Struggle for Justice (CRJ 427)

Wintermester 2014-2015, University of Nevada, Reno

Course Time and Location: ***

Instructor: Timothy “Skip” Griffin (Office: AB 112)

Office Phone: ***

Office Hours: ***

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES: Through examination and discussion of relevant readings, lecture material, and in-class videos, students will grow in their knowledge of the efforts of minorities, women, and the disenfranchised to obtain equality. Special emphasis will be placed on the role of law and the institutions of criminal justice as they relate to this struggle.

This capstone course will satisfy Core Objectives 10 and 13 of the Silver Core Curriculum:

CO10. Diversity and Equity: Students will develop a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate attentiveness to and analysis of diversity and equity.

CO13. Integration and Synthesis:
Students will be able to integrate and synthesize Core knowledge, enabling them to analyze open-ended problems or complex issues.

In addition, will assist students in building honing/building the skills described in Core Objectives 1 and 3

CO 1 Effective Composition and Communication. Students will be able to compose written, oral, visual, and other forms of discourse for a variety of scholarly, professional, and creative purposes.

CO3 Critical Analysis & Use of Information.
Students will be critical consumers of information, able to engage in systematic research processes, frame questions, read critically, and apply observational and experimental approaches to obtain information.

General Student Learning Outcomes:

* Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of historic and modern issues addressing the struggle for justice and equality of African Americans in the United States (CO 10).

* Students will be able to define and explain cultural inequality in the African American struggle for justice (CO 10).
* Students will be able to identify and analyze the social construction of crime in America and the experiences of African Americans with and in the criminal justice system from different perspectives (CO 10, CO 13).

* Students will be able to integrate effective communication and the critical use and analysis of information in class discussion and a variety of assignments (CO 1, CO 3, CO 13).

**READINGS:** The required reading materials are available online through the library under course reserves.

**ASSIGNMENTS:**

**Class Participation:** Here is how class participation works in this class. I will develop a class participation list every day and randomly call on people to answer simple true-false questions based on the “Points of Interest” from the readings. If you are absent for a lecture, that counts as a zero in your participation score for that day, but if you are present, it counts as nothing for or against your score if you are not called.

If you’re called, I will ask you a simple true-false question. You may decline to answer by taking a “safety”, worth two (2) points. If you choose to answer and you are incorrect, you will receive one (1) point. If you choose to answer and you are correct, you will receive three (3) points. Your average class participation score will be on a 100 percent scale based on your average answers. I will add 0.08 to everyone’s participation score at the end, so if you just show up every day and take safeties, you’ll get 75 percent on your participation score for the semester, even if you read and answer nothing.

My motive for providing this opportunity is first, to encourage you to read, but most important, to reward those who choose to prepare for class diligently. It helps you learn, and that is my job—to facilitate your education and reward those who are taking steps to learn the material.

“Points of Interest”: When I prepared this course, I read through the readings and noted important “points of interest” for each section of readings I assigned. These points of interest are available on the website. I want you to understand these points, so will give quizzes as per above that are directly derived from them.

**Exams:** The midterm and the final will be essay and true-false. The essay options are based on clusters of the Points of Interest from the readings (CO 10; CO 13).

Make-ups: If you have a documented and valid reason for missing a midterm or the final, please see me to arrange an appropriate time to make up the exam. If you miss a midterm or the final for an invalid reason, you will receive a zero for that test.

Work (other than unforeseen and required military or criminal justice service) vacation, personal problems that do not involve documented professional assistance, and having a very demanding schedule are NOT valid excuses to miss class or a test. Furthermore, to ensure it does not become an issue in the future, traffic delays and “temporary” car
trouble are NOT valid excuses to miss class or a test. If your car legitimately broke down on the way to class, and you took it to a mechanic, and have a receipt, that’s one thing. However, the “engine goblins” that only seem to operate on important class days are no excuse for failing to come to class.

The simplest way to avoid all these complications is to just come to class on time, all the time, and be prepared.

Book Review: You must read *The Short and Tragic Life of Robert Peace: A Brilliant Young Man who Left Newark for the Ivy League*, by Jeff Hobbs and write a review of it wherein you will tie class readings into a summary and critique of the book (CO 1, CO 3, CO 10, CO 13).

