HISTORY OF PREJUDICE

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

“History of Prejudice” is an upper-division humanities course in the Liberal Studies program at a comprehensive regional university. The university enrolls approximately 9,000 students in a variety of programs ranging from two-year-certificate programs through master degree programs. The vast majority of students enrolling in “History of Prejudice” are enrolled in bachelor degree programs, though a few are post-baccalaureate students seeking teacher certification. All students enrolled in a bachelor’s degree program must complete one upper-division Liberal Studies course. Almost all of those courses are in the humanities or social sciences, so science, business, and nursing majors typically take either a humanities or social science course to fulfill that requirement.

“History of Prejudices” is taught on a two-year cycle, typically in the winter semester. It is capped at 20 students per offering. Few minority students have taken the course (the campus itself is overwhelmingly white); the students have been roughly evenly split between men and women, and only three students in the class have self-identified as members of a sexual minority.

In the winter 2013 offering only two students had had a prior history course at the 200-or 300-level, which is typical for upper-level Liberal Studies courses offered by the department. As a result, whoever teaches the class can make no assumptions about the students’ grasp of historical methods, historical writing, or even the historical context in which the development of prejudices is discussed. Additionally, the university has a long tradition as a “right to try” institution and actively seeks to maintain the lowest tuition among its peer institutions in the state; therefore, the university has a high proportion of first-generation college students, and a high proportion of probationary students. While this certainly offers access to higher education to students who may otherwise be excluded, it also mitigates against the use of some classic texts as well as some more theoretically driven texts.

The winter 2013 offering was the second time I taught the course, and I made a substantive change in its structure. Rather than offering a brief overview of multiple types of prejudice and then focusing on racism in the United States, I determined to give more equal weight to sexism, homophobia, and religious prejudice. This was done because of the demonstrable problem of sexism and homophobia on the university’s campus as well as the general tide of Islamophobia in the country. Notably, in the very few years between offerings, the university has seen both an increase in the number of Muslim students enrolled at the university and in the visible activism in the student LGBTQ organization. The “forum post” assignment was designed to heighten student awareness of current problems, especially on campus. The students’ awareness of the problem is essential to a solution, and many students are unaware of the subtle nature of some prejudices. Students seem particularly unaware of the ways in
which privilege—white privilege, male privilege, or heterosexual privilege—are displayed in everyday life, both on and off campus.¹

I chose the readings to aid students in seeing the origins, development, and manifestations of prejudice. In Racism: A Short History George Fredrickson posits that modern racism emerged as anti-Jewish sentiment transformed into anti-Semitism, and Jews came to be seen as a race with a blood libel that could not be overcome by conversion to Christianity. Frederickson also argues that racism reached ascendancy in the Segregated South, Nazi Germany, and Apartheid South Africa. I chose Joshua Trachtenberg’s The Devil and the Jews to examine in more detail the historical emergence of anti-Semitism as a manifestation of racism rather than religious intolerance, and Matti Bunzl’s work to examine the modern manifestations of religiously based racism in European Islamophobia. Two works focus specifically on racism: Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race and They Called them Greasers. Both are specific to the American experience of racism. Nancy Tauna’s The Less Noble Sex traces the origins and development of sexism from the ancient to the modern world while, Young, White and Miserable explores the impact of sexism on young, white, middle-class women who would seem to be quite privileged. The final two works—Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities and Tales of the Lavender Menace—focus on homophobia, as well as the protest movements against homophobia.

During the discussions I work to bring in a more theoretical perspective. The first time I taught the course, I assigned Elisabeth Young-Bruehl’s The Anatomy of Prejudices but found it more effective to introduce many of her ideas through the discussions rather than assigning her book for the second offering. Of course, analysis of prejudice relies on a wide variety of theories. I make significant use of Franz Fanon’s concept of the decolonization of the mind, especially as presented alongside the necessity of violence in The Wretched of the Earth. I also incorporate the work of various anthropologists, like Eric Wolfe, who have offered ways of understanding power and coded symbols. Historians have been forced to grapple with the implications of these theories and of the linguistic turn, particularly as presented by Hayden White. Clearly, historians reconstruct the past in particular ways—and not all ways of reconstructing the past are equally defensible. Nevertheless, we can also turn to the language theories offered by Ludwig Wittgenstein to see that coded symbols were meant to be understood, at least by the “in” group, in their common usage.² Hence, we can argue that the past can be reconstructed and we can create a window into the ways in which people of the past understood their world—it is not merely the present historians imposing their interpretations on the past.

