

# GOVT 4816: Politics of Race and Capitalism

Dr. Jacob Swanson

Spring 2023

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Office Hours: T/TR 11:00am-12:00pm

Office: TBD

Class Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 12:30pm-1:45pm

Class Room: White-Gravenor 409

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## Course Description

This course explores the politics of the historical intertwining of race and capitalism. What are the political stakes, we will ask, of thinking and analyzing race and capitalism together? How should we define *racial capitalism*, and how do these joint forces operate and perpetuate racial and socioeconomic inequalities across time and space? What political ideas, languages, imaginings, and forms of action are made possible through analytical and rhetorical frames that operationalize race and capitalism together?

Organized thematically, the readings in this course provide a rich survey of the diversity of (re)sources to be found under the rubric of race and capitalism studies, thus empowering students to learn and understand key ideas and concepts and to explore a multitude of avenues available for further study. Engaging a wide range of philosophers, artists, activists, and scholars – from Karl Marx and W.E.B. DuBois to Audre Lorde, Octavia Butler, Aimé Césaire, Angela Davis, and Cedric Robinson – this course aims to better understand and challenge the complex ways in which race and capitalism have shaped—and continue to shape—our world. This course satisfies the upper-division Political Theory requirement for GOVT majors.

## Course Mechanics

This course has three primary aims: 1) to teach students about diverse theoretical and practical-political approaches to race and capitalism; 2) to teach students to listen to and understand multiple perspectives on this topic; 3) to challenge students to carve out their own positions by way of thinking critically about the texts we will read and discuss in class.

To achieve these aims and to make class more engaging and productive, this will be a **discussion-based class**. This means that, as a seminar, we will collaboratively work through each week's readings by discussing, interrogating, critiquing, and evaluating them together. This also means that students' ongoing input is invaluable and essential.

For this format to work well, students are expected to actively engage with the course material in several ways. First, do not just read the assigned texts but **read them actively**: underline passages that you find important or interesting, and those that don't seem to make sense; write down questions that come up for you about the texts; note places where the author(s) seem to be contradicting themselves or (as you see it) inadequately making their argument; finally, note for next class any parts of the texts that seem to connect up with something a fellow classmate said (to foster ongoing, generative discussion).

NOTE: We will read some dense and complicated readings, and some students may have more familiarity with them than others. That's fine! As we'll see, for the most part these are not readings that you grasp in a single setting or class; they're ones you tackle with others to gradually challenge, enrich, and deepen your own thinking about the world. To better handle the heavy reading load, longer readings will generally be assigned on Tuesdays and shorter ones on Thursdays. This will give us time on Thursdays to overview where we're at and how a given week's reading fit into the arc of the class thus far. The reading load is also subject to change to accommodate our interests and discussions as a class as we move from week to week.

## Evaluation

### 1. Class Participation (25%)

Class participation involves three main components: consistent attendance; active engagement in class discussion and group projects; and preparation of a **1) discussion memo** for every class and **2) discussion posts** on Canvas (you must write 12 posts in total, not including brief replies to classmates' comments on your posts, which you are encouraged but not required to do).

#### Discussion Guidelines (for class and Canvas):

- **What's a Discussion Memo?** Think of discussion memos like a set of notes you bring to a discussion that you help facilitate (which is the case! every student is a co-facilitator of discussion in this class). In them, you'll have marked down passages from the readings, quotes, ideas, links between ideas, critiques, comparisons between readings (from this week and/or others), connections to real-world events and debates, and, crucially, questions of all sorts. Thus, your discussion memo is a guide for your participation in discussion.

Make sure to have these discussion memos prepared and ready! You may not always have to talk about them, or need them, but you should be ready to do so at any point in class.