The book is available for very cheap through Amazon or other online vendor but there are some copies at the bookstore. Here is the assignment for the book review:

2. In the remainder of the paper, explain how six of the authors discussed in class might comment on the story and why. Use three from the first part of class and three from the second part. Pay special attention to how different sources from class might conflict with each other in their interpretation of the events and stories described in the book. The ability to tie your essay to specific events discussed in the book—which shows depth of comprehension—is crucial.

Rules For Book Review

1. The review must be no more than 3,000 words in length, in 12-font. No bibliography is necessary.
2. All papers must be submitted to me, *virus free, via WebCampus Learn in Word docx format. Do not send me pdf or other formats. NO DISKS OR HARD COPIES WILL BE ACCEPTED. Make sure you understand how to transfer documents this way before you start typing on your Mac or whatever, because it would be horrible to find that you can’t move your document from your computer to mine via email. Test first and be sure!*
3. The student’s name and student number must be on a separate cover page.
4. **Direct quotes from any of the assigned readings are not allowed. You must paraphrase.**
5. Any direct quotes from any outside readings must be limited to no more than one sentence, must be identified as quotes, and must have a page number reference. A bibliography must be included if outside works are cited. No bibliography is needed if only assigned class readings are referenced, although you must correctly identify ideas with their respective authors. (It will be very possible to write “A”-quality papers without citing outside materials, although you are welcome to do this if you wish.)
Grading Criteria for Written Assignments: Grades for the book review are determined as follows:

Spelling and Grammar (20 percent)—Each grammatical or spelling error will cause one percentage point to be deducted. Consult with an editor before turning your paper in.

Following the Assignment (20 percent)—Otherwise brilliant papers that fail to answer the question posed or follow the instructions will lose big points here. Similarly, failing to keep the paper within the word parameters will result in lost points. For every five points outside the prescribed word range, a percentage point will be deducted. I want you to actually write something substantive but I don’t want to sift through pages and pages of vacuous babble.

Demonstrated Understanding of the Readings (20 percent)—If your paper is excessively filled with anecdotes and unsubstantiated personal opinions, then I will have to conclude that you really haven’t carefully read the material and will deduct points from this section accordingly. It is okay to briefly relate a personal experience directly to one of the readings, but personal anecdotes are no substitute for having read, and demonstrating an understanding of, the material.

Organization and Flow (20 percent)—The construction of your paper must make it clear to me what you’re saying. Thus, make sure that your paragraphs are organized in such a way that you build a coherent argument. If you start flying from idea to idea and fail to make a comprehensible argument, then points will be deducted from this section. Thus, you need to be careful—especially in the Response Papers—to not just give me a mechanical list of authors and ideas. Relate them to each other as you proceed through your argument.

General Assessment (20 percent)—I will generally grade this section leniently, since it is the most subjective, but here I will ask myself questions like, “How well has this person anticipated counterarguments to their position?” and, “Have they made the best case that can be made for whatever position they took, within reason?” This is where well-articulated papers that draw heavily from the readings can really mop up.

YOU WILL NOT BE GRADED BASED ON YOUR POSITION. I WILL NOT DEDUCT FOR DISAGREEMENT—ONLY BAD WRITING. My political ideologies are all over the map on a host of issues, but it makes no difference anyway. Students who completely agree with me, and pretty much articulate their positions to be totally in line with mine, but write a bad paper, will get the grade that a bad paper deserves. Conversely, students who think I’m a full-of-it, stuffed-shirt academic with no clue, but write a great paper, will be accordingly graded. In my career, I have given “Ds” to students I liked, and “As” to students I thought were obnoxious—based entirely on their academic performance. There is room for disagreement in this class, as there must be, because we will be discussing some very controversial topics.
Important Note: It is crucial that students not be deceived about the purpose of and guidelines for these written assignments. It will not be enough to just slap together a couple of mediocre papers and expect that this will guarantee your grade will be an “A”. Ask yourself: “How committed and I to getting an “A” in this class?” Under the A-track grading criteria, the paper is simply incorporated into the grading scale. If you write a weak paper, then the grades for that weak papers will be incorporated into your final grade in a fashion according to the grading rules described above. Thus, if you are getting 75 percent on your participation and tests, and you turn in two papers on which you get 75 percent of the possible points, then your grade will be 75 percent, which is a “C”. The point is to introduce an element of risk. If you turn that paper in, it will become part of your grade. This is to avoid students gaming the system by just turning in a bad paper and hoping to get lucky.