The list of topics, and my approach to them, certainly stems from my own research into the religious basis and justifications for—particularly—racist beliefs. It is quite a complex problem to determine how beliefs and justifications wend their way into institutions which then perpetuate prejudice-driven discrimination, yet the idea of superiority and inferiority infuses both personal and structural manifestations of prejudice and discrimination. One of the fundamental goals of the course is to enable students to better notice, identify, and understand both personal and structural prejudices and

² I address these issues periodically, but probably most clearly in dealing with the case of Hugh Davis, who was sentenced to a public flogging by the General Court of Virginia in 1630 for “lying with a Negro.” The sentence does not specify if the person Hugh Davis lay with was male or female, but through linguistic analysis I demonstrate that it is much more likely the person was male than it is that the person was female.
discrimination. This is very difficult to assess in any way beyond self-reporting, but student evaluations and comments do indicate some degree of success in achieving this goal.

As a final thought, in future offerings of the class I will be discussing the narrowness and problems with the term “homophobia” and suggesting that discussing “heterosexism” maybe a much more fruitful way of examining the nature of prejudices based on sexual orientation and identity.

IN THE CLASSROOM

My course schedule is intentionally vague. This built-in flexibility allows for easier adjustments of the schedule. Most notably, it allows me to respond to current events which bear directly on the class. It also allows me to adjust to a particular group of students’ needs and interests, spending more or less time on a particular issue without causing a cascade of syllabus revisions.

Most of the class time is spent in discussions of the texts assigned or of the students’ forum posts. Certainly some of the techniques I use could be considered tried-and-true, but I also use a few less common techniques. The following activities are directly mentioned in the syllabus and warrant some explanation here:

- The “minute round”: every person in the class (including me) must comment on the readings or posts.
- The “crash course”: student teams investigate a question for 15 to 20 minutes then present their findings to the class; this is particularly effective for providing context for ideas that were tangentially or passingly mentioned in the readings.
- “Yes, and… “: each student—in a random but pre-determined order (I use playing cards to assign order)—writes one sentence on the board which the next student must follow logically (the first student also goes last so as not to get a free pass on incorporating prior ideas).
- The “Big 5”: student teams identify the five most important pieces of evidence an author uses to make a point, or the five most important points in a work, or the five most salient pieces of evidence from a set of documents. After this is done, the activity can go in one of two main directions: 1) student teams share what they have determined, or 2) teams are mixed and students are tasked with finding common ground and/or defending their earlier team’s choices against the choices of other teams represented in their new groups.

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3 This strategy was adopted from “Practice 27” in Eric Liu and Scott Noppe-Brandon, *Imagination First*. 
HS 354: HISTORY OF PREJUDICE

Prerequisite
Completion of Division I, sophomore standing, and completion of at least three credit hours of lower division history.4

Bulletin Description
The course focuses on the historical development of prejudice and the ideas which underpin prejudice. The course examines the phenomena of prejudice in multiple contexts, exploring both the similarities and differences in the development of prejudices against different peoples.

Course Description
The History Department intentionally left the bulletin description fairly vague. When I teach “History of Prejudice,” I do so almost exclusively within the Western context, examining the phenomena in European and American societies. I do so because most of us, in our daily lives, encounter prejudice in its Western manifestation. If I have narrowed the geographic scope of the course, I have not particularly narrowed the chronological scope; the course covers the origins of prejudices among the Ancient Greeks and the manifestations of prejudice in modern societies.

I realize that there are many different kinds of prejudices. However, I have chosen to examine the origins and development of four in particular: religious prejudices (mainly anti-Semitism and Islamophobia), racism, sexism, and homophobia.

Required Books
Trachtenberg, The Devil and the Jews
Frederickson, Racism: A Short History
Bunzl, Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia
Tuana, The Less Noble Sex
D’ Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities
Dyer, Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race
Jay, Tales of the Lavender Menace
De Leon, They Called them Greasers
Breines, Young, White, and Miserable

Other required readings, typically academic articles or popular media, are posted to EduCat. Most of these are already available, however some (especially from the popular media) may be added during the course of the semester.

Course Objectives
“History of Prejudice” is tied to both the History Department and the Liberal Studies Program; as a result, it has several pre-determined goals.

