

"From Biological Racism to the Construction of Systemic Racism : A Comparative study between France and the USA".

Class Summary:

The aim of this lesson is to understand how racism has been constructed as a system of oppression. Fixed in our society, institutional or systemic racism originates from biological racism. The craniology of the 19th century justified the inferiority of the Black-Slave while affirming the superiority of the "white race". If the wars of decolonization in Africa and the black liberation movements in the USA have apparently destroyed the remains of the colonial states, what remains of the racist theories? Especially when one observes a rise in extreme right-wing politics in France and the USA?

What do you think of the American ghettos or the over-representation of Blacks in prisons in the USA? Should we criticize French Universalism? Or should we consider it as a model of equality and freedom?

Explanation of the syllabus:

Starting with the discovery of the Americas by Christopher Columbus in 1492 we will reflect on the differential way in which racism was constructed in France and in the United States.

Through historical sources (legal texts, stories of European travelers, diaries of the masters and mistresses of the Habitation) we will study the slave trade which is at the foundation of modern racism.

Then, we will study the abolitionist movements of slavery in the French West Indies and the United States, as well as the revolutions of the maroon slaves (runaway slaves). The Jim Crow Laws, and the formation of the French colonial state in North and Black Africa will draw our attention.

Later, we will see how liberation movements were organized: Black Panthers in the USA, Decolonization War in France with the author Frantz Fanon. Finally, despite these liberation efforts, we will show how racism persists today as an ideology, as well as through institutions.

Lesson objective:

- Develop your critical thinking : understand how racism (if it no longer exists as biological) exists in protean ways in the media, institutions, schools, workplaces, etc.
- Analyze historical sources in relation to the context in which they were created: the description of slavery by a 17th century Christian missionary is different from that of a 16th century merchant traveler, for example
 - Study legal texts: to understand how the law contributed to the emergence of racism
 - Develop your research and thinking skills: understanding philosophical and sociological concepts + personal reading
 - Develop your oral skills: participating in the class is very important because if we present racism in France and in the USA, other communities are also victims (Latin America, Asia, Jews, Muslims). The participation of everyone through their own experience would be very enriching.

Course syllabus:

Lesson 1: The First Encounter ? The Discovery of the Americas

Lesson 2: The Black Code (1685): the institutionalization of racism in the French West Indies

Lesson 3: The Slave Trade in the West Indies and the Reproduction of a Slave Labor Force in the United States

Lesson 4: Maroon Slavery, Abolitionism, and the Concept of Freedom

Lesson 5: American Segregation: Jim Crow Laws (1877)

Lesson 6: Colonization of North Africa: The Case of the Arab-Muslims

Lesson 7: African American Liberation: The Black Panthers (1960)

Lesson 8: Frantz Fanon and the Critique of French Colonialism: The "Father" of Postcolonialism

Lesson 9: African Americans: Ghettos, Overrepresentation in Prisons: The Question of Institutional Racism

Lesson 10: French Universalism in Question: Between Community Demands and Extreme Right Discourse

Assessment:

Two 30min written quizzes in the form of questions and answers that will count for 30% of the final grade. These will be class questions only to grade your attendance and your personal and continuous investment.

A 1500-2000 word essay in Times New Roman 12 format, 1.5 line spacing, which counts for 70% of the grade. In this file you must develop a theme related to the lesson, to take up the concepts presented, to develop your critical mind, and your research skills. You must write an introduction with a problematic, a development, a conclusion and a bibliography (citing your sources is very important).

Examples :

- I was interested by lesson 1 on The Conquest of the Americas, and I want to take a historical source from a traveler's story and focus on how it defines and describes the indigenous people.
- I am generally interested in the concept of "racism" and I want to focus on the racism of Latinos, Asians etc.
- I was interested by lesson 2 on The Black Code. Then, I look at a modern law text that I consider racist and I put it in relation with this same Black Code
- It is also possible to take a "racist"'s news topic that you will study (in France, in the USA or in the rest of the world): death of Georges Floyd, anti-Asian racism following the pandemic etc.
- ...
- I want to link the notion of racism to feminism through an author (Angela Davis for example)

Of course, I'm here to talk about your subject and guide you in your readings.

A participation grade will be taken into account, only if it allows you to increase your overall grade.

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