Racial inequality in America: What do we do now?

Instructor Information

- Jacob Faber (Jacob.Faber@nyu.edu)
- Office Hours Sign Up: https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/nvqi

Course Information

- Class Meeting Times: Wednesday s, 4:55 PM - 6:35 PM
- Class Location: GCASL (238 Thompson St.), Room 361

Course Description

The intertwined economic, social, and political crises facing cities from the COVID-19 pandemic and police violence have brought renewed attention to entrenched racial inequality in the United States, particularly anti-Black racism. Students in this course will develop a critical understanding of the causes and consequences of racial inequality in America with a focus on segregation and concentrated poverty in cities. We will explore and gain insights into how place and race shape critical issues, spanning political representation and voting rights, policing and mass incarceration, and access to quality education, healthy environments, and employment. Importantly, we will focus on the question “What do we do now?” This course will be solutions-oriented, drawing on academic materials on American urban history, contemporary research, policy debates, podcasts, videos, and investigative journalism. Students will be expected to situate and investigate their own experiences and the places they call home within debates on our collective obligation to advance racial equity. The course will be an interactive experience, requiring preparation before coming to class and active exchange during class.

Course and Learning Objectives

At the end of the course, students will understand the root causes of racial inequality in the United States. Through readings, multimedia, and class discussions, students will learn to identify and articulate how race and place shape opportunity and will develop a critical understanding of the policy mechanisms that created and perpetuate inequality. Students will
develop an understanding of contemporary policy discussions around addressing racial and socioeconomic segregation. Because the course is focused on breadth and exploration of these policy areas, students will be prepared for more advanced study on racial segregation, urban history, and housing and community development policy, among a range of other contemporary urban studies. Finally, students will become critical observers and evaluators of the policy structures in their own communities.

We will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. How do we situate the current political moment in a longer history of racial inequality?
2. What is opportunity? How is opportunity organized spatially?
3. How has public policy led to inequality? In what ways do contemporary policies exacerbate and/or ameliorate these inequalities? What is the role of local versus federal policymaking?
4. How do we assess the merits and drawbacks of policy solutions to the challenge of entrenched inequality?
5. How does considering racial segregation and neighborhood-based inequality enhance our understanding of the social determinants of health (i.e., COVID-19), the role of police, unequal school systems, politics, and other critical issues of inequality?
6. How are Black Lives Matter, immigrants' rights, organized labor, and other social movements bringing attention to and challenging the problem of racialized concentrated poverty, segregation, and inequality in cities?

**Required Materials**

Course readings are drawn from a range of sources, including academic journals, books, news articles, editorials, research reports, and policy proposals. They will be integral to preparation for class discussions and as references for completing assignments. Each week will also have multimedia components such as podcasts and videos. All materials (reading and multimedia) will be linked directly or uploaded to the course Brightspace portal.

Students are encouraged to introduce material from outside the classroom – other written material (e.g., newspaper stories, readings from other courses), experiences in community-based organizations, relevant personal stories, etc. – during our classroom discussion. The course schedule also includes “recommended” readings and multimedia. Students are highly encouraged to read or listen to a selection of these additional materials each week. If you want more…

- [Seeing White](https://www.basic.ryerson.ca/charles-caal-d/washington-addis-anderson/seeing-white/) and [The Land That Never Has Been Yet](https://www组织实施/1-the-land-that-never-has-been-yet/) Scene on Radio
- [The 1619 Project](https://www.nytimes.com/section/the-1619-project) *The New York Times*
- [Who We Are: Podcast Chronicle of Racism in America](https://www.vox.com/2020/5/21/21274358/who-we-are-podcast) Vox
- “Glad You Asked S2” Vox
- [What Works Collaborative](https://www.urban.org/projects-initiatives/what-works) Urban Institute
- [Racial Justice in Housing Finance](https://www.prrac.org/policy/whats-working) PRRAC and NYU Furman Center
- [The Dream Revisited](https://www.urban.org/research/publication/the-dream-revisited) NYU Furman Center
Assignments and Evaluation

This is a reading and discussion intensive course. Students should be well prepared to participate actively in class discussions with well-supported arguments and should build on and react to the arguments of classmates. The assignments are intended to spur engagement with the materials, facilitate critique of ideas, and encourage creativity and self-reflection as we grapple with an urgent, heavy, and often deeply personal subject matter.

Each written assignment will have detailed instructions and a grading rubric posted on Brightspace. In general, high-quality written assignments have the following characteristics:

1. Poses a clear question or articulates a clear thesis
2. Incorporates concepts and evidence from assigned materials and other rigorous sources
   a. Interprets and applies readings correctly
   b. Effectively uses evidence to support its argument
   c. Adds original critiques and analysis of readings
3. Demonstrates analytic rigor and offers an original argument
   a. Displays critical thinking
   b. Offers critical insights and makes creative connections
4. Presents a compelling, well-structured argument
   a. Has a logical structure supported by the development of the thesis
   b. Engages with counter-arguments and acknowledges weaknesses

1. Regular attendance (10% of final grade)
   It is imperative that you join class on time, have read and listened to the assigned material, and are prepared to discuss concepts and questions in class.