The History Department Goals for 300-level courses:

4 Division I of the Liberal Studies program is the university’s English Composition requirement. Students must complete the composition requirements before taking and upper-division Liberal Studies course.
Critical Thinking and Argumentation
   Ability to develop a creative and original thesis
   Ability to analyze and evaluate historical arguments

Critical Writing
   Ability to write a clear, sustained, source-based, thesis-driven paper
   Command of Historical citation conventions (Chicago/Turabian style)

Oral Competency
   Ability to participate in Historical discussion

Field of history
   Understanding of historiographic and methodological concerns

Liberal Studies Program Goals for Humanities:
   Ability to write and communicate clearly and effectively
   Ability to evaluate various forms of evidence and knowledge
   Ability to engage in analytical reasoning and argumentation
   Ability to see across disciplinary boundaries
   Understanding cultural diversity in the United States
   Understanding the world as a diverse and interrelated community
   Understanding the relationship of the individual to society and its culture and institutions
   Understanding the role of the fine and performing arts and the humanities in shaping and expressing a culture’s values and ideals

If this appears to be a fairly heavy burden on the course, consider the substantial overlap among the course objectives.

Students will be able to write a clearly argued and well supported paper regarding the history of prejudice.

This will be assessed through the assigned papers.

Students will be able to discuss, with each other and the professor, the nature of prejudice both in the United States and the broader Western world, noting its impact on both dominate and minority cultures.

This will be assessed in an ongoing manner through the monitoring of class discussions and forum posts.

Students will demonstrate, in their discussions and papers, an understanding of the multiple ways in which prejudice may be studied and understood.

This will be assessed through the papers, monitoring of the class discussions and forum posts.
THE "FUZZY" GOALS

Students will grow intellectually
Students will encounter and engage with new ideas
Students will reevaluate long held ideas
Students will learn something about themselves

People interested in quantifying the results of education often do not like “fuzzy” goals because they are notoriously difficult to assess. They are also very difficult to pin down to one class. Many of them develop in the interplay between multiple classes and life beyond the classroom.

These goals are important to me. They represent the essence of an expanding mind and intellect. However much “academic work” is assigned in a class, the true key to learning is engagement. People engage, and therefore learn, when tasks provide both challenges and rewards. It is my intention that this course will be meaningful to you and that we will all learn from this course because it will provide both challenges and rewards, and those rewards will be more than just grades.

When you leave this course, I hope you know something more about prejudice than you did when you entered. I hope you can imagine a world without prejudice, which is a prerequisite for creating a world without prejudice. I hope you more open to examining your own beliefs and ideas, that you can understand things you once thought were beyond your grasp and do things you once thought might be beyond your intellectual abilities. I hope that you will be inspired to continue learning, and to continue imaging, and to continue growing as person.5

PREPARING TO SUCCEED

In 20 years of teaching I have noticed a few things about the people who pass the class as opposed to the people who either drop or fail. People who pass don’t let one, or even two, “bad grades” derail their efforts or undermine their belief that they can, in the end, pass the class. Students who pass, it seems, have a strategy—sometimes conscious, but not always—for anticipating potential obstacles and for rebounding from setbacks. In fact, most of them assumed that they would encounter setbacks before it happened and they prepared themselves to face those setbacks in a proactive manner.6

It is useful to make a specific plan for passing any class. While that plan ought to include when you will set aside time to accomplish the course work, it should also include an assessment of likely difficulties and a strategy for addressing those difficulties and rebounding from setbacks. That plan should also include some self-imposed rules for success. Possible rules, depending on your habits, might include things like: turn the TV off when you study, turn the Wi-Fi off on your computer when working on a paper so you aren’t tempted to check your email or Facebook, or not studying in the presence of your romantic partner.7

6 Tough, How Children Succeed, chapter 2 “How to Build Character.”
7 Ibid.
SOME SUGGESTIONS

Be Present: of course you will come to class, but you should also be present in class. Class is not taking place on your iPad nor is it being texted to you. It’s happening in real life.

Be Open: some of the ideas and topics we will discuss will conform to ideas you’ve already held; but, some will be brand new and others will conflict with beliefs you already hold. Be as open to the new and the contrary as you are to the old and comfortable.

Be Careful: accept that unknowns will always exist, that it’s impossible to know even most things, much less everything; in that knowledge of limitations, weigh the available evidence and arguments with care and caution.

Be Mindful: attend to the matters of the class, think them through, consider what they mean and what they could mean. Allow what you learn to become a part of you and a part of your life.