Preliminary Examination of Papers and Due Dates: To help students avoid wasting effort on their papers and to maximize their grade return, I will accept first drafts of their papers, and return them with written comments in a timely fashion. The due dates for first drafts are specified in the syllabus below.

GRADING
Assignments:
Class Participation: 10%
Midterm: 35%
Final: 35%
Book Critique: 20%

Grades:
93-100%: A
90-92%: A –
88-89%: B+
83-87: B
80-82%: B-
78-79%: C
73-77%: C+
70-72%: C-
68-69: D+
63-67%: D
60-62%: D-
Below 60 F

COURSE RULES

Behavior: Please be courteous and don’t talk out of turn or otherwise create distractions in class. Most folks are great this way, but there are sometimes a few, regrettable exceptions, so this must be pointed out. Also, TURN OFF YOUR CELL PHONES AND LAPTOPS. The University has a policy on this I will enforce it.
Academic Dishonesty: The vast majority of students would not even dream of cheating, but there are occasionally a very few exceptions, so this must be addressed. I hate cheating. Please, do your own work when writing a paper or taking the midterm or the final. Peeping at others’ answers, looking at notes or cell phones, or taking, is unacceptable. ANY OF THOSE BEHAVIORS CONSTITUTE CHEATING. Violators will fail the assignments in which they cheated and also be reported to the appropriate academic authorities at the University of Nevada, Reno. I have caught cheaters before and it ended badly for them. Cheating is high-risk and low-reward; be smart and don’t do it.

Furthermore, any paper you submit must be your own writing, as per the instructions above.

Disability Accommodation: The University of Nevada, Reno is committed to facilitating students with special educational needs. Please feel free to contact me or the Disability Resource Center on campus.

Attendance: Strictly speaking, attendance is not mandatory, but realistically, it would be imprudent to miss a class, because of its impact on your class participation grade and need to prepare for the essay tests.

INTRODUCTION TO COURSE PERSPECTIVE: Whenever one talks about the “struggle for justice”, one immediately runs two opposite risks. First, and perhaps most common, one risks being dismissed as a “radical”, “bleeding heart”, or “liberal”. Many people in the United States today do not believe that there is a significant basis for any continued, organized “struggle for justice” as such. People in this camp believe that most of the battles for social equality have already been fought and won (e.g., the Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil Rights Act), and that much of the contemporary focus on “social justice” has degenerated into a counterproductive “political correctness”. This perspective should be acknowledged, and will be given its due representation in the readings and discussion in this course.

A second, opposite risk in engaging in a discussion of the “struggle for justice” is that, in the eyes of some, the discussant has not done enough “justice to the struggle”. It is impossible in a college course (and perhaps even over a lifetime) to do justice to the issue of justice. There is not a single religious, racial, ethnic, or gender grouping in the United States that cannot at least make the claim that they have had to “struggle for justice” at some point. Some of these claims are probably more meritorious than others, but deciding which claims to injustice have the most merit is intrinsically part of the struggle itself. (In the pre-Civil War South, many justified the practice of slavery with passages from the New Testament and/or pseudo-scientific arguments about the presumed “inferiority” of the African race. Few in power then would have thought that any “struggle for justice” for African-Americans to be necessary.)

Furthermore, there are numerous social dimensions of such elusive concepts as “equality”, “freedom”, and “justice”. As a result, the one who chooses to discuss (or
teach a course on!) the struggle for justice must choose from among the many aspects and
issues that are relevant to the struggle. This I have attempted to do, but I make no claim
that either the subject offerings from the syllabus, or even my own knowledge of the
matter, are complete.

The African-American experience in the United States and the US justice system is our
focus in this course for a number of reasons. There is the functional reason: To the extent
that I am qualified to teach anything—in an academic capacity—about the struggle for
justice for any historically oppressed group, this subject is it. Suffice it to say that I have
read a lot on the topic, and continue to research the impact of the justice system on
African-Americans. There is also the historically unique situation of African-Americans
that is compelling in its own right—a race brought into slavery, robbed of most cultural
identity and stripped of all power, and yet some of whose descendants have reached the
highest positions of economics, the arts, athletics, and politics, and have made remarkable
contributions to the struggle for justice in the United States.