- **Discussion Posts** on Canvas don't have to be long, but they do need to be thoughtful and constructive. This means: don't just reiterate what a reading says, but tell us what you think of what it says. In general, discussion posts can take the form of a critique of a given reading or readings; highlighting or exploring links or contrasts between readings; developing concrete questions about readings or the broader issues they touch upon; or friendly, constructive debate with classmates. **Due every Friday by 5pm.**

*In-class discussion:*

- Asking questions is encouraged! It is important that we have a comprehensive understanding of the material in order to make comments and approach it critically. Questions are an essential part of participation and *all questions are welcome*.
- Participation takes many forms, including attentive listening and thoughtful engagement with other students, sharing your comments and thoughts on lectures and current events, critically evaluating the material, asking questions, and carefully and curiously reading the material.
- Quality over quantity. Thoughtful participation is valued over frequent participation.
- Please be respectful of your fellow students, and be considerate and thoughtful in your comments. Our diversity as a class is an asset to our learning experience. A core aim of this course is to provide you with the opportunity to speak and be heard, explore your own understandings and assumptions, and engage meaningfully with each other. Please join me in upholding these values in our class.

I acknowledge that students come to class with varying levels of experience and comfort when it comes to speaking in a public setting. If you are nervous and/or uncomfortable about participating in class discussions, I strongly encourage you to reach out to me so that we can work together to help you participate in a way that is effective for you.

### **Group Mini-Lectures (15%)**

Remember above when it said that each student is a co-facilitator of discussion? Well, this assignment is part of that!

Our class will be organized into small working groups. You'll do various small, in-class projects with your group throughout the semester. For this assignment, each group is tasked to prepare a 12-15 minute mini-lecture on a given week's readings (you can go a little *over* on time, but not under). Groups will be assigned on the first day of class; a sign-up sheet will subsequently be distributed for each group to pick a week. A handout with mini-lecture guidelines will also be available on Canvas. All mini-lectures will occur on Thursdays, so that everyone will have completed the week's readings.

For the group lectures, students are expected to read all the week's material closely and critically; decide on a way of organizing that Thursday's readings for presentation to the class in light of the topics discussed on Tuesday and previous weeks; and highlight, and offer explanations of, the main ideas, concepts, policies, controversies, and information in that Thursday's readings. In short, you'll be collaboratively teaching your classmates.

### **Short Writing Assignments (30%)**

There are two short writings assignments:

1) Students will develop and present a **Case Study** which details a specific historical or current case of the effects of racial capitalism and connects it to theoretical work from the readings. The case study can take a number of forms (slide presentation, TikTok or YouTube video, Twitter

thread, etc.) and will be presented in class. An assignment handout will provide more details and a sign-up sheet will be offered for students to choose when to present. **15%**

**2) Final Paper Outline + Paragraph.** Write 1-2 paragraphs explaining your idea, arguments, and evidence for the final paper, along with a 1-page outline. *You must also make an appointment to discuss your idea and outline in office hours.* All proposals must be approved or they cannot be used for the final paper. **Due via submission to Canvas by 11:59pm on April 24.** It must be submitted as a Word document (.docx or .doc) or PDF. No other file formats will be accepted (including Google docs!). **15%**

### **Final Paper (30%)**

Students have the choice of writing an 12-15 page research paper *or* 12-15 page critical literature review (double-spaced). Proposals for either option are required and due two weeks before the last week of class (20 April, by class time). The final is **due via submission to Canvas on 13 May by 5pm**. It must be submitted as a Word document (.docx or .doc) or PDF. No other file formats will be accepted (including Google docs!).

## **Course Policies**

### **1. Attendance**

Regular attendance is required. Please notify me in advance in case you have a legitimate excuse for not attending a session (such as family emergency or illness). You have one free pass, i.e. one unexcused absence for which you do not need to notify me before class. Any other unexcused absences will result in a reduction of your participation grade. More than three unexcused absences will result in a participation grade of zero. Also, please arrive on time; consistent tardiness will result in a reduction of your participation grade.

