

Econ 190, Fall 2022:
Flourishing: The Economics of Systemic Racism
Tentative Syllabus

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Course Description:

“Systemic Racism” has become one of the most salient, polarizing, misunderstood, nuanced, definitionally amorphous, yet consequential phrases in academic, political, and lay spaces. Although economic dynamics are central to some of the key ideas behind systemic racism, the notion of systemic racism has barely permeated the field of economics. In this course we will 1) Investigate the limitations behind traditional approaches to study racial discrimination within the field of economics; 2) Draw on literature from multiple disciplines to establish a working definition of systemic racism; 3) Explore both the history of anti-Black racism in the United States and the economic consequences of that history; and 4) Consider how an economically rigorous understanding of systemic racism could lead to pragmatic policy solutions to racial inequities. Attention will be given to heterogeneity in the social and economic well being of various Black subgroups by gender and sexuality (e.g., intersectional experiences of Black women in career mobility). Students will learn how respectful, empathetic, scholarly, but also historically informed conversations about race can lead to productive solutions.

This course is one within a cluster of seminars exploring human flourishing. Collectively these courses touch upon three themes: connection, transformation, and expression.

- Connection: Humans are relational, dependent beings. Their well-being is dependent on those relations, and those relations impact more than the human world. What relations allows us to thrive and feel at home or to have a sense of belonging? What relations lead to experiences of alienation and dislocation? In its own way, each course will look at how "connections" are integral to the human and more than human world. **In this course, we will approach this theme using what is called “systems thinking,” a technical approach to modeling connections and their implications in social and economic systems.**
- Transformation: Humans are creatures of action. They monitor their worlds and their welfare within it. They also adjust themselves and try to modify their worlds in an effort to find lives worth living. In its own way, each course will look at agency and how it navigates a world of connection, including situations that undermine the agency of people, whether through accidentally adverse conditions or socio-political histories of oppression. **In this course, we will explore this theme in terms of how habit, perception, and judgment as well as choice and commitment figure into an effort to live in a flourishing manner. In this course, we will especially investigate the tension between agency and the systemic forces that constrain it in debates about the persistence of racial inequality.**
- Expression: In multiple, diverse ways, humans give voice to their condition and their experience of it. They ask and reply to questions such as: who am I? What is happening to me? Who do I want to become? What do I want to see realized in my world? What would I remove? In its own way, each course will ask students to give expression to questions like these, and to reply from their own, developing point of view. **In this course, you will pursue this task in terms of**

weekly reflection papers, two in-class debates, and ongoing class discussion about what is to be desired with respect to systemic racism.

Course Meeting Time and Location:

TBA

Required Textbooks:

Loury, Glenn C., and Glenn C. Loury. *The anatomy of racial inequality*. Harvard University Press, 2009.

Roithmayr, Daria. *Reproducing racism*. New York University Press, 2014.

Darity Jr, William A., and A. Kirsten Mullen. *From here to equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the twenty-first century*. UNC Press Books, 2020.

Darity, William A., and Samuel L. Myers. *Persistent disparity: Race and economic inequality in the United States since 1945*. E. Elgar Pub., 1998.

Rothstein, Richard. *The color of law: A forgotten history of how our government segregated America*. Liveright Publishing, 2017.

Feagin, Joe. *Systemic racism: A theory of oppression*. Routledge, 2013.

Recommended Textbooks:

Bowles, Samuel, Steven N. Durlauf, and Karla Ruth Hoff, eds. *Poverty traps*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006

Others TBA

Journal Articles:

“The Race Discrimination System” By Barbara Reskin

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *u. Chi. Legal f.*, 139.

Others On Canvas

Technology Tools:

You will be expected to check the canvas site on a regular basis. That is the only technology tool used in the course. You will use it to submit assignments, receive feedback on assignments, take quizzes, and

participate in discussion posts. It may also be used for the exams. Should university require us to become virtual, we will use Zoom and the relevant information will be provided.

Grading;

This is primarily a reading and discussion-based course. There will be occasional quizzes (15 % of the grade) on the readings and lecture notes, a midterm (20%), and a final exam (20%). All students, in groups of 2, are required to present and summarize the key ideas in one of the course readings on at least one Thursday. At that time, the group will also be expected to suggest interesting discussion points and moderate the class discussion. This presentation is worth 15% of your grade. Class participation is worth 30% of your grade. You can evidence class participation by asking and answering questions, participating actively in discussions, submitting reflection papers on the readings and completing the discussion board assignments. This will constitute half of your participation grade. Finally, we will have at least two major in-class debates in which students are asked to argue a particular position. Students will be expected to use the course material in their arguments, and those not participating in the debate will be asked to evaluate the arguments of each side using the course readings as well. All of this will constitute the other half of your participation grade.

There are no make-up exams. All late assignment and quiz submissions will be penalized the equivalent of 25 percentage points per day. This means you cannot earn points for submissions that are more than or equal to four days late.

A forthcoming rubric will be used for the grading of the midterm, final examination, presentations, and in-class debates. In short, you are expected to actively participate, engage, and answer questions in such a way that is clearly informed by the material covered in class, including readings and lecture slides. You are expected to think critically, not merely regurgitating information, but using the information to form coherent, logically sound arguments. Of course, this will require a strong understanding of the course material.

Assignment Due Dates:

Unless otherwise specified, you are expected to submit a reflection on the course readings **BEFORE class on Tuesdays**. In general, I will lecture on Tuesdays, and this will be an opportunity for you to ask clarifying questions about the readings. This reflection needs to not only summarize the readings, but also offer your own reaction to the readings. Think critically about what is missing or what you may not be understanding from what you read. Share and ask in class and on the discussion board.