2. Extracurricular events (10% of final grade)
   Students are required to attend 2 extracurricular events during the semester (e.g., outside seminars and lectures). A running list of such events is available here and will be updated as I learn about new events, so please check it regularly! To receive credit, post a short response (i.e., a few sentences) about what you learned from the event. Students can earn EXTRA CREDIT by attending more than 2 events (maximum of 3).

3. Response papers (20% of final grade)
   Each student will write 2 one-page (single-spaced) response papers on a week’s materials. Papers should focus on the key issues in the readings and multimedia, make connections to earlier issues discussed in class, and raise any outstanding questions. Response papers should be posted on Brightspace by noon on the day prior to the class. It is expected that on days you choose to write a response memo, you will help lead the discussion. Sign up for the weeks you’d like to write your response paper here.

4. Mid-semester memo: Home town vis-à-vis NYC (20% of final grade)
   Using at least three data sources, compare your hometown to New York City along lines of spatial/racial inequality. Each student will write a memo (3 pages single spaced) describing the
data sources and differences in the distribution of opportunity and people by race/class between your hometown and New York City—connecting course materials to what you find. The memo must be submitted to Brightspace by 5:00 p.m. on October 16.

5. **Group presentation (20% of final grade)**
Students will work in randomly assigned groups on a presentation on a current or recent policy debate here in New York City. Groups are required to submit a one-page proposal of their presentation topic by 5:00 p.m. October 29. Generally speaking, all group members will receive the same grade. However, if it is apparent that a given member of a group has contributed much more or much less, that student's grade will go up or down accordingly. Groups must submit their slides at least 12 hours prior to their presentation.

6. **Final memo: open-ended self-reflection (20% of final grade)**
Each student will write a two-page (single spaced) memo reflecting on what they’ve learned in this course and how you will use that moving forward. The memo must be submitted to Brightspace by 5:00 p.m. on December 3.

**Plagiarism**

All students must produce original work. Outside sources are to be properly referenced and/or quoted. Lifting copy from web sites or other sources and trying to pass it off as your original words constitutes plagiarism. Such cases can lead to academic dismissal from the university. **Be aware that all written work in this class will be submitted to Google Classroom, where it will be checked for plagiarism using anti-plagiarism software.**

**Academic Integrity**

Plagiarism of any form will not be tolerated and students in this class are expected to report violations to me. If any student in this class is unsure about what is expected of you and how to abide by the academic code, you should consult with me.

**Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Student Accessibility**

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please visit the [Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) website](https://mosescenter.nyu.edu) and click the “Get Started” button. You can also call or email CSD (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are strongly advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

**NYU’s Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays**

NYU’s Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays states that members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious
obligations. Please notify me in advance of religious holidays that might coincide with exams to schedule mutually acceptable alternatives.

NYU’s Wellness Exchange

NYU’s Wellness Exchange has extensive student health and mental health resources. A private hotline (212-443-9999) is available 24/7 that connects students with a professional who can help them address day-to-day challenges as well as other health-related concerns.

Overview of the Semester

- Week 1 (September 7) - Introduction: Where are we? Who are we?
- Week 2 (September 14) - Segregation: We Built This
- Week 3 (September 21) - Housing affordability and homeownership
- Week 4 (September 28) - Wealth inequality: The worst site of racial inequality?
- Week 5 (October 5) - Crime, policing, and incarceration
- Week 6 (October 12) - Environmental racism and climate justice
- Week 7 (October 19) - Education
- Week 8 (October 26) - Political disenfranchisement
- Week 9 (November 2) - When work disappears: employment and wages
- Week 10 (November 9) - Poverty, income instability, and social safety net
- Week 11 (November 16) - The Ghetto Tax
  No class on November 23 (Fall Break)
- Week 12 (November 30) - An Antiracist future
- Week 13 (December 7) - Student group presentations
- Week 14 (December 14) - Student group presentations

Detailed Course Overview

Week 1. Introduction: Where are we? Who are we?

