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2021

### Identity Politics (POLS 53) Syllabus

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SWARTHMORE COLLEGE // DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE // FALL 2021

POLS 54

**IDENTITY POLITICS**

Prof. Osman Balkan | W: 1:15 – 4:00



EMAIL: [OBALKAN1@SWARTHMORE.EDU](mailto:OBALKAN1@SWARTHMORE.EDU) // OFFICE HOURS: TUESDAY, 2:30 – 4:30 PM

## // COURSE DESCRIPTION //

The term “identity politics” has become a mainstay of contemporary political discourse. In both scholarly and public debates, it is used to describe phenomena as diverse as multiculturalism, civil rights, white nationalism, LGBTQI activism, separatist groups, feminist movements, and violent ethnic conflicts. Identity is central to politics but are all identities political? Where do our identities come from and why do they matter for social, political, and economic life? Do we have the freedom to choose our own identities or are they ascribed to us by others? And to what extent do our identities dictate what we can do, think, know, say, or feel?

This class offers an introduction to the politics of identity. Over the course of the semester we will investigate how categories like class, race, gender, ethnicity, nation, religion, and sexuality shape struggles for power and recognition across the world. The first part of the course introduces students to concepts like identity and identity politics, performance and performativity, authenticity, standpoint theory, intersectionality, power/knowledge, subjectivity, ideology, and hegemony. Once we have developed a common vernacular and conceptual toolkit, we will delve into three books which speak to the politics of identity from a variety of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives. The capstone project for this course is an independent research paper on an identity-related topic of your choice.

## // REQUIRED TEXTS //

- Sara Ahmed. *Living A Feminist Life*. Duke University Press, 2017
- Rogers Brubaker. *Trans: Gender and Race in an Age of Unsettled Identities*. Princeton University Press, 2016
- John and Jean Comaroff. *Ethnicity, Inc.* University of Chicago Press, 2009

These books are available for purchase at the Swarthmore College bookstore. All other readings will be posted on the course Moodle site.

## // COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION //

Your final grade will be based on the following:

- |                                 |     |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| • Attendance and participation: | 20% |
| • 3 response papers:            | 30% |
| • Discussion facilitation:      | 20% |
| • Final paper:                  | 30% |

**Response Papers (30%):** You will write three response papers over the course of the semester. These papers should be approximately 1,000 words and can be written in response to any week's readings (with the exception of the week that you are facilitating discussion). I will grade your response papers on a 5 point scale: 5—excellent, 4—very good, 3—good, 2—fair, 1—poor. You may elect to write up to five response papers and I will factor your top three when I calculate your final grade.

Please upload your response papers to the course Moodle site **no later than 11:59 pm** on Monday. Discussion facilitators will be reading your papers in preparation for class discussion so it is your responsibility to get your paper to your colleagues on time! Your response paper should include 1) your name, 2) a title, and 3) a word count and should address the following questions:

- What are the major question(s) raised in the text(s)?
- What is the author's main point / argument?
- What sort of data and evidence does the author use to develop their arguments? (i.e. historical sources, statistics, interviews, secondary sources, etc.)
- How did the author collect this data? What was their methodology? (i.e. archival research, participant observation, fieldwork, interviews, etc.)
- Do you think the author's data support his or her arguments? Why or why not?
- What do you think the author got right?
- What do you think the author got wrong? In other words, what are your critiques of the author's work?
- How does this reading relate to other course materials? What connections do you see?

**Discussion Facilitation (20%):** In small groups, you will help lead discussions of our readings each week. I will post a signup sheet during the first week of class. All groups are required to meet with me during office hours to discuss your ideas before we convene as a class.

**Final Paper (30%):** The capstone project for this seminar is an independent research paper on an identity-related topic of your choice. Once you have determined a general area of inquiry, I will work with you to narrow your research question(s). This is a multi-step assignment, entailing a formal research proposal, an annotated bibliography, a first draft, and a final draft. I will give more details about each step of the process in class.

## // COURSE POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS //

**Inclusive Classroom:** One of my top priorities as a professor is to create a learning environment that is welcoming to all students. If you have special circumstances that impact your life as a student, please inform me as early as possible so that we can work together to ensure your success in this class. I will always try to be flexible and accommodating and ask that you maintain an open line of communication with me to best meet your learning needs.

**Office Hours:** My office hours are on Tuesdays, between 2:30 – 4:30 pm. Please schedule an appointment [here](#). If you have a conflict and need to meet at a different time, I will do my best to accommodate your schedule. Individual meetings allow us to get to know each other better outside of the more formal space of the classroom. Come with questions and new ideas, to talk about aspects of our readings that you are excited or confused about, or to discuss contemporary political events that you are interested in. In short, don't be a stranger!

**Accommodations:** Please contact Monica Vance ([mvance1@swarthmore.edu](mailto:mvance1@swarthmore.edu)) if you have any questions about disability accommodations and services. You may email her directly or use the office email address ([studentdisabilityservices@swarthmore.edu](mailto:studentdisabilityservices@swarthmore.edu)).