This invariably begs a question many would be too modest to pose, so I’ll preempt it:

*If this course is about the African-American struggle for justice, why is it being taught by
a white guy?*

The simplest and probably most brutally realistic answer is that, since 2002, the
department needed someone to teach this course. Perhaps more convincingly, I could
argue that the readings I have assigned are thought-provoking in their own right whatever
my background. (I don’t know what it is like to be black in America, obviously, but I do
know this: Every American, at some point in his or her life, should read *The
Autobiography of Malcolm X*.)

But I think there is an even more poignant way to look at this issue. My status as middle
class white male disqualifies me neither as interpreter nor—and this is key—as
participant in the “struggle for justice”. To suggest otherwise is to ignore the crucial
truth that, as an American, I have a vested interest in the creation of a healthy and just
society. It does me no good if millions of my fellow citizens do not share my love of
country or belief in its capacity to render prosperity and happiness. Also, it turns out that
I am a decent person, and I want to see the right thing done by my fellow citizens. And
despite Stanley Nathan Cohen’s (one of our authors) suggestions to the contrary, I am
convinced the vast majority of Americans have this in them, in the end.

The struggle for justice, then, is not the exclusive domain of those who have
disproportionately been the recipients of injustice. Whatever our backgrounds or
identities, we all have a shared interest in building a just society, as well as an ethical
imperative to do so. At the end of the day, understanding the struggle for justice, like the
struggle itself, is an ongoing process that challenges each individual American as much
as it challenges our society as a whole. My hope is that through this short and
preliminary discussion of what I regard to be a crucial issue in our democracy, my
students and I could continue (or begin) to make our own small impact toward “an America worth fighting for.”

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Lecture:** Each class period, I will discuss the points of interest from the readings through class participation and my own discussion. After that I will fill in the “gaps” for particular readings based on the class schedule. It is not possible for me to assign you everything that is “worthy” of being read in this class. Thus, I will assign chapter highlights from recent and prominent books that cover some of the issues that are relevant to the “struggle for justice”, and then describe other, unassigned material by the authors to you through lecture and class participation.

(This schedule is a tentative outline and might be altered at my discretion. Students are responsible to inquire about any schedule changes if they miss a class where a schedule change is announced.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Discussion Number and Title</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12/29/14</td>
<td>#1 Class Intro</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>#2 What is ‘Justice’</td>
<td>Swift</td>
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<td>12/30/14</td>
<td>#3 African American Anger Part 1</td>
<td>Haley (Malcom X)</td>
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<td>#4 Perpetuating Inequality Part 1</td>
<td>Loury</td>
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<td>#5 Perpetuating Inequality Part 2</td>
<td>Harford</td>
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<td>12/31/14</td>
<td>#6 Culture and Inequality Part 1</td>
<td>Cohen</td>
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<td>#7 Culture and Inequality Part 2</td>
<td>Sowell</td>
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<td>#8 Culture and Inequality Part 3</td>
<td>Steinhorn and Diggs-Brown</td>
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<td>NO CLASS NEW YEARS HOLIDAY</td>
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<td>1/5/14</td>
<td>#9 African American Responsibility Pt. 1</td>
<td>Steele</td>
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<td>#10 A Place for Race</td>
<td>Guinier and Torres</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Breather</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/6/14</td>
<td>#11 Video and Discussion</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Review for Midterm</td>
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<td><strong>NONE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1/7/15</td>
<td>#12 Race and Justice in History</td>
<td>Browne-Marshall</td>
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<td>1/8/15</td>
<td>#13 Social Structure and Crime</td>
<td>Reiman</td>
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<td>#14 African American Responsibility Pt. 2</td>
<td>Elder</td>
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<td>1/12/15</td>
<td>#15 Drugs and Death</td>
<td>Walker, Spohn, and Delone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Session Content</td>
<td>Presenter</td>
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<td>1/13/15</td>
<td>#16 How Important is Race?</td>
<td>Wilbanks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>#17 African American Anger Part 2</td>
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<td>#18 Video Excerpts: Menace 2 Society</td>
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<td>#19 A Legitimate Justice System</td>
<td>Cole</td>
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<td>1/14/14</td>
<td>#20 How Much Progress?</td>
<td>Alexander</td>
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<td>#21 Discuss Final Paper Drafts</td>
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<td>1/15/15</td>
<td>#22 Video/Discussion: Central Park Case</td>
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<td>Prep for Final</td>
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<td><strong>FINAL</strong>*</td>
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*For the midterm and final, bring No 2 Pencils, Scantrons, and pens if you prefer to write your essay answers that way.*