Introduction to 
Critical Race Theory 
[IRTS 7077 001 • 2 credits] 
Fall Semester 2015 
Th. 1:30-3:30pm 
Room 208

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I. Course Description

Thirty years ago, an interdisciplinary scholarly movement in the legal academy, known as “Critical Race Theory” (CRT), burst onto the scene. Early advocates of CRT—such as (the now late) Derrick Bell, Mari Matsuda, Richard Delgado, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Patricia Williams—challenged both the substance and style of traditional legal scholarship. Substantively, “race crits,” as they came to be known, rejected not only the “colorblind” approach to legal issues that renders invisible the particular and often divergent experiences of people of color vis-à-vis the law, but also liberal approaches emphasizing formal equality and individual civil rights. They even rejected, to a degree, the radical critiques of critical legal theorists (“crits”) and the crits’ “trashing” of civil rights. Stylistically, critical race theorists often employed new and interdisciplinary methodologies for legal scholarship, including storytelling and postmodern analysis. CRT advocates effectively used these methods to illuminate and define the centrality of race as a foundational feature of U.S. law, and the mutually constitutive nature of race and law.

Since its emergence there have of course been a number of developments in CRT, as is the case with every specialized field of study. Contemporary "second generation" CRT scholars have focused on a discursive “anti-essentialist” challenge presented by a diverse community of race crits along racial, ethnic, gender, sexuality, and class lines, among others. The contemporary substantive focus is cross-racial, comparative, and proactive. It analyzes the converging and diverging experiences of indigenous peoples, Latin@s, African Americans, and Asian Pacific Americans, as well as different strategies for social justice.

Because this is a two-credit course, however, our readings will focus on what I consider to be foundational readings in CRT, consisting primarily of first-generation works as well as a few second-generation and non-legal writings. Through close reading and discussion of these materials, this course aims to provide you with analytical and rhetorical tools that will enable you to respond effectively to contemporary movements and arguments designed to maintain subordinating social and socioeconomic hierarchies (i.e., the status quo). Additionally, during the last several of the semester, reading assignments will lighten significantly, as we will focus on a course project that, in part, will enable us to put theory into practice. Further details about this project and course format are discussed below.

II. Course Format

Reading portion of course: Although this course is not a seminar, you should know at the outset that reading assignments during the first half of the semester will be quite heavy (100-200 pages per week). During this time, classroom instruction will prioritize student-initiated discussion
using “Lead Discussants” (see below, "Course Requirements"). You are of course always expected to be timely, prepared, active, and thoughtful class participants, since a successful class depends upon consistent attendance by all members and a high quality level of preparation, discussion, and analysis. Moreover, I have a very keen sensitivity to and very low tolerance of “bullshitting,” and if I find that you do it regularly or frequently, it will negatively affect your final grade in the course. I also expect that you will hold each other accountable for doing the reading and engaging in meaningful discussion, as long as you do so in a respectful way that makes clear the high expectations we presumably will all have for one another in this class.

**Project portion of course:** During the latter part of the semester, we will focus on a class project that we will collectively conceptualize and develop in response to the shooting death of Sam Dubose on July 19, 2015, at the hands of a UC Campus Police officer. Keep in mind that this response could be multi-directional or multi-faceted, given the incredibly complex nature of the problem(s) at issue. A guest teacher/facilitator—journalist Dani McClain, who writes for The Nation on issues of race, gender, policy, and politics—will assist us with this project. Stay tuned for further information about exactly how Ms. McClain will be involved.

Through working on this project, you will learn to apply theory covered during the first half of the semester to existing problems in the real world. Thus, the purpose of the project is, ultimately, to teach you how to connect theory to practice or, in more academic terms, to “perform critical race theory.”

**III. Required Texts**

The only required text that you should purchase or rent is **MICHAEL OMI & HOWARD WINANT, RACIAL FORMATION IN THE UNITED STATES (3d ed. 2014)**, as we will be reading the entire book. If you do not already own this book, I highly recommend that you go ahead and buy it if you can afford doing so. It is indispensable reading for anyone who wants to understand sociopolitical inequality in American society.

All other required readings will be made available on the TWEN site for this course.

**IV. Course Requirements**

**A. Lead Discussant and Class Facilitation**

Over the course of the semester, you and at least one other classmate will serve, collaboratively, as "Lead Discussants" for two (2) different readings from the assigned materials. Each of you must post—no later than 1:30pm on the day prior to the start of your assigned session—an MS Word document of up to 550 words (with name and word count stated in the upper right-hand corner of the document) in the “01 15_Fall CRT” Box-at-UC sub-folder “Lead Discussant Postings.” The document must include the following six components:

1) **Thesis:** Provide in one or two sentences, the author's main argument or thesis.

2) **Evidence & Methodology:** Analyze whether the argument is supported by evidence and what kind of evidence is provided. How would you describe the “methodology” the author uses to prove her argument (doctrinal analysis, discursive analysis, legal history, storytelling, etc.)?

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3) **Critique:** Identify strengths or weaknesses of the author’s contribution, focusing on his/her argument, methodology, and evidence.

4) **CRT intervention:** Discuss whether and how the article engages or helps us understand both race and the law from a critical (vs. conservative or traditional civil rights or liberal) perspective, and assess how relevant the argument is in today’s sociolegal context.

5) **Questions:** Develop at least two discussion questions of a conceptual or theoretical nature (vs. factual or normative) to pose to the group to spur conversation.

6) **Contemporary example:** Provide and discuss briefly one instance from the week or month's news and/or media that demonstrates how a theoretical insight from the reading is operationalized in "the real world," where that term is broadly defined to include not only real events but also discursive formations generated by various forms of media.

Collaboration between Lead Discussants who are facilitating on the same piece is required, as such collaboration maximizes the potential for nuanced and sophisticated discussion that connects things, cumulatively, together. Feel free to be creative and/or incorporate current issues into your class facilitation, if you can do so in a way that meaningfully employs the assigned materials.

**B. Project**

You are required to write and submit a 1,500-2,000 word paper (roughly 6-8 pages) situating the project and work you will do on the project within the CRT frameworks that we will study in the course. At a minimum, the analysis in your paper should include discussion of at least 5 of the readings covered during the first half of the semester. The paper will be due no later than **Thursday, December 17, 2015** (the last day of fall final exams). We will discuss the paper in more detail closer to the end of the semester.

**V. Grading**

Your grade in this class will be based on:

1. your 2 lead discussant and class facilitation postings and sessions, each worth **20 points** (40 points total);
2. your project paper, worth **40 points**; and
3. the quality of your class participation, worth a maximum of **20 points**.

Thus, your final grade for the course will be based on an available total of **100 points**. And note, of course, that excessive absences and lateness will result in a failing grade for this course.
### VI. Tentative Weekly Schedule of Assignments

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<th>Session &amp; Topic/s</th>
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