**Attendance and Participation:** I see the classroom as a collaborative learning environment. Seminars work best when students take an active role in discussion and debate. I expect you to come to class having carefully read the assigned material and to participate as fully as possible. Participation encompasses a wide range of activities, including asking clarifying questions, taking detailed notes, drawing our attention to a relevant passage and reading it out loud, listening attentively, responding to something that has been said, explaining why you agree or disagree with something, posing questions to your classmates and answering questions posed by others. *The quality of your contributions will be weighed more heavily than the quantity.* Don't feel pressured to answer every question. Make sure to give space to others who may be less comfortable speaking in public. I encourage you to take on different roles in the classroom by experimenting with different forms of participation. Attendance is mandatory. Please be on time. If you need to miss class for any reason, please let me know in advance.

**Extensions:** Recognizing that deadlines often creep up on us, I will grant you one 48-hour extension on any written assignment, with the exception of the final paper. Any subsequent assignment that is turned in late will be penalized by half a grade each day.

**Plagiarism:** Your writing should present original ideas and engage with arguments made by other scholars. Using another person's words or ideas without crediting or citing them constitutes plagiarism and is strictly prohibited. Swarthmore's policy on plagiarism stipulates that a student's first plagiarism offense will result in a failing grade for the course and immediate suspension for one semester. A second offense will result in a yearlong suspension and/or expulsion from the college. When in doubt, cite!

## // COURSE OVERVIEW //

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| <b>Week One</b>      | <b>Introductions and Course Overview</b>                |
| <b>Week Two</b>      | <b>What's At Stake in Identity Politics?</b>            |
| <b>Week Three</b>    | <b>Labels, Masks, Performances</b>                      |
| <b>Week Four</b>     | <b>Authenticity</b>                                     |
| <b>Week Five</b>     | <b>Positionality</b>                                    |
| <b>Week Six</b>      | <b>Subjectivity, Ideology, Hegemony</b>                 |
| <b>Week Seven</b>    | <b>Fall Break</b>                                       |
| <b>Week Eight</b>    | <b>Field Trip to the Institute for Contemporary Art</b> |
| <b>Week Nine</b>     | <b>Ethnicity, Inc.</b>                                  |
| <b>Week Ten</b>      | <b>Ethnicity, Inc.</b>                                  |
| <b>Week Eleven</b>   | <b>Living A Feminist Life</b>                           |
| <b>Week Twelve</b>   | <b>The Politics of Diversity</b>                        |
| <b>Week Thirteen</b> | <b>Thanksgiving Break</b>                               |
| <b>Week Fourteen</b> | <b>Trans</b>  |
| <b>Week Fifteen</b>  | <b>Trans</b>  |

## WEEK ONE: INTRODUCTIONS AND COURSE OVERVIEW

9/1

- No readings.

## WEEK TWO: WHAT'S AT STAKE IN IDENTITY POLITICS?

9/8

- Francis Fukuyama. "Against Identity Politics: The New Tribalism and the Crisis of Democracy." *Foreign Affairs*. September / October 2018. Pgs. 90 – 114.
- Courtney Jung. "Why Liberals Should Value 'Identity Politics.'" *Daedalus* Vol. 135, No. 4 (2006): Pgs. 32 – 39.
- Kwame Anthony Appiah. "The Politics of Identity." *Daedalus* Vol. 135, No. 4 (2006): Pgs. 15 – 22.
- Gary Younge. "The Politics of Identity: From Potential to Pitfalls, and Symbols to Substance." *Identities*. Vol. 26, No. 1 (2019): Pgs. 1 – 11.

## WEEK THREE: LABELS, MASKS, PERFORMANCES

9/15

- Kwame Anthony Appiah. *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity*. (2018)  
Introduction: xi – xvi.  
Chapter One: Classification. Pgs. 3 – 32.
- Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. (1956)  
Introduction: Pgs. 1 – 9.  
Chapter One: Performances. Pgs. 10 – 46.
- Jia Tolentino. *Trick Mirror: Reflections on Self Delusion*. (2019)  
Chapter One: The I In The Internet. Pgs. 3 – 34.

## WEEK FOUR: AUTHENTICITY

**9/22**

- Charles Guignon. *On Being Authentic*. (2004)  
Chapter One: The Culture of Authenticity. Pgs. 1 – 7.
- Charles Taylor. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. (1991)  
Chapter One: Three Malaises. Pgs. 1 – 12.  
Chapter Two: The Inarticulate Debate: Pgs. 13 – 24.  
Chapter Three: The Sources of Authenticity. Pgs. 25 – 30.  
Chapter Four: Inescapable Horizons. Pgs. 31 – 42.  
Chapter Five: The Need for Recognition. Pgs. 43 – 53.
- Tim Black. "Who do you think you are? Autonomy, Authenticity, and the Emergence of Identity Politics." (2017)

Listen here: <https://soundcloud.com/institute-of-ideas/who-do-you-think-you-are-autonomy-authenticity-and-the-emergence-of-identity-politics>

**// 1-2 PARAGRAPH PAPER PROPOSAL DUE ON 9.25 //**

## WEEK FIVE: POSITIONALITY

**9/29**

- The Combahee River Collective Statement (1977)
- Patricia Hill Collins. "Defining Black Feminist Thought." (1990)
- Olúfemi Táíwò. "Being-in-the-Room Privilege: Elite Capture and Epistemic Deference" (2020)
- "Culture Wars and the Untold Story of Lyndie B. Hawkins." *NPR Hidden Brain*. July 20, 2020.

