Civil Rights Law & Policy UAPP 649/449; BAMS 649
Wednesday 12:20pm-3:20 pm
Room 202 Interdisciplinary Science & Engineering

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Course Description

This course will examine the origin and evolution of the laws and policies that govern race, gender, national origin and sexual orientation in the United States. The course will commence with a consideration of the legal status of groups under state and federal law. It will explore the impact of the post-civil war constitutional amendments on the legal status of groups during the Reconstruction Era. Subsequent developments, from the establishment of state-sponsored segregation at the end of the 19th century, through the enactment of the civil rights legislation of the 1960s will be analyzed. The final weeks of the course will focus on contemporary civil rights issues including, among others, school desegregation, affirmative action, voting rights, criminal justice and fair housing. The course will examine emerging and consider the implications of the Supreme Court’s current approach to civil rights issues.

Learning Goals

1. To refine skills in research, and oral and written communications.
2. To think critically and develop problem solving skills.
3. Engage questions of ethics and recognize responsibilities to the community and society at large.
4. Develop analytical skills, intellectual curiosity, confidence, and engagement.
5. Develop the ability to integrate academic knowledge with experiences that extend beyond the boundaries of the classroom.
6. Understand the foundations of American society including the significance of its cultural diversity.
7. Develop an international perspective that will facilitate living and working in a global society.

Grading Criteria

Class discussion and reflection papers............30%
Midterm Presentation......................................30%
Final Paper.......................................................40%
Reflection Papers

Students will be required to prepare reflection papers consisting of a one or one and one-half page document that states a summary of the readings assigned each week and your reaction. Each of the assigned readings should be briefly summarized. The concluding 1/3 or 1/4 of the document should state your reaction (“reflection”) to the readings. Papers are due each week on Wednesday.

Midterm Presentations and Final Papers

Students will be required to prepare a midterm presentation and a final paper on the same topic. Midterm presentations can be made with or without PowerPoint or other electronic presentation tools. Midterm presentations must have a complete bibliography consisting of at least a page and one-half. (No websites, except official governmental sources. Academic books and journals only). Final papers should be on the same topic as midterm presentation.


Course Syllabus:

February 8 Introductory Class

February 15 Slavery, Free Blacks, and the United States Supreme Court

Race Law 113-173

The United States v. The Libellants and Claimants of the Schooner Amistad, 40 U.S. 518 (1841)
Prigg v. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 41 U.S. 539 (1842)
Scott v. Sandford, 60 U.S. 393 (1857)

February 22 The Supreme Court’s Betrayal of Reconstruction

Race Law 181-254

The Slaughterhouse Cases, 16 Wall. 36 (1873)
United States v. Cruikshank, 92 U.S. 542 (1875) 233
The Civil Rights Cases, 109 U.S. 3 (1883)

March 1 Race and Citizenship

Midterm and Final topics Due

Race Law 255-289

Ozawa v. United States, 260 U.S. 178 (1922)

1 Readings are not always sequential. Read the pages of Race Law and other readings as indicated on the syllabus.
United States v. Thind, 261 U.S. 204 (1923)
People v. De La Guerra, 40 Cal. 311 (1870)
Ping v. United States, 130 U.S. 581 (1889)
United States v. Ark, 169 U.S. 649 (1898)
Korematsu v. United States, 323 U.S. 214 (1944)

March 8 The Separate but Equal Doctrine
Race Law 335-372
Strauder v. West Virginia, 100 U.S. 303 (1880)
Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896)
Berea College v. The Commonwealth of Kentucky, 211 U.S. 45 (1908)

March 15 Racial Segregation and Housing
Race Law 372-385
Buchanan v. Warley, 245 U.S. 60 (1917)

Racial Segregation and Interstate Commerce
Race Law 385-395
Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia, 328 U.S. 373 (1946)

Racial Segregation and State Action
Race Law 395-402
Shelley v. Kraemer, 334 U.S. 1 (1948)

March 22 Interpreting the Separate but Equal Doctrine
Race Law 402-433
Cumming v. County Board of Education, 175 U.S. 528 (1899)
Lum v. Rice, 275 U.S. 78 (1927)

Applying the Separate but Equal Doctrine
Race Law 434-450
Gaines v. Canada, 305 U.S. 337 (1938)

March 27-31 Spring Break

April 5, 12 and 19 Student Presentations

April 26 The End of State-Mandated Segregation

Race Law 450-470


Loving v. Virginia, 388 U.S. 1 (1966)

Race Conscious Remedies

Race Law 473-567

Brown v. Board of Education (Brown II), 349 U.S. 294 (1955)


Fisher v. University of Texas, 133 S.Ct. 2411 (2013)


May 3 Maintaining Racial Inequity

Race Law 570-646


Shelby County v. Holder, 133 S. Ct. 2612 (2013)


May 10 Last Class-wrap up; turn in papers