Be Challenged: challenges make life interesting and exciting. No matter how difficult or easy you find a task, you should always allow yourself to be challenged, and to challenge yourself. No one thinks twice when they hear "no pain, no gain" for physical fitness, yet few realize that the same is true in intellectual pursuits.

This Moment Matters: everyone will be something later, we all have the next thing to do; but let that wait until its time comes. For now, pay attention to what is now not what is next.

You are expected to be present in class. Attendance is essentially a physical phenomenon: you got your body to class. Presence means you brought your mind with you. The world outside the classroom can never be fully shed; yet, the classroom is an space designated—for one hour and forty minutes, two times a week—for the excitement of intellectual pursuits which involve the discovery and exploration of new ideas, and the questioning of old ideas. You cannot “multitask” when engaged in truly invigorating intellectual enterprise, and you will miss the experience if you insist on trying to “multitask” and attend to the matters of the world beyond classroom. College is a pressure cooker and there is always something you have to do “next.” I know, I went to college and I remember how it was. Spend some time in the “now”; be present in this class. What’s next is what’s next; it has to wait for next. If you are already doing what is next, what happens to what is now?

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The University has specific and varied resources and requirements for accommodating students with disabilities. If you qualify for such, please see the professor to make the necessary arrangements.

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THOUGHTS ON THE ASSIGNMENTS

PAPERS

You will write one paper on each of the following subjects: Racism, Sexism, Homophobia, and Religious Prejudice. Your “final” paper will address the nature of prejudice and the commonalities among and the differences between the types of prejudice we have examined over the course of the semester. More information about each paper assignment is available on EduCat.

These papers provide you an opportunity to explore new ideas and to express your views—backed by evidence, of course—on serious topics. It is true, the papers are required, but no one is stopping you from taking the initiative and doing more than is required. No one is stopping you from excelling, unless it is yourself.

In the unfortunate event that you receive a grade below a C- on two consecutive papers, I will not grade the subsequent paper until you have met either with me to create a strategy for improvement—which you must do before the next paper is due. Please note that you must have a grade for every paper in order to pass the course. That means that your decision not to seek assistance on your paper will result in your automatic failure of the course.

FORUM POSTS

You have your own forum for this class; I fully admit I borrowed the idea from a professor at NYU. In your forum, you will post links to various articles that you have found on the topics assigned (you can always post more than is required). You should also post your comments and thoughts on those articles. More importantly, you should browse your colleagues’ forum posts, take a look at the articles they have found, and engage in an online discussion by posting your own thoughts or by responding to their comments. Here is an excellent opportunity to do more than is required, will you take it? One way to enhance both your experience and that of your colleagues is to move beyond the required articles and find art work, music, or other appropriate medium to post in your forums.

One goal of the forum posts is to create a catalog of personal experiences with prejudices. We would all like to think there is minimal prejudice around us, but without careful observation of daily interaction, we can never be sure just how much exists. Certainly we can do nothing about discrimination and prejudice if we are unaware of their existence or manifestations.

GRADING

Participation: 30%
Forum: 20%
Papers: 50%

Your "Papers" grade is weighted as follows:

Topical Papers: 60%
Final Paper: 40%

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**ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS ABOUT GRADES**

In truth, students are far more obsessed with grades than they ought to be; nevertheless, the university will require that I give a grade at the end of the session and, so, you should be aware of a couple of the ground rules for earning a grade:

1. You must complete the course. This means you must complete all the assessments and assignments.
2. You must do legitimate work. This means, of course, you must not plagiarize (see separate handout). It also means that you must do work that reasonably meets the expectations of the class.

Once you have successfully met the above two criteria of completing the course and doing legitimate work, you will be eligible for a passing grade. At that point, I will calculate your grade based on the formula presented above.

You may think it is stringent requirements that you do *everything* in the class before you can even possibly pass. I do not believe it is. Could you really only do half or two-thirds of your job and remain employed? While we often hear the mandate “think outside the box” sometimes we should think inside the box.\(^\text{12}\) May I suggest the Food Network’s show “Chopped” as an example of thinking inside the box? Contestants open a box with several ingredients which virtually no one would pair together in their own kitchen; the chefs must use *everything* in the box in their culinary creations, which are judged on taste, presentation, and creativity, and they must do so under considerable time constraints. We know that interleveling, and weaving together ideas from various sources and in various ways, creates effective learning resulting in long-lasting knowledge. Doing all the aspects of the course will improve your overall experience with the course and understanding of prejudice. With any luck it will improve your overall college experience.

