PADM-GP 4456  
Race and Voting in the United States  
Spring 2023

Course Description
This course will introduce students to the history of and contemporary fight for voting rights in the United States. We will begin with a brief overview of historical struggles over access to the ballot box, up through and including the 15th Amendment and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. The bulk of the course will focus on the contemporary context of voting rights, looking specifically at recent Supreme Court decisions, scholarship about white backlash against the growing political power of nonwhite Americans. Of course, white supremacy is not the whole story—throughout American history, nonwhite Americans have organized and fought for their rights as citizens. As such, we will pay close attention to the agency and power of these groups. This course specifically attends to how voting laws both reflect and codify structural racism in the American context.

Assignments
This course will work best if you arrive ready to engage thoughtfully with the topics up for discussion each week. As such, there are relatively few formal assignments, freeing you up to prepare thoroughly for classroom discussions.

Participation and Discussion (50%)
- By 5PM on the evening before class meets, please submit a brief reflection on the week’s readings to Brightspace. These can be questions you want to chew on with your classmates; other examples the readings made you think of; ideas you found challenging; or anything else you want to bring to our discussion.

Discussion Leader (10%)
- Depending on the size of the class, either groups or individuals will be responsible for leading the discussion each week. Discussion leaders are expected to read their classmate’s responses posted on Brightspace, and to synthesize these responses. You are not expected to present on any of the readings, but please come prepared to tell the class...
the concepts that your classmates found the most interesting, challenging, and which they are most interested in discussing.

**Pre-Reflection Exercise (10%)**

- Before our second meeting, you will write a brief reflection (2 pages double-spaced) on what you are most interested in about our collective enterprise over our short 7 weeks together. I’m especially interested in what the idea of citizenship means to you; how you think of political power, both in the voting booth and outside of it; and how electoral politics does / does not fit in with your theory(ies) of social change.

**Policy Analysis (30%)**

- Your final assignment will be to pick either a voting policy or a social movement that relates to access to the ballot box. You will place the policy in historical context and explain how it does or does not fit into the contested history of voting rights in America. You will also discuss how the particular policy draws / expands boundaries around who is considered a citizen deserving of political voice. This should be roughly 6 double-spaced pages.

**A Note on a Participatory Classroom**

You’ll notice that there is a fair amount of reading expected in this class. But doesn’t the current moment call for serious study of these issues? Of course, like any class, stories and issues are left out (such as Native American voting rights, immigration, and the women’s suffrage movement, to name just a few). On the first day of class, we will discuss the syllabus as a group, discussing whether there are ways to make the class more reflective of what you want to get out of it. After all, running a class on democracy as an instructional despot doesn’t make any sense!

**Schedule**

Week 1: What Does It Mean to be American? How do race and citizenship mutually create one another?

- Douglass, Frederick. “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” 1852.

Week 2: Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the VRA


• ACLU History of the VRA

• Optional: Watch Selma (currently free on Peacock)

Week 3: Shelby County v Holder and Contemporary Backlash


• Shelby County v. Holder, No. 12-96 (U.S. Supreme Court June 25, 2013).


• Lopez, Tomas. “‘Shelby County’: One Year Later.” Brennan Center for Justice, 2014.

Week 4: White Racial Identity and Trump-Era Backlash


Week 5: Contemporary Policies: Criminal Legal System, Voter ID


Week 6: Fighting Back


Week 7: Presentations

**Brightspace**

All announcements, resources, and assignments will be delivered through the Brightspace site. I may modify assignments, due dates, and other aspects of the course as we go through the term with advance notice provided as soon as possible through the course website.

**Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is a vital component of Wagner and NYU. All students enrolled in this class are required to read and abide by *Wagner’s Academic Code*. All Wagner students have already read and signed the *Wagner Academic Oath*. 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* 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.