the MCV campus (828-9782). Please also visit the Disability Support Services website at [www.students.vcu.edu/dss](http://www.students.vcu.edu/dss) and/or the Division for Academic Success website at [healthsciences.vcu.edu/DAS/](http://healthsciences.vcu.edu/DAS/) for additional information.

Any student who has a disability that requires an accommodation should schedule a meeting with the instructor at the student's earliest convenience. Additionally, if coursework requires the student to work in a lab environment, the student should advise the instructor or a department chairperson of any concerns that the student may have regarding safety issues related to a disability. Students should follow this procedure for all courses in the academic semester.

### **Statement on Military Short-Term Training or Deployment**

If military students receive orders for short-term training or for deployment/mobilization, they should inform and present their orders to Military Student Services and to their professor(s). For further information on policies and procedures contact Military Services at 828-5993 or access the corresponding policies.

### **Excused Absences for Students Representing the University**

Students who represent the university (athletes and others) do not choose their schedules. Student athletes are required to attend games and/or meets. All student athletes should provide their schedules to their instructors at the beginning of the semester. The Intercollegiate Athletic Council strongly encourages faculty to treat missed classes or exams (because of a scheduling conflict) as excused absences and urges faculty to work with the students to make up the work or exam.

### **Campus Emergency Information**

What to Know and Do to Be Prepared for Emergencies at VCU:

- Sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts. Keep your information up-to-date. Within the classroom, the professor will keep his or her phone on to receive any emergency transmissions.
- Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
- Listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities. Within the classroom, follow your professor's instructions.
- Know where to go for additional emergency information.
- Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (828-1234).
- Report suspicious activities and objects.
- Keep your permanent address and emergency contact information current in eServices.

### **Important Dates**

You can view important dates for the semester in the university calendar (<http://academiccalendars.vcu.edu>).

### **VCU Mobile**

The VCU Mobile application is a valuable tool to get the latest VCU information on the go. The application contains helpful information including the VCU directory, events, course schedules, campus maps, athletics and general VCU news, emergency information, library resources, Blackboard, and more. To download the application on your smart phone or for more information, please visit <http://m.vcu.edu>.

### **Class Registration Required for Attendance**

Students may attend only those classes for which they have registered. Faculty may not add students to class rosters or Blackboard. Therefore, if students are attending a class for which they have not registered, they must stop attending.

### **Withdrawal from Classes**

Before withdrawing from classes, students should consult their instructor as well as other appropriate university offices. Withdrawing from classes may negatively impact a student's financial aid award and his or her semester charges. To discuss financial aid and the student bill, visit the Student Services Center at 1015 Floyd Avenue (Harris Hall) and/or contact your financial aid counselor regarding the impact on your financial aid. Contact information for the University Financial Aid Office is available at <http://www.enrollment.vcu.edu/finaid/contact-us>.

### **Student Financial Responsibility**

Students assume the responsibility of full payment of tuition and fees generated from their registration and all charges for housing and dining services, and other applicable miscellaneous charges. Students are ultimately responsible for any unpaid balance on

their account as a result of the University Financial Aid Office or their third party sponsor canceling or reducing their award(s).

