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**Race and Schooling: The Role of Research in Transforming Urban Schools  
Fall 2012**

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**Course Description:**

Race and racial inequality are issues that are at the center of numerous controversies related to public policy and urban education in the United States. From school de-segregation to the ongoing debates over vouchers, charter schools and greater school choice; from conflicts related to the disproportionate placement of children of color in special education to the highly polarized debates over tracking and “gifted” education; from school discipline practices that result in disproportionate punishment being directed at low-income students of color to ongoing controversies related to the representation (or absence) of racial minorities in the school curriculum, controversies related to the role and significance of race in education have been a persistent feature of American education. This course will examine many of these controversies and the way in which race is implicated in these debates. The course will provide students with a setting where we can learn about these issues through open, critical discussion, and together we will work toward developing an understanding of how they might be addressed.

Urban schools are frequently described as “failing”. They are often characterized as unsafe and ineffective, criticized for low levels of student achievement and high drop out rates, and castigated for bureaucratic dysfunction and political corruption. Understanding why failure is so pervasive and the ways in which race and class are implicated in the challenges confronting urban schools will be a central focus of this course. More often than not, the children served by urban schools are predominantly poor and non-white. Many of these children have a wide variety of social needs (e.g. health, nutrition, safety, housing, etc.) that are unaddressed and that often impact their ability to learn. Despite their shortcomings, urban public schools are an *indispensable institution* for poor children and their families because they are often the most stable institutions in poor communities. Understanding what it will take to improve urban schools so that they can succeed at meeting the academic needs of the children they serve is a central theme of this course.

A closer examination of the challenges confronting urban public schools reveals that their problems are inextricably connected to the social, economic and political conditions present within the urban environment and the larger society (and world). Changes such as the transformation and decline of some cities as centers of industry and commerce, the dramatic demographic changes brought on by the unprecedented scale of immigration, and the globalization of the world economy, will all be analyzed and considered. We will also analyze the ways in which urban schools are influenced by changes in local, state and federal policy such as the emergence of charter schools, various privatization plans, and the No Child Left Behind law. Throughout the course the particular experiences of public schools in New York City and other communities within the greater metropolitan area will be used for the purpose of grounding our analysis within the reality of urban schools.

Too often, educational reform efforts, public policy and educational research have overlooked the connections between the problems confronting schools and the challenges that are embedded within the social context. Throughout this course we will adopt the stance that context matters, and that the only way we will be able to assist urban schools is by understanding the *urban* – the local environment and the social, economic and cultural context where learning and development occur. Through such an approach we hope to gain a clearer sense of what it will take to reform and improve schools where change is so desperately needed.

## Course Goals

This course is designed to achieve three distinct goals. The first and perhaps most important is to provide students with practical experience in using research to address the problems and issues confronting urban public schools. To that end, **each student will be required to develop and implement a research designed for the explicit purpose of helping a school to improve or to address an issue of concern.** Throughout the semester students will be provided with guidance and direction on how to engage in research that addresses one or more of the many challenges confronting urban public schools. The course will serve as a setting where students will receive advice, support and training on how to do research that is most helpful to schools in concrete and practical ways.

A second goal of the course is to provide students with substantive knowledge; information and perspectives related to the complex issues facing urban schools and the ways in which race, class and culture are implicated in these. To understand the challenges confronting urban public schools we will read and discuss relevant social theory particularly related to race and social identity, scholarship on the political economy of urban areas, anthropological and sociological literature on urban life and schooling, and educational studies on learning and child development. As we explore the problems encountered by urban public schools we will attempt to link theory to first hand observations and data obtained through field research so that our conversations are grounded in the reality of the schools and communities we will discuss. One of the assumptions of the course is that it is impossible to understand much less address educational issues without a first hand knowledge of what is actually happening within them.

The final goal of the course is to help students make connections between theory, research, policy and practice in order to strengthen our ability to act as leaders, educators and researchers on the complex issues influencing the academic performance of students and schools in urban areas. By probing the issues and challenges facing urban public schools and synthesizing various ideas to process information pertinent to the schools where we work and do our research, the course will provide a setting where discussions can move beyond abstract analysis of what might be, to concrete consideration of what should be done.

## Course Readings and Design:

This course is organized around a core set of critical questions related to the challenges confronting urban schools and the role that race, class, language and culture play on a number of important issues. Students are expected to come to class having read the material listed under the heading for a particular week and to be prepared to engage in a probing discussion of the main ideas raised by the authors. Class participation is a central feature of the learning experience in this course.