a) Required materials
   iii) Traister, Rebecca. 2022. “The Necessity of Hope Things are bad. They will get worse. But despair has never been an option.”
   iv) [Podcast] “The Problem We All Deal With” This American Life
   v) [Podcast] Wilkerson, Isabel. 2020. “America's 'untouchables': the silent power of the caste system” The Guardian

b) Additional materials
   i) 1968 National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (“The Kerner Commission”)

viii) Roosevelt, Franklin D. 1944. The Second Bill of Rights

Week 2. Segregation: We Built This

a) Required materials
iv) “Why Integration?” NYU Furman Center’s The Dream Revisited
v) [Podcast] “Historian Says Don’t ‘Sanitize’ How Our Government Created Ghettoes” Fresh Air 2015
vi) [Video] “The Great Migration and the power of a single decision” TED Talk by Isabel Wilkerson

b) Additional materials

Week 3. Housing affordability and homeownership

a) Required materials
iii) “First Generation: Criteria for a Targeted Down Payment Assistance Program.” Center for Responsible Lending
iv) [Video] “For the Living” by New York City, Television Production Unit 1949
v) Hertz, Daniel. 2018. “Housing can’t both be a good investment and be affordable.” CityLab
vii) Schuetz, Jenny. 2020. “Rethinking homeownership incentives to improve household financial security and shrink the racial wealth gap” Brookings

b) Additional materials
v) [Podcast] Kathleen Moore On The Housing Choice Voucher Program And Rental Market Discrimination
vi) “New research probes eviction’s causes and consequences.” 2019. The Economist

Week 4. Wealth inequality: The worst site of racial inequality?

a) Required materials
v) Perry, Andre M., Marshall Steinbaum, and Carl Romer. 2021. “Student loans, the racial wealth divide, and why we need full student debt cancellation.” Brookings

b) Additional materials
iv) H.R.40 — 117th Congress (2021-2022)
v) Mineo, Liz. 2021. “Racial wealth gap may be a key to other inequities.” The Harvard Gazette
vi) “Nine Charts about Wealth Inequality in America.” 2017. The Urban Institute
vii) “North Carolina city commits $2.1M for reparations.” AP 2021
viii) [Podcast] “The Hidden Racism of Taxes” The New Yorker Radio Hour interview with Dorthy Brown 2021

Week 5. Crime, policing, and incarceration

a) Required materials
   viii) [Podcast] “Psychologist Examines What A ‘Rapid Evolution’ In Policing Might Look Like.” Fresh Air 2021

b) Additional materials
   iv) Doleac, Jennifer L. 2016. “Should we pay people not to commit crime?” Brookings
   vii) [Podcast] “The Link Between Disproportionate Police Brutality And Police Unions.” NPR

Week 6. Environmental racism and climate justice

a) Required materials
   vii) [Podcast] ”America’s 'Lead Wars' Go Beyond Flint, Mich.: 'It's Now Really Everywhere’” Fresh Air 2016

b) Additional materials
Week 7. Education

a) Required readings
ii) Benn, Melissa. 2018. “The only way to end the class divide: the case for abolishing private schools.” The Guardian
v) Summary of Johnson, Rucker C. “Long-run Impacts of School Desegregation and School Quality on Adult Attainments.” NBER working paper #16664, revised August 2015.
vi) [Podcast] Chloe Gibbs On Full-Day Kindergarten And Its Impact On Academic Achievement

b) Additional materials
ii) Barshay, Jill. 2015. “When School Choice Leads Families to Trade 1 Bad School for Another.” US News
vii) "Massive Resistance" Equal Justice Initiative

Week 8. Political disenfranchisement
a) Required readings
vi) [Podcast] “The Short Life and Early Death of Voting Rights.” The United States of Anxiety

b) Additional materials
iii) Douglass, Frederick. 1867. “An Appeal to Congress for Impartial Suffrage.” The Atlantic

Week 9. When work disappears: employment and wages
a) Required readings
iv) Paul, Mark, William Darity, Jr., and Darrick Hamilton. February 4, 2017. “Why We Need a Federal Job Guarantee: Giving everyone a job is the best way to democratize the economy and give workers leverage in the workplace” Jacobin Magazine


b) Additional materials


ix) [Video] Ai-jen Poo. “The work that makes all other work possible.” TED Talks

Week 10. Poverty, income instability, and social safety net

a) Required readings


ii) “Cutting Child Poverty In Half: Directions For Policymakers.” IRP Fast Focus. 2020


vii) [Podcast] Damon Jones On Whether A Modest Basic Income Might Lead People To Work Less

b) Additional materials


Week 11. The Ghetto Tax

a) Required readings
iii) Lopez, German. 2017. “Study: cities rely more on fines for revenue if they have more black residents.” Vox.
vi) [Podcast] “It’s Tax Time!” On the Media 2017

b) Additional materials
vi) Kiel, Paul. 2019. “IRS: Sorry, but It’s Just Easier and Cheaper to Audit the Poor.” Propublica

Week 12. An antiracist future

a) Required materials
i) Butler, Octavia. 1995 “The Book of Martha.” Bloodchild and Other Stories
v) [Podcast] “An Extraordinary Moment': Angela Davis Says Protests Recognize Long Overdue Anti-Racist Work” Here & Now 2020

b) Additional materials
i) [Video] Vulchi, Priya and Winona Guo. 2017. “What it takes to be racially literate.” TED Talks
v) [Podcast] "Why Ta-Nehisi Coates is hopeful." Vox Conversations 2020