

**Phil 2028**  
**Critical Race Theory: Philosophical Perspectives**  
(Open Lecture, Spring 2022)

**Instructor:** Prof. Carmen De Schryver  
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**When/Where:**

**Conferences:**

**Office Hours:**

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### **Course Description**

What is race? In what ways have prominent political movements such as liberalism, Marxism and feminism failed to fully address the significance of racism? How should the relationship between racial and gender identity be conceptualized? How do processes of racialization differ across the globe? What is the connection, if any, between love and social justice? What is the meaning of anti-racist solidarity, and how does it get off the ground? In this course, we will look at some of the major philosophical themes, debates and questions within critical race theory from a historical and global perspective.

After situating critical race theory philosophically, the second unit of the course looks at some of the historical forbearers of critical race theory within the United States. In this part of the course, we will consider Frederick Douglass's political philosophy, Du Bois's writings on the nature of the race, and some of the key voices in the civil rights era. We then zoom out to consider the global dimensions of critical race theory, engaging thinkers from the African continent, the Caribbean and Latin America who center issues of racial consciousness and decolonial, anti-racist solidarity. Some of the figures that we will be reading include Malcolm X, MLK, Audre Lorde, James Baldwin, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Paulette Nardal, Leopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Gloria Anzaldúa. By foregrounding the plurality of critical race theoretical traditions, we will gain the tools to critically engage problems central to current political realities and discourse. Group conferences meet every week, and discussion will play a central role in this course.

### **Learning Outcomes**

- Gain familiarity with the deep historical and global background to critical race theory, including civil rights debates and the Négritude movement
- Develop a critical perspective on contemporary race discourse within the US
- Develop skills in closely reading and evaluating technical philosophical material

- Learn to read texts from different historical and geographical contexts and cultivate skills in comparative analysis
- Build argumentative skills and learn how to write a philosophy paper
- Constructively engage with the work of peers by providing written feedback on a presentation

### Course Elements

- Participation is a key component of the success of this class. Your participation grade is based on:
  - (i) Reading. *All the reading for this class is required.*
    - You are expected to submit a short (one sentence) question about the reading, or respond to a question about the reading, *in advance* of the class meeting on the discussion board on mySLC.
  - (ii) Attendance. I expect you to attend both lectures and group conferences. If you cannot make it for some reason, you should email me in advance. *Do not come to class if you are sick, especially if you suspect you may have Covid.*
  - (iii) In-class participation. I expect you to positively contribute to some combination of class/conference/office hours. A positive contribution can take on a variety of forms: asking a clarificatory question, raising a discussion point, weighing in on an interpretation. *At minimum, it requires that you be a respectful and engaged listener not just to what I say but to what your peers say.* Speaking up in larger group settings will be more comfortable for some than for others. If you tend to be more talkative, an important component of your contributing to a healthy and respectful discussion will be making space for others to speak. I encourage you to meet with me during office hours to determine alternative modes of engagement if speaking up in larger group settings is uncomfortable for you.
- Two term papers of no more than 5 pages
  - Prompts and a guide to writing philosophy papers will be circulated on mySLC
- Final paper of no more than 7 pages
  - You should pick a topic of your own, to be discussed with me
  - Two weeks before the deadline you should submit a one-page outline which articulates your *thesis* and shows how you will go about demonstrating it.
  - You will then be assigned a partner, and each of you will provide written commentary (one-paragraph) on one another's outlines. Your commentary on your partner's work will be a key part of your successful completion of this task
  - Your assessment on the final paper will factor in your engagement with your peers. Guidelines for respectful and constructive peer feedback will be circulated on mySLC.

## **Policy on Late Assignments**

I expect you to submit your work in a timely fashion. But life happens: if you think you won't be able to complete the assignment, you need to contact me *before* the deadline to discuss your situation and possibly arrange an alternate schedule for completion. If you simply submit an assignment late this will impact your assessment.