### **2. Office Hours and E-mail Policy**

Please feel free to e-mail for questions or to set up a meeting. Longer discussions and any questions/concerns about grades must take place in person. I will guarantee a response to e-mails within 24 hours during the week. I will also be checking my e-mail more regularly in the day or two before assignments or exams are due. However, I highly encourage not waiting until the very last minute before getting in touch. I cannot guarantee that I will receive, read and respond to any last minute queries.

### **3. Electronic Devices in Class**

Cell phones and similar electronic devices should be turned off and put away during lecture.

Laptops and tablets are optional; students who do the readings in an electronic format may wish to be able to access the texts for the purposes of discussion. However, laptops are only allowed to this end and for note-taking purposes. I reserve the right to ban the use of laptops at any moment, should it cause any disturbance during class.

### **4. Grading Policy**

The expectations for each assignment will be discussed in class before they are due. Any late submissions will result in a reduction of a full grade every 24 hours unless documentation for a legitimate excuse for late submission (such as family or medical emergency) is provided. For any concerns related to completing any of the assignments, please see me before the assignment is due. Once grades are returned, you must wait for min. 24 hours before any appeals.

### **5. Academic Honesty**

Academic dishonesty, in the form of plagiarism, cheating, and related behavior, will not be tolerated. It will likely result in a failing grade for the course and may lead to documentation that becomes part of a student's permanent academic record. You are responsible for making sure that the written work you give me is entirely your own work. All submitted work must comply with Georgetown's policy on academic integrity. For further details, see: [honorcouncil.georgetown.edu/system](http://honorcouncil.georgetown.edu/system).

Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. In the case that occurs,

they will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Usage Policy posted on the Turnitin.com site. For further information about plagiarism, see: [honorcouncil.georgetown.edu/whatisplagiarism](http://honorcouncil.georgetown.edu/whatisplagiarism).

## **6. Statement of Nondiscrimination**

Georgetown University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer. Discrimination, or harassment (either in the form of quid pro quo or creation of a hostile environment) of any person based on race, color, religion, creed, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation is a violation of state and federal law and Georgetown University policy and will not be tolerated. Any person who feels that they have been the subject of prohibited discrimination or harassment should contact the Office of Student Equity and Inclusion located in Thomas & Dorothy Leavey Center 5th Floor, via email at [osei@georgetown.edu](mailto:osei@georgetown.edu) or by phone at (202) 687-4978.

Students with disabilities are entitled to receive reasonable accommodations necessary for their full participation in the course and all of its requirements. Students with disabilities may contact Academic Resource Center in the School of Continuing Studies, located in Room C144, via email at [arc-scs@georgetown.edu](mailto:arc-scs@georgetown.edu), or by phone at (202) 784-7366.

## **7. Title IX/Sexual Misconduct**

Georgetown University and its faculty are committed to supporting survivors and those impacted by sexual misconduct, which includes sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, and stalking. Georgetown requires faculty members, unless otherwise designated as confidential, to report all disclosures of sexual misconduct to the University Title IX Coordinator or a Deputy Title IX Coordinator. If you disclose an incident of sexual misconduct to a professor in or outside of the classroom (with the exception of disclosures in papers), that faculty member must report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator, or Deputy Title IX Coordinator. The coordinator will, in turn, reach out to the student to provide support, resources, and the option to meet (please note that the student is not required to meet with the Title IX coordinator). More information about reporting options and resources can be found on the Sexual Misconduct Website: <https://sexualassault.georgetown.edu/resourcecenter>.

If you would prefer to speak to someone confidentially, Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professional resources that can provide support and assistance. These resources include:

- Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention: confidential email [sarp@georgetown.edu](mailto:sarp@georgetown.edu)
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS): 202.687.6985 or after hours, call (833) 960-3006 to reach Fonemed, a telehealth service; individuals may ask for the on-call CAPS clinician
- More information about reporting options and resources can be found on the Sexual Misconduct Website.