Listen here: <https://www.npr.org/2020/07/13/890610437/culture-wars-and-the-untold-story-of-lyndie-b-hawkins>



## WEEK SIX: SUBJECTIVITY, IDEOLOGY, HEGEMONY

**10/6**

- Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (1977)  
    "The Body of the Condemned." Pgs. 170 – 178.  
    "Docile Bodies." Pgs. 179 – 187.  
    "The Means of Correct Training." Pgs. 188 – 205.  
    "Panopticism." Pgs. 206 – 213.
- Michel Foucault. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*  
    "Lecture Two: 14 January 1976." Pgs. 92 – 108.
- Louis Althusser. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation) (1970). Excerpts.
- Antonio Gramsci. *Selections From the Prison Notebooks* (1973).  
    "Intellectuals and Education." Pgs. 300 – 322.

**// FORMAL RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE ON 10.10 //**

## WEEK SEVEN: FALL BREAK

**10/13**

- No class

## WEEK EIGHT

**10/20**

- Class trip to the Institute for Contemporary Art for a guided tour of "Ulysses Jenkins: Without Your Interpretation." Details TBA.

More information about the exhibition is available here:

<https://icaphila.org/exhibitions/ulysses-jenkins-without-your-interpretation/>

**// ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE ON 10.20 //**

## WEEK NINE: ETHNICITY, INC.

### 10/27

- Joane Nagel. "Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture." *Social Problems*. Vol. 41, No. 4 (1994): Pgs. 152 - 176
- John and Jean Comaroff. *Ethnicity, Inc.* (2009)  
Chapter One: Prologue. Pgs. 1 – 6  
Chapter Two: Three or Four Things about Ethno-Futures. Pgs. 6 – 21  
Chapter Three: Questions of Theory. Pgs. 22 – 59

## WEEK TEN: ETHNICITY, INC.

### 11/3

- John and Jean Comaroff. *Ethnicity, Inc.* (2009)  
Chapter Four: Commodifying Descent, American-Style. Pgs. 60 – 85  
Chapter Five: A Tale of Two Ethnicities. Pgs. 86 – 116.  
Chapter Six: Nationality, Inc. Divinity Inc., and Other Futures. Pgs. 117 – 138  
Chapter Seven: Conclusion. Pgs. 139 – 150.

## WEEK ELEVEN: LIVING A FEMINIST LIFE

### 11/10

- Sara Ahmed. *Living A Feminist Life* (2017)  
Introduction: Bringing Feminist Theory Home. Pgs. 1 – 18  
Chapter One: Feminism is Sensational. Pgs. 21 – 42  
Chapter Two: On Being Directed. Pgs. 43 – 64  
Chapter Three: Willfulness and Feminist Subjectivity. Pgs. 65 – 88

## WEEK TWELVE: THE POLITICS OF DIVERSITY

### 11/17

- Sara Ahmed. *Living A Feminist Life* (2017)  
Chapter Four: Trying to Transform. Pgs. 89 – 114  
Chapter Five: Being in Question. Pgs. 115 – 134  
Chapter Six: Brick Walls. Pgs. 135 – 160.
- Walter Benn Michaels. *The Trouble With Diversity* (2006)  
Introduction. Pgs. 1 – 16.  
Chapter Three: Richer, Not Better. Pgs. 80 – 110.  
Chapter Four: Just and Unjust Rewards. Pgs. 111 – 140.

## WEEK THIRTEEN: THANKSGIVING BREAK

### 11/24

- No class

// FIRST DRAFT OF PAPER DUE ON 11.27 //

## WEEK FOURTEEN: TRANS

### 12/1

- Rogers Brubaker. *Trans: Gender and Race in an Age of Unsettled Identities* (2016).  
Introduction: Pgs. 1 – 14.  
Chapter One: Transgender, Transracial? Pgs. 15 – 40.  
Chapter Two: Categories in Flux. Pgs. 40 – 70.

## WEEK FIFTEEN: TRANS

### 12/8

- Rogers Brubaker. *Trans: Gender and Race in an Age of Unsettled Identities* (2016)  
Chapter Three: The Trans of Migration. Pgs. 71 – 91.  
Chapter Four: The Trans of Between. Pgs. 92 – 112.  
Chapter Five: The Trans of Beyond. Pgs. 113 – 130.  
Conclusion: Pgs. 131 – 153.
- Robin Dembroff and Dee Payton. "Why We Shouldn't Compare Transracial to Transgender Identity." *Boston Review*. November 18, 2020.

**// FINAL PAPER DUE ON DECEMBER 17<sup>th</sup> //**