

The Politics of Identity
University of Toronto
Professor Courtney Jung
POL 438 H1 L0201
Fall 2009
Wednesday 10-12
UC 65

This course ranges across the fields of comparative politics, anthropology, law, post-colonialism, and political theory to present a critical, inter-disciplinary approach to the study of identity. The class examines how people organize politically in order to establish the legitimacy of their claims on citizenship, resources, access, and power. Political identity is “the collective label for a set of characteristics by which persons are recognized by political actors as members of a political group.” Class, ethnicity, religion, race, and gender may all act as political identities, but none of these categories has automatic political resonance. Political identity must be constructed, and how it is constructed has implications for politics in the sense that different identities suggest distinct strategies, arenas, and demands. Whether people recognize race, class, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality as politically salient, and act accordingly, will have an important effect on who gets what, where, when, and how, and who governs. The course will use texts that look at the question of identity from a variety of different perspectives, including law, politics, and normative theory. It will not review debates on whether identity is primordial or constructed, etc., but it will try to examine how our conception of political identities are shaped by the assumptions, cases, and methods that inform our research into identities.

Until quite recently, the topic of identity has not received sustained treatment from political scientists, notwithstanding the central importance of identities as both a cause of political outcomes and a consequence of political structures. Even now, most political scientists continue to treat such social categories as race and ethnicity as exogenous to the political process. Race and ethnicity are often used as independent variables to explain election results, for example. As a result, they continue to import theories of identity from other fields, in particular from social psychology and sociology.

Most of the readings in this course treat identity as a dependent variable, or as both an independent and a dependent variable. These authors are interested in the process of identity formation, or they are interested in how the process of identity formation, and not simply the “identity” itself (race, ethnicity, religion, class) affects political outcomes. Most of all, they are interested in the politics of how identities are forged in particular ways. Critical race theory—a branch of critical legal theory that focuses attention on the construction of race through law—exposes the normative side of a supposedly neutral judicial structure. Anthony Marx makes the case that states make race. Paul Brass shows how conflicts that are really about power get reframed as “identity.”

The course also attempts to explore the differences and similarities among social identities and the way they interact with politics. What are race, class, ethnicity, and gender, and how should we think of them politically? Are some of these social categories more ‘real’ than others? Are some constitutive of identity while others remain categories of chosen, and therefore more temporary, affiliation? Some of the authors represented here focus on identity as a strategy and a resource of political claim-making. How do the symbols or markers that are used to constitute the group (race or class) affect the meanings, goals, boundaries, and salience of the group? How do different groups interact with the democratic state, and when are they more or less difficult for democracies

to process? One fundamental question that bedevils this literature, either implicitly or explicitly, is the tension between the public and private roles of identity.

Course requirements: You are required to complete the assigned reading and to attend class. Every other week, half the students in the class are required to post 1-2 page responses to the reading on Blackboard. Responses should be posted no later than noon on the day before the class meets. By the end of the semester, each student will have written 6 responses, for a total of 30% of his/her grade. 10% of the grade will be based on in class discussion and participation that demonstrates thoughtful engagement with the assigned reading.

60% of the grade will be based on a final 20 page paper. The paper may be critical, theoretical, or empirical. That is, it may be a critique of the literature, it may offer a theoretical advance or normative intervention into the study of identity, or it may be based on empirical research into identity formation. It may be ostensibly located in any sub-field of political science. Somewhere near the middle of the semester, you should meet with the instructor to discuss your paper topic. It may be wise to enlist the help of an outside advisor for example, if your proposed topic is too far away from the instructor's area of expertise. The late penalty for responses and the final paper is 1% per day.

1. Introduction to the course. In class movie, Hotel Rwanda
2. Mahmood Mamdani, When Victims Become Killers
3. Rogers Smith, Stories of Peoplehood
4. Paul Brass, Theft of an Idol
5. Judith Butler, "Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse," and Susan Bordo, "Feminism, Postmodernism and Gender skepticism" in Linda Nicholson, ed. Feminism/Postmodernism; Mala Htun "How is Gender like Ethnicity?" Perspectives on Politics
6. Erin Calhoun Davis, "Situating "Fluidity": (Trans)Gender Identification and the Regulation of Gender Diversity," GLQ 15:1
Katrina Roen, "Either/Or and Both/Neither: Discursive Tensions in Transgender Politics," Signs Vol.27 No.2 (Winter 2002)
7. Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color"
Leslie McCall, "The Complexity of Intersectionality"
8. Ivan Hanaford: Race: The History of an Idea in the West (pp.255-276)
Anthony Marx Making Race and Nation
9. Kimberle Williams Crenshaw "Race, Reform and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Anti-discrimination Law" in Kimberle Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, Kendall Thomas, eds. Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement
Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres, The Miner's Canary (chapters 1-3)
10. Charles Taylor "Multiculturalism and The Politics of Recognition" in Multiculturalism; Will Kymlicka, "The Politics of Multiculturalism," (Chapter 2 of Multicultural Citizenship); Nancy Fraser "From Redistribution to Recognition? In Justice Interruptus
11. Gerald Torres and Kathryn Milun "Translating Yonondio by Precedent and Evidence: The Mashpee Indian Case";
12. Courtney Jung The Moral Force of Indigenous Politics