## Required Materials

Students only need to get two texts for this class, listed below. Please consult Canvas for an up-to-date syllabus and all other course readings, assignments, handouts, and other documents.

### Required Texts

- Butler, Octavia. (2019). *Parable of the Sower*. NOTE: please try to get the 2019 edition from Grand Central Publishing, ISBN-10: 1538732181, so that we can all (literally) be on the same page!
- Wilderson, Frank III. (2021). *Afropessimism*. NOTE: ideally, try to get a copy of the 2021 paperback edition from Liverlight, ISBN-10:1324090510.

## Schedule and Readings

The schedule is tentative and subject to change.

NOTE: "Recommended" readings on this syllabus are there for students to consider if they want to do further exploration of a topic on their own or for a research paper. Whole books are listed, for example. It is *not* recommended that students also read these readings each week, then, but that they take a look at them if they want to pursue an interest further.

### Section 1: Race *and* Capitalism

#### Week 1. Introduction (Thursday, 12 January)

##### Week 2a. Definitions of Capitalism (Tuesday, 17 January)

- Kelly, Robin D.G. (2017). "What Did Cedric Robinson Mean by Racial Capitalism?" *Boston Review*.
- Kocka, Jürgen. (2016). Chapter 1: "What Does Capitalism Mean?" in *Capitalism, a Short History*.

##### Week 2b. Definitions of Capitalism (Thursday, 19 January)

- Sarwat, Jahan and Ahmed Saber Mahmud. (2015). "Back to Basics: What is Capitalism?" IMF: *Finance and Development Magazine*.
- Hayek, Friedrich. (1975). Introduction: "History and Politics" in *Capitalism and the Historians*.

##### Week 3a. The Place of Race (Tuesday, 24 January)

- DuBois, W.E.B. Chapter 5: "The Concept of Race" in *Dusk of Dawn*.
- Fields, Karen E. and Barbara J. (2014). Chapter 1: "A Tour of Racecraft" in *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*.

##### Week 3b. The Place of Race (Thursday, 26 January)

- Lorde, Audre. (2007). "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*.

##### Week 4a. The Place of Race, continued (Tuesday, 31 January)

- In-class film: *I Am Not Your Negro*
- \*Read ahead for Thursday!



### **Week 4b. The Role of Marx & the Category of Class. (Thursday, 2 February)**

- Reed, Adolph. (2002). "Unraveling the relation of race and class in American politics." *Political Power and Social Theory* 15: 265-274.
- Fraser, Nancy. (2016). "Expropriation and Exploitation in Racialized Capitalism." *Critical Historical Studies* 3(1): 163-178.
- Boggs, James. (2011). *Pages from a Black Radical's Notebook: A James Boggs Reader* (excerpts).

## **Section 2: Slavery and Democracy**

### **Week 5a. Separate or Equal? (Tuesday, 7 February)**

- Hartman, Saidiya. (1997). Introduction in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*.
- Williams, Eric. (2021). Chapters 1 & 2: "The Origin of Negro Slavery" and "The Development of the Negro Slave Trade" in *Capitalism and Slavery*.

### **Week 5b. Separate or Equal? (Thursday, 9 February)**

- Johnson, Walter. (2018). "To Remake the World: Slavery, Racial Capitalism, and Justice." *Boston Review*.

### **Week 6a. (II)liberal Democracy (Tuesday, 14 February)**

- Harris, Cheryl. (1993). "Whiteness as Property." *The Harvard Law Review* 108(8): 1707-1791.

### **Week 6b. (II)liberal Democracy (Thursday, 16 February)**

- Harris, Cheryl. (1993). "Whiteness as Property." *The Harvard Law Review* 108(8): 1707-1791.

