

Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, many individuals in the U.S., particularly whites, believe the U.S. is now a post-racial society, one where color-blindness is the order of the day. For these individuals, to the extent that racism mattered for the life chances of blacks and other people of color in the U.S., the landmark Civil Rights legislation of the 1960s stamped out all but any remainder of it. That Barack Obama was twice elected as President of the United States only further verifies what these folks already believed to be true. However, not only are such claims factually inaccurate, they are also dangerous. Much evidence, both historical and sociological, shows the U.S. has been and remains a white supremacist society. That is, a racially stratified society where whiteness is more highly valued and therefore associated with greater life chances. Research shows the persistence, durability, and mutability of white racism and the injurious effects it continues to have on those racialized as non-white.

In my White Racism course, we will review theoretical and empirical scholarship that documents the aforementioned state of affairs. We will begin by interrogating the concept of race (its origin, purpose, persistence, and consequences). With this background, we will then proceed both systematically and thematically as we investigate the ways in which those racialized as white have, since Europeans colonized what would become the United States, been afforded manifold unmerited advantages across a range of social domains. Many whites have subscribed to and promoted racist ideologies; championed and/or enacted scores of racist laws, policies, practices, and traditions; and made incalculable decisions in their daily lives that have operated to maintain white racial domination over blacks and other people of color for hundreds of years. We will read and engage with important scholarship in these areas. Finally, we will discuss ways to challenge and disrupt white racism and white supremacy in the service of engendering an anti-racist society in which whiteness is not tied to greater life chances.

My White Racism course is not anti-white; it is anti-white racism. Clearly, not all white people are racists; some are even anti-racist. However, all people racialized as white derive, in some measure, material and psychological benefits by virtue of being racialized as white. Courses such as mine have been taught throughout the country and across disciplines for decades. A course with this very title has been regularly taught at the University of Connecticut for the past 22 years. These courses provide students with an opportunity to gain a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of race, white racism, racial inequality, and white supremacy. At the same time, they also challenge widely and adamantly held, but empirically unsubstantiated myths about racial matters in the U.S. A voluminous body of multidisciplinary empirical research has shown that white racism, in its various manifestations, has been and remains a serious social problem worthy of scholarly investigation toward its amelioration, if not its elimination. Any “controversy” generated by the course title or description testifies to its urgency. Attempts to paint the course as anything other than that contained in the course description, which is self-explanatory, betrays gross ignorance and/or malevolent intent as well as a self-evident need to enroll in the course. At its core, my course is about the search for truth. Too many Americans, especially whites, are cocooned in a “bubble of unreality” as it concerns racial matters. My job as a sociology professor is, in part, to facilitate students’ learning toward a data-informed understanding of the social world. And that is the goal of my White Racism course.