

**Identity Politics**  
**Political Science 547**  
**Summer 2006**

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Course Overview

Politics can be broadly defined as the process of determining who gets what, when, and how. It is motivated by purposive actors pursuing their interests in a social arena through a variety of possible actions (force, coercion, persuasion, compromise, etc.). Identity shapes how actors perceive themselves and others. Thus, identity can tell us how interests are constructed, and how actors respond to others' actions. It exerts a powerful influence over virtually all social interaction, and is so embedded in our social experience that many take identity's existence and effects for granted in the everyday choices they make.

This course moves the study of identity from intuition to systematic investigation. It explores the origins, reproduction, and effects of social identity from a variety of perspectives – including theories of the self, the group, society, and the state, and issues of nationality, ethnicity, race, religion, class, gender, and sexuality. This entails two primary goals. First, an introduction to the literature should demonstrate how research on identity is conducted by social scientists, and should equip you with the basic tools necessary to engage the field in your own research. This aspect of the class will be the focus of the formal course assignments. Second, and more broadly, I hope both the theoretical and substantive issues we examine in class will lead to a greater appreciation for the importance of identity in how we construct the reality around us. The ability to recognize the social forces at work in identity formation and reproduction, and an awareness and understanding of identity's effects, are deeply empowering and enduring skills that will help you fruitfully understand and influence your social environment now and in the future.

Expectations

Class will be conducted as a hybrid of lecture and seminar. The balance between them will be determined by the relative difficulty of a given day's material, your level of preparation, and your active participation in discussions. Regular attendance and a high level of participation are expected. This obviously entails preparing the course readings *before* the class for which they are assigned. (*Hint:* I strongly encourage reading with a highlighter, pen, and paper. Quickly summarizing the authors' arguments (in paragraph or bulleted format) will greatly increase your retention of the material and will certainly help you in class discussions – which will, in turn, make the entire experience more enjoyable.)

## Assignments and Grading

The course grade is broken down as follows:

Paper #1	20%
Paper #2 Outline	10%
Paper #2	30%
Quizzes	40%

**Paper #1** – A 5 page essay designed to address the various perspectives on the origins of identity. You will choose two perspectives from the first half of the course, outline their assumptions and logic, and evaluate them in terms of an issue area of your choice. More specific instructions will be distributed in class. A hard copy should be placed in my mailbox in Derby Hall no later than 3pm on Friday, July 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Paper #2 Outline** – In lieu of class on Wednesday, August 16<sup>th</sup>, each student will sign up for a 15 minute personal meeting in my office on that day to discuss an outline of Paper #2. You will be expected to have read both books for the project (see below) and developed an idea for how your paper will unfold. This will be explained in more detail in class.

**Paper #2** – A 10-12 page research paper critically analyzing two books on racial identity. One book will be common to all: Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*. The other will be your own selection, though no two students may choose the same book. Your choice should be either auto/biographical or fictional – a story rather than academic research. Bring me your book after class for approval (no later than Wednesday, August 2<sup>nd</sup>), at which time you will have ‘dibs’ on that title. I encourage you to start checking out possibilities right away. More will be said about this in class. A hard copy will be due at the beginning of class on Monday, August 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Quizzes** – There will be nine random quizzes, with the lowest score thrown out, asking questions (primarily short answer) about the day’s readings. These are primarily designed to ensure adequate preparation, though they will indirectly reflect attendance and participation. If you come to class prepared on a regular basis ready to actively engage the literature, this should be an easy 40% of your grade.

**HINT:** When both reading and writing about the material, be sure to think about the authors’ arguments in terms of:

- (1) Where identity originates,
- (2) How identity is reproduced over time,
- (3) How identity is changed, and
- (4) What the effects of identity are.

While there are other important questions you should consider, and by no means will every author address all of the above questions, these will provide some structure as you absorb the material and analyze it.

## Readings

There are two required books for this class:

\* Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Anchor Books, 1966. Available at SBX and Online.

\* Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. New York: Knopf, 2003. Available Online.

\* All other course readings will be posted on Carmen. In addition to the readings on the syllabus, I will often assign one or more short news articles that illustrate the day's topic in current events. These will be announced and posted on Carmen no later than the class period before the one in which the readings will be discussed. Please note that these will be fair game for quizzes.

## The Classroom as 'Safe Zone'

Our study of identity politics will often lead us into controversial topics and conversations. Indeed, at various points during the course I will actively push students to confront language and imagery that will make us all uncomfortable to at least some extent. I do this not for shock value, but to illustrate the very real power of identity in everyday language and action. I make every effort to avoid singling out or ridiculing any particular identity, and I expect students to display maturity in their handling of the presented material. If you have any concerns whatsoever about the specific nature of content that will be presented, by all means speak to me after class or in office hours and we can go over any concerns you have and discuss how best to address them.