**Required Readings:**

*Urban Schools and Public Will* by Norm Fruchter (Teachers College Press, 2007)

*City Schools and the American Dream* by P. Noguera (Teachers College Press, 2003)

*Class Warfare: Inside the Fight to Fix America's Schools* by Steven Brill. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011

*Multiplication is for White People* by Lisa Delpit. New York: New Press, 2012.

Recommended: *The Practice of Social Research* by Earl Babbie; *Methods of Social Science Research* by Kenneth Bailey (selected readings from both books will be available on Blackboard. Both books will be on reserve in the Metro Center library); *Ethnography* by Shirley Brice Heath and Brian Street New York: Teachers College Press, 2008).

Note: Please read the chapters listed for Fruchter, Noguera, Brill, and Delpit listed under each date. The rest of the articles under each date will be available on Blackboard.

**Week 1:**

**9/5 Introduction to the course: Why is failure so pervasive in urban schools across the United States? Why haven't past reforms solved the problem? Why does the United States allow so many schools to fail? Why hasn't educational research been more helpful in solving the problems that plague urban schools?**

**Week 2:**

**9/12 Race, schooling and American society**

Read: *Amazing Grace* by Jonathan Kozol (1995); *The Right to Learn* by Linda Darling Hammond, chapters 1 and 2; "Race and Diversity in the Age of Obama" by Orlando Patterson, *NY Times* August 16, 2009; "Consuming Social Change: The United Colors of Benetton" by Henry Giroux in the Giroux Reader (University of Colorado Press, 2006); *So Much Reform, So Little Change* by Charles Payne (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2008); Noguera, P. A. (2003) *City Schools and the American Dream* (chapter 1); Delpit, chapters 1 and 2.

**Week 3:**

**9/19 How does the local community influence the challenges facing urban public schools?**

Read: Fruchter, Norm *Urban Schools and Public Will* (2007) NY: Teachers College Press (Chapter 1); Noguera, P. A. (2003) *City Schools and the American Dream* (chapter 2); Wilson, W.J. (1996) "The Fading Inner-City Family" & "The Meaning and Significance of Race: Employers and Inner-City Workers" in *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*; *Education Next*, "Poor Kids or Poor Schools" a policy debate between Joe Williams and Pedro Noguera in *Education Next*, American Enterprise Institute Fall 2009; "A Bolder and Broader Approach to School Reform"; *Ghetto Schooling* by Jean Anyon, chapters 1 and 2.

**Week 4:**

**9/26 Racial categories and racial formation in American schools and society**

Read: *Race in the Schoolyard* by Amanda Lewis; Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 from *The Changing Terrain of Race and Ethnicity* edited by Krysan and Lewis (2004); *Race and Ethnic Relations* by Martin Marger; *City Schools and the American Dream* chapter 3; *Everyday Anti-Racism* edited by Mica Pollack (2008); *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations* by Joe Feagin (New York: Routledge, 2000); "Critical Race Theory" by Gloria Ladson Billings and William Tate; "Witnessing Whiteness" In *Off-White: Readings on Race, Power and Society*, Ed. M. Fine, L. Weis, L. C. Powell and L. M. Wong. New York, (NY: Routledge, 1997).

**Submit two-page description of research project and question and first response paper.**

**Week 5:**

**10/3 Understanding the relationship between race and achievement.**

**Read:** McWhorter, John H. 2001. *Losing the Race*, New York, NY: Perennial, chapters 1 & 2; “The Attitude Achievement Paradox Among Black Adolescents” by R. Mickelson in *Journal of Sociology of Education*; Payne, Charles. 1984. “Black Bastards and White Millionaires” In *Getting What We Ask For*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press; “Minority Education in Comparative Perspective” *Journal of Negro Education*; Delpit chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6.

**Week 6:**

**10/10 Demographic change and school segregation after the Brown decision: Is it possible to produce equity in educational outcomes when poor children are concentrated in under-funded schools?**

**Read:** *Schools Betrayed: Roots of Failure in Inner-City Education* by Kathryn Neckerman; *Toward Excellence with Equity* by Ron Ferguson (Harvard Education Press 2008); “How the Middle Class Has Helped Ruin the Public Schools” Nocera, J. in *Utne Reader*, Sept/Oct. (1990), pp.66-72; Olsen, L. (1997) *Made in America*. Suarez-Orozco, C, M. Suarez-Orozco and I. Todorova *Learning a New Land*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; *Urban Schools and Public Will* by N. Fruchter, chapters 2 and 3.