### **Week 7. (II)liberal Democracy (Thursday, 23 February)**

\*NOTE: No Class Tuesday, February 21

- Mills, Charles W. (1997). *The Racial Contract*. (excerpts)

## **Section 3: Political Economies of Race**

### **Week 8a. Capitalism and Dispossession (Tuesday, 28 February)**

- Singh, Nikhil Pal. 2016. "On race, violence, and so-called primitive accumulation." *Social Text* 34(3): 27-50.

### **Week 8b. Capitalism and Dispossession (Thursday, 2 March)**

- Césaire, Aimé. Excerpts from *Discourse on Colonialism*.

## **NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK (enjoy!)**

### **Week 9a. Indigeneity and Dispossession (Tuesday, 14 March)**

- The Kino-nda-niimi Collective, ed., *The Winter We Danced: Voices from the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement*: Shiri Pasternak, "Occupy(ed) Canada: The Political Economy of Indigenous Dispossession."
- Nichols, Robert. (2019). Introduction: "What is Dispossession?" in *Theft is Property!*.

### **Week 9b. Indigeneity and Dispossession (Thursday, 16 March)**

- Rogin, Michael. (1988). Chapter 5: "Liberal Society and the Indian Question" in *Ronald Reagan The Movie: And Other Episodes in Political Demonology*.

### **Week 10a. Racializing Profit (Tuesday, 21 March)**

- Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta. (2019). Introduction in *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*.
- Lee, Trymaine. (2019). "How America's Vast Racial Wealth Gap Grew: By Plunder." *New York Times Magazine*.
- Baradaran, Mehrsa. (2020). "Closing the Racial Wealth Gap." *NYU Law Review*.

### **Week 10b. Racializing Profit (Thursday, 23 March)**

- Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. (1999). "Globalisation and US prison growth: From military Keynesianism to post-Keynesian militarism." *Race & Class* 40(2-3): 171-188.
- Davis, Angela. (2003). Chapter 5: "The Prison Industrial Complex" in *Are Prisons Obsolete?*.

### **Week 11a. Commodifying Race in Capitalist Culture (Tuesday, 28 March)**

- Shelby, Tommie. (2015). "Impure Dissent: Hip Hop and the Political Ethics of Marginalized Black Urban Youth," in *From Voice to Influence : Understanding Citizenship in a Digital Age*
- Shelby, Tommie. Liner Notes: Nas, *Illmatic* (1994)

### **Week 11b. Commodifying Race in Capitalist Culture (Thursday, 30 March)**

- Ebron, Paulla A. (2008). "Strike a Pose: Capitalism's Black Identity" in *Recharting the Black Atlantic*.
- hooks, bell. (2016). "Moving Beyond Pain."

### **Week 12. Race & Climate Justice (Tuesday, 4 April)**

- Táíwò, Olúfémi. (2021). Chapter 5: "What's Next: Why Reparations Require Climate Justice" in *Reconsidering Reparations*.

**NO CLASS - EASTER BREAK**

**Section 4: Art, Narrative, and Anti-Capitalism**

**Week 13a. Feminism and Futures (Tuesday, 11 April)**

- Butler, Octavia. (2019). *Parable of the Sower*.

**Week 13b: Feminism and Futures (Thursday, 13 April)**

- Butler, Octavia. (2019). *Parable of the Sower*.

**Week 14a: Afro-Surrealism & Anti-Capitalism (Tuesday, 18 April)**

- Film: *Sorry to Bother You*
- Sinha, Vamika. (2020). "Sorry to Bother You: Reflecting on Modern Capitalism and Satirical Black Cinema." *Prospect Magazine*.

**Week 14b: Final Paper Workshop (Thursday, 20 April)**

**Week 15a: Afro-Pessimism (Tuesday, 25 April)**

- Wilderson, Frank III. (2021). *Afropessimism*.

**Week 15b: Afro-Pessimism (Thursday, 27 April)**

- Wilderson, Frank III. (2021). *Afropessimism*.

**Week 16: Office Hours for Final Paper (Tuesday, 2 March)**