## **Norms of Conduct**

Each of you will be coming to our discussions with your unique background, opinions and insights. In order to navigate our differences respectfully and productively, we must all commit to upholding a certain set of standards for how we engage with each other. This is critical given the sensitivity of many of the issues we will be discussing, which impact each of us differently. We are all responsibly for cultivating a safe space for discussion. Some starting guidelines are the following:

- **Always** be respectful. Conflict can be constructive and healthy so long as it departs from a position of explicit mutual respect
- Try to make your contributions thoughtful and productive. A good rule of thumb here is: if I were only going to say two things during this conversation, is this what will be most fruitful for the discussion at hand?
- Be self-challenging and self-responsible
- *Never* use slurs, even when directly quoting
- Do not attack, demean or disrupt others
- Avoid generalizing, especially when stating an opinion. Speaking from the “I” perspective can be helpful here
- Adopt a principle of charity: what is the best possible construction of what this person, or this text, is trying to say? Assume good will and have good will
- Listen carefully to your peers; don't assume you know in advance what someone is going to say
- Seek clarification through questioning before assuming a confrontational stance
- Do not interrupt others; raise your hand before you speak

## **Note on Office Hours**

I encourage you to come to office hours regularly. I particularly encourage you to come to office hours with any questions, ideas, or worries that were raised for you during the lecture; any difficulties that you are experiencing with the material or your own learning process; or additional help and guidance you might need for assignments.

## Note on the Readings

In order to get the most out of the course, **it is necessary that you read the assigned texts closely in advance of the class meeting.** Often this will mean reading twice. Do not be discouraged if you find the readings difficult or even confusing – philosophy is hard! I will not expect you to understand everything that you read. I do, however, expect you to make a good-faith effort to interpret the text on your own, and to participate in the class discussion on this basis. Our class discussion is designed to (i) collaboratively make sense of the text and (ii) equip you with the skills that you need to fully comprehend and critically interrogate the course material. *Do not hesitate to raise clarificatory questions and be upfront about elements of the reading you found challenging; if you are confused about something, it is likely your peers will be as well, and your questions will be welcomed!*

## Course Materials

All the readings will be made available in PDF. Please do not hesitate to email me if you have trouble accessing a file (or if it looks like I have forgotten to upload it)!

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## Course Schedule

The following is a tentative schedule for the semester. Changes to the syllabus will be announced in class.

### Unit 1: Background: Critical Race Theory from a Philosophical Perspective

#### **Week 1 (Jan 25): No class, but read:**

Lugones & Spelman, “Have we Got a Theory for You”, esp. pp.578-581  
bell hooks, “Building a Teaching Community”, pp. 129-165 (optional)

#### **Week 2 (Feb 1): Critical Race Theory – introduction and overview of syllabus**

Derrick Bell, “Who’s Afraid of Critical Race Theory”, pp. 898-910  
Delgado & Stefancic, “Introduction” in *Critical Race Theory*, pp. 1-9 (optional)

#### **Week 3 (Feb 8): The Exclusion of Race I: Liberalism**

Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, “Introduction”, pp. 1-7  
Charles Mills, “Contract of Breach: Repairing the Racial Contract” in Pateman and Mills, *Contract and Domination*, pp. 79-105

#### **Week 4 (Feb 15): The Exclusion of Race II: Feminism and Marxism**

Aimé Césaire, “Letter to Maurice Thorez”, pp. 145-152

- Fraser, [Is Capitalism Necessarily Racist?](#) (read for conference)

Sojourner Truth, "[Ain't I a Woman](#)" at The Sojourner Truth Project

- Hay, [Who Counts as a Woman?](#) (read for conference)

## Unit 2: History of CRT in the United States

**Week 5 (Feb 22):** Debates over the Constitution

Frederick Douglass, "Oration (Corinthian Hall, 1852)", pp. 303-318

- [1619 Project](#) (read for conference)