**2-page Research Methods paper due**

**Week 7:**

**10/17 Charter schools versus public schools: will choice and competition lead to improvement?**

*Race, Schools and Hope* by Lisa Stulberg (2008); “Success at Scale in Charter Schooling” by Steven Wilson Education Sector (2008); *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* by Diane Ravitch, Chapters 7 and 10 (NY: Basic Books, 2010); *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neo-liberalism, Race and the Right to the City* by Pauline Lipman. New York: Routledge, (2011); Brill, pp. 1 – 150.

**Week 8:**

**10/24 Youth culture, community life and the family: How do we understand and respond to problematic behavior?**

**Read:** Anderson, E. (1994). “The Code of the Streets” in *Atlantic Monthly*, May, pp.81-94.  
Wilson, W.J. (1996). “Ghetto-Related Behavior and the Structure of Opportunity” in *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*; “Violence in American Cities: Young Black Males Is The Answer, But What Was The Question?” by Greenberg, M., Schneider D. (1994); *City Schools and the American Dream* chapter 5; *Gang Redux* by Diego Vigil (Waveland Press 2009); *What A Coach Can Teach a Teacher*, Chapter 4 by Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade (Peter Lang 2010); Jeffries, M, *Thug Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2010). Delpit, chapters 7 – 11.

**Second response paper due.**

**Week 9:**

**10/31 The role of research in urban schools: Can research be used to help urban public schools?**

**Read:** *Cities Schools and the American Dream* Chapter 4; *Race and School Restructuring* by P. Lipman (Teachers College Press, 2002). “How Listening to Students Can Help Schools to Improve” by P. Noguera in *The Trouble With Black Boys* (San Francisco: Wiley and Sons, 2008); *Becoming Good American Schools* by Jeannie Oakes, Karen Hunter Quartz, Steve Ryan and Martin Lipton (San Francisco: Josey Bass, 2000).

**Literature review due.**

**Week 10:**

**11/7 Improving teaching and learning in urban schools**

Read: *Teach Like A Champion* by Doug Lemov, chapter 3. (San Francisco: Josey Bass, 2010); *Dream Keepers* by G. Ladson-Billings; “A Talk to Teachers” by James Baldwin; *The Right to Learn*, chapters 5 and 6; “The Pedagogy of Poverty Versus Good Teaching” by M. Haberman in *City Kids, City Teachers* edited by William Ayers and Patricia Ford (1994); *The Flat World and Education* by Linda Darling-Hammond New York: Teachers College Press, 2010.

**Week 11:**

**11/14 Disorder, violence and safety in urban schools.**

Read: Quay, H.C. *Teach Like A Champion* by Doug Lemov, chapter 5. (San Francisco: Josey Bass, 2010); Noguera, P.A. (2003). *City Schools and the American Dream*, chapter 6. Ballenger, C. (1992). “Because You Like Us” *Harvard Educational Review*, 62(2), 199-208. ARC (2001) *Racial profiling and Punishment in U.S. Public Schools*, T. Johnson, et. al. Oakland, CA (2001). “Listen First: How Student Perspectives on Violence Can Help in Making Schools Safe” by P. Noguera in *The Assault on America’s Children* edited by V. Polakow (NY: Teachers College Press, 2000); *Because of the Kids* by J. Obidiah and K. Teel; *Police in the Hallways* by Kathleen Nolan chapters 1, 2 and 3.

**Data samples due.**

**Week 12:**

**11/21 Thanksgiving Holiday**

**Week 13:**

**11/28 What will it take to improve America’s urban schools? Race, reform, politics and governance**

Read: *The Right to Learn* chapters 7 and 8; *Urban Schools and Public Will* by N. Fruchter chapter 4 – 6; *Learning Power* by Jeannie Oakes and John Rogers; *Race, Schools and Hope* by Stulberg (chapter 9); *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* by D. Ravitch chapter 1 (NY: Basic Books, 2010); *Schools That Change* by Lew Smith chapters 1 – 4 (NY: Corwin Press, 2008) “Community Organizing for Education Reform” by Mark Warren in *Public Engagement for Public Education* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); Brill, pp. 150 – 302.