**ANTICIPATED ORGANIZATION OF THE COURSE**

I have divided the course into five sections. The first, “understanding prejudice” is designed to help us come to a clear-cut idea about what, exactly, we mean when we talk about prejudice. Most people have a vague idea what it means, but vague ideas are only a starting point for scholarly inquiry. We need something more solid before moving into the core of the course. The four sections that follow are designed around the “Big Four”: religious prejudices (anti-Semitism and Islamophobia), racism, sexism, and homophobia. They could have been put in any order, but I have selected this order because religious ideas often underpin racism, sexism, and homophobia, and so I thought it would be best to start there. Frederickson ties the development of anti-Semitism directly to the emergence of racism in *Racism: A Short History*, so I have chosen to follow religious prejudice with racism. Many of the ideas about women’s inferiority and weakness inform prejudices against gay men as they have been deemed “effeminate” and, therefore, I have chosen to examine the nature of sexism—as discussed in Nancy Tauna’s work, *The Less Noble Sex*—first, and then examine how those ideas do or don’t apply to homophobia.

\(^{12}\) Liu and Noppe-Brandon, *Imagination First*, practice 6 “Think Inside the Box.”
Understanding Prejudice

Frederickson, *Racism: A Short History*

Student provided readings on the nature of prejudice

(Only peer reviewed articles are acceptable: post link or PDF in your forum)

McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”

Student forum postings

Some activities to be undertaken in this section

Student forum “minute” round

Based on McIntosh, student pairs generate lists of the nature of male privilege, and straight privilege in American society

The Big 5: Features of prejudice

“Yes, and...” –defining and limning prejudices and privileges

Religious Prejudice

Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*

Bunzl, *Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia*

Haynes, “Original Dishonor” on the Curse of Ham and Racism

Student forum postings

Some activist to be undertaken in this section

Student forum “minute” round

The Big 5: most important points and evidences from the texts

Crash course on Islamophobia in contemporary America

Crash course: is there “Christian Privilege” in America?

“Yes, and...” on relationship between religious belief and other prejudices

Racism

Dyer, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race*

De Leon, *They Called them Greasers*

Student forum postings

Some activities to be undertaken in this section

Student forum “minute” round
Examination of race in advertising, early 20th century

Black Power: Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael/Kwame Touré, and Eldridge Cleaver; The colonized mind and American race relations.


Analysis of lynching post cards: http://withoutsanctuary.org/main.html

Measuring Heads and Scientific Racism (the professor will provide the tape measure, we will be measuring students’ heads!)

SEXISM

Becker and Swim, “Seeing the Unseen”
Tuana, The Less Noble Sex
Breines, Young, White, and Miserable
Student forum postings

Some activities to be undertaken in this section

Student forum “minute” round

Analysis of advertisements from the 1950s based primarily on the reading from Becker and Swim

Crash Course: Examination and analysis of student-provided contemporary advertisements with gendered messages.

Discussion of Feminism and Marxism: Is it always about economics? Class and Gender as loci of oppression

Crash Course: Radical Feminism and Anti-Feminists: the colonized mind?


14 I draw considerably, but not exclusively, on Franz Fanon.

15 A fundamental question here is when and how did Virginia transform from a “society with slaves” into a “slave society” and how race was implicated in that transition.

16 These postcards typically depict public mob lynchings. Some include writing on the back of the card, others do not. Many of the photographs clearly show children in the mob attending the lynching. We examines ideas of rituals, and particularly rituals as social control and rituals as rites of passage, based primarily on the works of anthropologists. Such a discussion could draw on innumerable works, but among I typically introduce students to the ideas of Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz, though I do introduce them briefly to the theories of Claude Levi-Strauss as well.
The Big 5: Prejudice and Privilege (having privilege in some areas, facing prejudice in other area)

**HOMOPHOBIA**

- D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*
- Jay, *Tales of the Lavender Menace*
- Student forum postings

Some activities to be undertaken in this section

- Student forum “minute” round
- Analysis: What did Hugh Davis do?
- Crash Course: contemporary homophobia and same-sex marriage
- Discussion: Who has Privilege? A review of the invisible backpack
- Ex-Gay Therapy and the Colonized Mind
- “Yes, and...” review of the nature of prejudice—revisit accepted class definition from “understanding prejudice” section
WORKS CITED

COURSE MATERIALS


CONTEXTUAL AND PEDAGOGICAL MATERIALS


Fanon, Franz. The Wretched of the Earth translated by Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, 1963