**Week 6 (Mar 1):** W.E.B Du Bois: What is Race? Race as Biological/Cultural/Strategic

W.E.B. Du Bois, "On Being Ashamed of Oneself: An Essay on Race Pride", pp.350-255

W.E.B. Du Bois, "Does Race Antipathy Serve Any Good Purpose", pp.347-350

**Week 7 (Mar 8):** Black (Inter)nationalism: Malcolm X & MLK

Malcolm X, "Speech on 'Black Revolution'", pp.372-385

Martin Luther King Jr., "Black Power", pp.385-397.

**\*\*\*Monday March 16, 11:59pm: First Paper due\*\*\***

**Week 8 (Mar 15): No Class (Spring Break)**

**Week 9 (Mar 22):** Black Marxisms

Cedric J. Robinson, "Racial Capitalism: The Nonobjective Character of Capital Development", in *Black Marxism*, pp. 9-28

- Kelley, "[What did Cedric Robinson mean by Racial Capitalism?](#)"

Angela Davis, "Radical Perspectives on the Empowerment of Afro-American Women", pp. 404-411

**Week 10 (Mar 29):** Love and Social Justice: Baldwin and Lorde

James Baldwin, "The Dungeon Shook" in *The Fire Next Time*, pp. 286-295

Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic" in *Sister Outsider*, pp. 53-59

**Week 11 (Apr 5):** Black Feminisms

[Combahee River Collective](#)

Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color", pp.12401-1300

Patricia Hill Collins, "Black Feminist Epistemology", pp. 251-273 (optional)

## Unit 3: The Global Dimensions of CRT

**Week 12 (Apr 12):** Négritude: The Question of the Universal

Paulette Nardal, "The Awakening of Race Consciousness Among Black Students", pp.180-185

Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, pp.31-78, pp.81-94 (pp.81-94 are optional)

- Robin D.G. Kelley, "A Poetics of Anti-Colonialism", pp. 7-28 (read for conference)

**\*\*\*Monday, April 18 11:59pm: Second Paper due\*\*\***

**Week 13 (Apr 19):** African Feminisms

Oyérónke Oyéwùmí, *The Invention of Women*, pp. 1-31

Nkiru Nzegwu, *Family Matters*, pp. 1-23

**Week 14 (Apr 26):** Racialization in Europe and Africa: Fanon

Frantz Fanon, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man" (*BSWM*), pp.29-43

Frantz Fanon, "Racism and Culture" (in *AR*)

**\*\*\*Friday April 29, 11:59pm: Paper Outlines due\*\*\***

**Week 15 (May 3):** Latin American Decolonial Thought

Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Reading TBD

**Week 16 (May 10):** Latina Feminisms

Gloria Anzaldúa, "Speaking in Tongues" in *This Bridge Called My Back*, pp. 163-172

Schutte, "Negotiating Latina Identities", pp.

**\*\*\*Final Papers due Friday, May 13<sup>th</sup> at 11:59pm\*\*\***

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**Accessibility, Accommodations and Diversity**

This seminar is committed to accessibility across all dimensions of identity. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of Sarah Lawrence College. If you suffer from a condition that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, coursework, or assessment of the objectives of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. The contact person to discuss such accommodations is Polly Waldman, Associate Dean of Studies and Disabilities Services, in Westlands 207C or x2235 or: [pwaldman@sarahlawrence.edu](mailto:pwaldman@sarahlawrence.edu).

**Academic Integrity**

Any written work you submit should be your own. This means that you should not copy/paste, paraphrase or borrow ideas from a text or internet source without proper citation (*i.e.* presenting them as though they are your own). Failure to do so amounts to plagiarism, and the college takes violations of plagiarism very seriously. For further information, you should consult the Student Handbook's policies and procedures regarding plagiarism. If you have any questions about how to use/cite material appropriately, please do not hesitate to ask.