**Week 14:**

**12/5 Community change, racial equality and the transformation of urban schools**

Film: Holding Ground

Read: Noguera, P. A. (2003) *City Schools*, chapter 7. *The Right to Learn*, chapters 9 and 10; “Makin’ it Real: Re-thinking Cultural Competence in an Urban Classroom” by T. Barret and P. Noguera in *Building Racial and Cultural Competence in the Classroom* edited by Karen Teel and Jennifer Obidah (2003) *So Much Reform* by Payne (chapter 7); *It’s Being Done* by Karin Chenoweth (New Press 2009); *Sweating the Small Stuff* by David Whitman (2008); *Failure is Not an Option* by Alan Blankstein (NY: Corwin Press, 2004); Brill pp. 302 – 439.

**12/12 Final Class: Research Presentations--Prospects for urban schools in the future**

**12/10 FINAL PAPER DUE**

## Course Assignments

The final grade for the course will be based upon completion of the assignments described below, regular attendance and to the extent possible, class participation.

Reading Summaries – Designed to provide students with opportunity to reflect on course readings and make connections to the research they will be carrying out in schools. Response essays should be no more than five pages in length and should address the corresponding question below:

9/26 Americans place a great deal of faith in the power of education to produce social equity. Is it reasonable to expect that schools could find ways to counter the effects of social inequality? What are the factors that limit and constrain schools in promoting greater equity?

10/24 Human behavior plays a major role in shaping possibilities for change in urban schools and communities. What are the factors that help to explain low achievement, school misconduct and other social problems in urban schools?

12/5 Is it reasonable to expect that urban schools can be reformed without changing the political economy of urban areas?

Final Paper - Each student will write a paper (20-25 pages) based upon field research conducted at an urban school or community organization. The paper must be on an issue relevant to urban education. Students should consult with the professor or one of the Teaching Fellows if they have questions regarding a potential topic.

Research for the paper will be based upon a combination of field research in a school or community setting and readings on the selected topic (selections from the course reader or text may be included). The paper must be both theoretical and practical; it must explore the nature of the problem, its causes and manifestations, and examine how the problem is being addressed at a particular school or within a particular school district.

Issues to be addressed may include: academic underachievement, bi-lingual education, multicultural education, school discipline policies, drugs and crime, teen parenthood, teacher attitudes and morale, financial problems confronting urban schools, race relations within schools, tracking, testing and student assessment, student drop-outs. Public policy issues such as charter schools, school voucher programs, and school finance can also be considered. Arrangements will be made to assist students in obtaining access to schools for research. Considerable class time will be devoted to discussion of individual research projects.

To provide an opportunity for feedback on the paper as it develops, written work will be submitted in stages according to the following timeline:

9/26 Turn in one page statement of the research question indicating site for proposed research

10/10 Turn in two page description of research methods

10/31 Turn in 5-10 page literature review

11/14 Turn in sample of the data you have collected

12/10 Final paper is due for all students

**In addition, all students are required to submit a response to the readings on the blackboard course website once every two weeks. The entry could include some questions or reactions that were raised in response to the course readings, lectures and class discussions.**

**Lab Section:**

The lab section is an optional one-credit supplement to the course that will meet for one hour every other week. You will be graded pass/ fail and participation is the only criteria for determining your grade. Attendance to each session is mandatory if you are obtaining credit. Also, if you will be absent or late, please let Jessica know in advance via email ([jal337@nyu.edu](mailto:jal337@nyu.edu)). If you are not participating for credit but would like to attend some of the sessions, you are more than welcome to attend any of the sessions that you like.

One of the primary goals of the lab section is to provide you with more time to engage with the assigned readings with your peers. You are strongly encouraged to bring your reactions, reading notes, etc. to engage in meaningful dialogue with each other about the texts. Jessica will prepare reading questions for the start of each session to help guide the discussion when needed.

In addition, the lab section is designed to support you as you develop and implement your independent research project. As needed, we will discuss topics such as how to conduct a literature search, how to develop a research question, how to write a literature review, how to conduct fieldwork, and how to analyze your results from the field. Additionally, you will have time to discuss your research with your peers in order to gain useful feedback on the research design process.

**Possible Meeting Times**

**Wednesday: 3:45-4:4 or 6:45– 7:45**

**Thursday: 1:30-2:30**

If you are interested in the lab session, please send an email to Jessica at [jal337@nyu.edu](mailto:jal337@nyu.edu) indicating

1. your interest
2. whether you will be taking the lab for one credit
3. which times work best for you.