Black Workers in American Society
575:303

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Course Description

This course will examine the evolving position of black workers in the U.S. economy: how it has changed at key points throughout U.S. history to the present day, and how access to opportunities in the labor market is informed by racial stratification in the larger society. We will discuss various dimensions of racial labor market stratification (wages, mobility, benefits, poverty, unemployment, underemployment) as a way to assess blacks' economic position in the labor market. The goal of the course is to challenge common notions of how people succeed in the labor market and to explore how systemic patterns of exclusion limit opportunities for blacks. The course will focus on structural explanations for racial inequality in the labor market rather than purely individualistic ones. We will examine the social constructs of race and class to understand how blacks at all levels in the labor market face common challenges in navigating the labor market.

This Course's SAS Learning Objectives:

Goal A: Analyze the degree to which forms of human difference shape a person's experiences of and perspectives on the world.

In this class we will explore how racial categorization, created through the social construction of race, affects one's position in the labor market and consequently produces racial labor market inequality. Through this approach we will examine the socioeconomic dimension of the claim that although race is not a scientifically "real" concept, it is real in its consequences.

Goal D: Analyze issues of social justice across local and global contexts.

You will develop an understanding of concepts such as hierarchy, power and hegemony to developing a working knowledge of social change, particularly one that uses a complex, nuanced analysis of a social problem to devise effective policies to end social and economic inequality.

Goal I: Explain and be able to assess the relationship among assumptions, method, evidence, arguments, method, evidence, arguments, and theory in social and historical analysis.

Through in-class discussion and analysis of readings, we will take apart the author's thesis, arguments and supporting evidence to critically evaluate the claims presented and compare them across other readings/authors drawing linkages and distinctions among different approaches and strategies for building arguments and supporting them.

Goal M: Understand different theories about human culture, social identity, economic entities, political systems, and other forms of social organization.

We will use the idea that the labor market, as well as society at large, is organized in such a way that it can be examined using a structural approach. Through this lens we can view blacks' position in the U.S. economy as part of a racial structure fortified by mechanisms such as institutional discrimination, exclusion, and access. We will explore this idea through multiple media: films, class readings chosen to represent a variety of perspectives, class discussions, and group exercises exploring hypothetical situations designed to bring your own experiences and perspectives into the discussion.

Goal N: Apply concepts about human and social behavior to particular questions or situations.

We will approach issues such as the labor market consequences of persistent school segregation, resistance to integration, affirmative action, racial disparities in unemployment, the persistence of a racial wage gap amidst a shrinking education gap, using concepts such as social structure, social closure, hegemony, bias, and homophily.

Professor Dickerson vonLockette's Biography

Dr. Dickerson vonLockette (Ph.D., University of Michigan, Sociology) studies the structural features of the U.S. labor market that enable or hinder access to employment opportunities for black and Latino workers. Her current work investigates the role of residential segregation in the job allocation process and patterns of race/gender occupational segregation in the U.S. labor market. The National Academy of Science rewarded her a HUD post-doctoral fellowship to study the impact of residential segregation on the race gap in unemployment and wages for blacks and Latinos in marginalized communities in U.S. metropolitan areas. She has served as a consultant to
the U.S. Departments of Labor and Commerce and the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago.

Readings

Readings are in the class coursepack, unless otherwise noted. The coursepack is available online on Sakai (https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal).

1) Go to https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal
2) Log in using your RU ID
3) Click the tab for this class (575:303)
4) Course materials (readings, etc) are located under Resources (on the left hand column)

You must come to class having read the assigned reading for that class meeting and be prepared to discuss it. Expect pop quizzes on the reading at the beginning of class from time to time.

Assignments:

Occupation Research Report

You will research the occupation group and industry of your interest using the institutional racism inventory as a guideline and write a report. In the written report focus on explaining how race may play a role in what workers have access to your occupation/industry and then end the report with a policy recommendation section on how to ensure equal access to your occupation/industry.

4-5 pp., double-spaced, 1" margins, 12 pt. Font (Times)

Discussion Participation:
Most class meetings we will break into small groups to discuss the readings and concepts introduced in lecture. Each student is expected to participate in these small-group and larger class discussions. This class will stress active learning where you are actively involved in learning and accountable for what you learn. Your participation grade is largely determined by how much you participate in these discussions, professional conduct and your attendance. Texting, use of phones, and computers during class for non–related activities distracts us from our mission and will not be tolerated.

Other notes:
The attendance policy is as follows: Each student is allowed one 'excused' absence. For every absence after that, points will be deducted from your final grade accordingly: 1 point for the 2nd absence, 2pts for the 3rd absence, 3 points for the 4th and so on. Coming to class late is highly disruptive; two late attendances (more than five minutes late) will count as an absence. If an assignment is turned in after the due date five points per day will be deducted from the grade for that assignment. The assignments are due in class in person on the day designated in the syllabus. I am not able to accept papers via email.

At all times and in all cases, ***you*** are responsible for missed information, announcements, notes, handouts, etc. Bring your syllabus, readings, and class notes to each class meeting.
Get the contact number of at least two other students in class, so that in the event that you can not be in class, you can get missed information and class notes from them. Whether you are in class or not, you are responsible for the information presented.

If you choose the convenience of contacting me via email, please be advised that the typical response time is 3-5 business days.

Final Grades will be determined by the following distribution:
25% Mid-term Exam
30% Occupation Research Report
30% Final Exam
15% Participation: discussion during class, timely attendance to each class, quizzes, citizenship, collegial interaction with other students and professor

<u>Class Schedule</u>
Note: The readings listed under each week must be read in advance and you must be prepared to discuss the reading for the class meeting under which it is listed.

Week 1:
Introduction to Course
- Introductions
- Course info and description
- Discussion of key themes and concepts used throughout the course
- Rules of engagement

- Go over assignments

Week 2:
Understanding Racial Economic Stratification in the U.S.
Amer. Sociol. Assoc., "Race, Ethnicity, and the American Labor Market: What's at Work?"

Week 3:
The Historical Formation of Race and Work in U.S. Economy: Post-Emancipation
Steinberg, "The Reconstruction of Black Servitude After the Civil War"

Week 4:
The Historical Formation of Race and Work in U.S. Economy: The Industrial Era
1. Nelson, "Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality", Introduction
2. Katznelson, When Affirmative Action Was White, Chapter 5

Week 5:
Understanding Racial Economic Stratification in the U.S.
Schulman, "The Political Economics of Labor Market Discrimination"

Week 6:
Blacks and the Post-Industrial Economy
Massey and Denton, American Apartheid, Chapter 2
Review for Mid-term

Week 7:
Mid-term exam

Week 8:
Middle Class and Professional Blacks
1. Cose, Rage of A Privileged Class, Ch. 4
2. Collins, "Black Mobility in White Corporations"

Week 9:
Working Class and Poor Blacks
Kozol, Shame of a Nation

Week 10:
Access to Work
Green, Tigges, and Diaz, "Racial and Ethnic Differences in Job-Search Strategies"

Week 11:
Access to Work
Pager, "The Mark of a Criminal Record"
Occupation Research Reports due Today

Week 12:
Institutionalized and Structural Exclusion
Shapiro and Kenty-Drane "The racial wealth gap"
Royster, "White Privilege and Black Accommodation: Where Past and Contemporary Discrimination Converge"

Week 13:
Institutionalized and Structural Exclusion
Kasinitz and Rosenberg, "Missing the Connection: Social Isolation and Employment on the Brooklyn Waterfront"

Week 14:
Affirmative Action in the Labor Market
Reskin, The Realities of Affirmative Action in Employment, Ch. 1