In the same spirit, I propose treating our classroom as a 'Safe Zone.' This has two meanings. First, each student should feel safe from personal attack. While some material we cover will contain inflammatory language and arguments, I ask every student to confront it maturely as an academic, neither making remarks that may be hurtful to others in the classroom nor taking the general issues under discussion too personally. Second, students should feel safe expressing their academic opinion on the material. I ask that students initially give each other the benefit of the doubt when discussing controversial topics. Our goal is not to hurt one another, but to delve into how and why this material can be, and is, used in various social scenarios to disempower and hurt particular individuals and groups.

## Academic Honesty

I expect all of the work you do in this course to be your own. I will tolerate absolutely no cheating or plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without proper citation). I will report any cases of cheating or plagiarism to the university committee on academic misconduct, and they will be handled according to university policy.

## Disability

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, you should contact me to arrange an appointment as soon as possible. At the appointment we can discuss the course format, anticipate your needs, and explore potential accommodations. I rely on the Office for Disability Services for assistance in verifying the need for accommodations and developing accommodation strategies. If you have not previously contacted the Office for Disability Services, I encourage you to do so.

# Class Schedule

## Monday, June 19 – Introduction to Identity Politics

## Wednesday, June 21 – Identity and Power

- Gaventa, John, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*, pp. 3-32.
- Eribon, Didier, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*, pp. 15-7.

## Origins of Identity

## Monday, June 26 – Group Identity

- Hewstone, Miles and Ed Cairns. “Social Psychology and Intergroup Conflict,” in Daniel Chirot and Martin Seligman, eds, *Ethnopolitical Warfare*, pp. 319-42.
- Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, and Nisbett, “The Cultural Matrix of Social Psychology,” in *Handbook of Social Psychology*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, pp. 915-63.

## Wednesday, June 28 – Group Identity (cont.)

## Monday, July 3 – No Class

## Wednesday, July 5 – No Class

## Monday, July 10 – Society

- Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, pp. 19-190 (skip the Introduction – pp. 1-18).

## Wednesday, July 12 – Society (Cont.)

## Monday, July 17 – Identity and the Self

- Hardin, Russell, *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict*, pp. 3-17.
- Brewer, Marilynn. “The Social Self: On Being the Same and Different at the Same Time.” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. Vol. 17 (1991), pp. 475-82.
- Sampson, Edward, *Celebrating the Other: A Dialogic Account of Human Nature*, pp. 31-41.

### **Wednesday, July 19 – Identity and the State**

- Kennedy, Laurel and Mary Williams, “The Past Without the Pain: The Manufacture of Nostalgia in Vietnam’s Tourist Industry, “ in Hue-Tam Ho Tai, ed, *The Country of Memory*, pp. 135-63.

## **Fault Lines of Identity**

### **Monday, July 24 – Nationalism**

- Hitler, Adolf, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 308-29.
- Lie, John, *Multiethnic Japan*, pp. 118-41.

### **Wednesday, July 26 – Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism**

- Readings TBA

\*\*\* Paper #1 Due Friday, July 28<sup>th</sup> by 3pm – Place in my mailbox in Derby Hall \*\*\*

### **Monday, July 31 – Ethnicity**

- Eller, Jack David, *From Culture to Ethnicity to Conflict*, pp. 7-94.

### **Wednesday, August 2 – Gender and Sexuality**

- Cowan, Jane, “Going out for Coffee? Contesting the Grounds of Gendered Pleasures in Everyday Sociability,” in Peter Loizos and Evthymios Paptaxiarchis, eds, *Contested Identities: Gender and Kinship in Modern Greece*, pp. 180-202.

### **Monday, August 7 – Gender and Sexuality (Cont.)**

- Nagel, Joane. “Ethnicity and Sexuality.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 26 (2000), pp. 107-33.

Deadline for approval of the second book for Paper #2

### **Wednesday, August 9 – Race**

- Haney-Lopez, Ian, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, pp. 1-36, 197-202.
- Open discussion on Morrison, Toni, *The Bluest Eye*, 1970.

**Monday, August 14 – Religion**

- McAlister, Melani, *Epic Encounters*, pp. 43-83.

**Wednesday, August 16 – Individual meetings to go over Paper #2 outlines**

**Monday, August 21 – Class Identity**

- Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, pp. 8-21.
- Weber, Max, “Class, Status and Party,” in Ian McIntosh, ed, *Classical Sociological Theory*, pp. 132-41.

**Wednesday, August 23 – Course Wrap-Up (*Attendance Mandatory*)**

\*\*\* Final Paper Due \*\*\*