You are expected to submit answers to the discussion questions for the week on canvas **BEFORE class on Thursdays**. You will also be expected to respond to at least two of your classmates' answers as well. I expect everyone to be respectful and engage in scholarly discussion. In general, Thursdays will be used for student group presentations and group discussion on the readings for the week. Engaging in discussion questions before Thursday will help prime and guide the class discussion on the readings.

You will have an online quiz on the readings for each week that is due on the Friday of that week. It will open and close on Fridays, so it **must be completed by 11:59pm on Friday** for you to receive credit. This provides additional incentive for you to digest the readings, ask questions during lectures on Tuesdays, and participate in the discussion board and group discussion. The course is designed such that you should perform well if you participate actively.

The tentative dates for the midterm and final are **TBA**.

Attendance

I expect in-person attendance for each day of class. If you are sick or believe you might be having covid-19 symptoms, however, you should let me know by email and not come to class. Follow the procedures outlined here: <https://studenthealth.emory.edu/other/COVID/index.html>. You will still be expected to be fully engaged in the course asynchronously, but I will certainly work with you if your symptoms become problematic. For general Emory University policy on absences, please visit <http://college.emory.edu/oue/resources-a-z.html>.

Expectations

You are expected to complete all course material by the due date and participate actively in all synchronous and asynchronous course activities. That includes in-class discussions on readings and lectures, at least one course debate (more on this later), quizzes, exams, and discussion-based assignments. I expect that you will do everything you can to contribute to a healthy class environment, showing up on time to class, treating one another and the instructor with respect. I will hold myself accountable for treating you with respect as well.

Feedback:

Please communicate with me directly through email with any questions. I will do my best to respond within 24-72 hours. I will also do my best to have grades posted within one week of the due date, for all assignments, quizzes, and exams. If you have any concerns don't hesitate to reach out. I will also regularly solicit feedback from students. You can email me privately at any time if there is something about the course that you think can be improved, and I will have two surveys during the semester soliciting feedback as well. My office hours can be used for you to receive feedback from me as well.

Office Hours: TBA

High-Level Course Objectives:

- 1) Investigate the limitations behind traditional approaches to study racial discrimination within the field of economics;
- 2) Draw on literature from multiple disciplines to establish a working definition of systemic racism;
- 3) Explore both the history of anti-Black racism in the United States, the economic consequences of that history, and the mutually reinforcing nature of racial inequities;
- 4) Consider how an economically rigorous understanding of systemic racism could lead to pragmatic policy solutions to racial inequities.

In addition, although this is a freshman course, it is my goal to make sure students are exposed to some basic mathematical and statistical concepts to help build economic intuition for the challenges of studying of racial inequities.

Tentative Topics Covered

As measured by grades on your assignments, quizzes, exams, and participation, you will gain understanding on the following topics in this course (the order is tentative and likely to change):

Week 1

I. Race as a Social Construct

- A. The construction of race in America (Smedley)
- B. Intersectionality (Crenshaw)

Week 2

II. Defining Systemic Racism

- A. Definition (Slides)
- B. The Race Discrimination System (Reskin)
- C. A Historical Perspective (Feagin Chapter One)

III. History of anti-Black racism in the American context

Week 3

- A. Chattel Slavery
 - 1. Feagin Chapters 2 and 3
 - 2. Darity "From Here to Equality," Chapters 3 and 4

Week 4

- B. Jim Crow
 - 1. Feagin Chapters 4 and 5
 - 2. Darity: From Here to Equality, Chapters 9 and 10

Week 5

- C. Jim Crow and Beyond
 - 1. Rothstein, Chapters 3, 5-7, and 9

IV. Consequences of historical and present-day racism in American context

Week 6

- A. Wealth and Income
 - 1. Intergenerational Mobility (Chetty)
- B. Housing and Segregation
 - 1. Tipping and the Dynamics of Segregation (Card)
 - 2. The Great Migration and Mobility (Derenoncourt)

Week 7

- C. Education and Criminal Justice
 - 1. Impact on Productivity and Crime (Lochner)
 - 2. Discrimination in Sentencing (Rehavi)

Week 8

- D. Labor
 - 1. Labor Market Discrimination (Bertrand)

2. Ban the Box (Starr)

Tentative Date for first in-class Debate: TBA

Tentative Date for Midterm: TBA

V. Traditional Approaches to Discrimination in Economics

Week 9

- A. Racial Animus vs Statistical Discrimination (Charles)

Week 10

- B. Technical Issues in Research on Racial Bias in Policing (Knox)

Week 11

- C. Racial Stigma (Loury Chapter 3)

VI. Solutions to Systemic Racism

Week 12

- A. Types of Solutions

- 1. Darity: Persistent Disparity, Chapter 7

- B. Reparations

- 1. The Racial Wealth Gap (Derenoncourt)
- 2. From here to Equality: The Case for Reparations (Darity Chapter 11-13)

Week 13

- C. Some Specific Targets

- 1. Impact of school desegregation (Johnson)
- 2. Economics of Investing in Disadvantaged Children (Heckman)

Week 14

- D. Systems Thinking

- 1. Roithmayr, Chapters 8-10 and Conclusion
- 2. Systems approach to crime (McMillon)
- 3. Systems approach to educational interventions (McMillon)

Tentative Date for Second in-class debate: TBA

Date for Final: **TBA**

Honor Code:

All students in this course are expected to be thoroughly familiar with and abide by the Emory Honor Code. If you have not, please read the entire code at: <http://catalog.college.emory.edu/academic/policies-regulations/honor-code.html>. If you have any questions about what constitutes an honors violation, please ask.

Inclusive Instruction:

Emory University makes reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. Please make any such request in person as soon as possible. More information: <http://portals.emory.edu/index.html> and <https://accessibility.emory.edu/students/index.html>