

# Race and Democracy in Urban Education Policy

Professor Jonathan Collins, Ph.D.

[Jonathan\\_Collins@brown.edu](mailto:Jonathan_Collins@brown.edu)

Class Time: Tues. & Thurs. 6:40pm-8pm

Office Hours: Tuesdays 3-5pm & by Appointment

## Course Overview

This course will provide a broad introduction to contemporary education policy centered on issues of race/ethnicity and ideas of democracy. Students will begin by engaging theories of democracy (representative, pluralist, participatory, deliberative) and theories of race (racial formation, critical race theory, racial solidarity, symbolic racism).

The course will then transition to analyzing major education policy debates such as: school desegregation, school finance, teacher evaluation, curriculum development standards, accountability, educator policies (collective bargaining, certification), special education, and the current policy landscape. The course will include final group projects where students apply the theoretical concepts to strategies for school reform, with the neighboring school districts as cases.

Specifically, we will focus on the following questions:

- 1) Democracy and education are supposed to be inextricably linked. Education is central to creating democratic citizens, and a strong democracy should produce an equitable education system. So, to what extent are these expectations true? What makes an urban school district democratic? What are the different types of democracy? What impedes on a district's ability to be democratic? What aspects of democracy are most useful? What aspects of democracy make reform more difficult? How can we begin to re-imagine urban policy reforms through democratic strategies?
- 2) The story of the U.S. education system has been the story of racial and gender politics. Schools were originally designed to only educate children who are white and male, and this was done strategically for political purposes. The modern education system attempts to reconcile the past with the demographics of the present, but racial inequity persists. What are all of the reasons why? How exactly does race foster educational inequity? What are the different aspects of race that generates obstacles for people of color and privilege for whites? What does racial equity, in the schooling context, actually look like? How does race intersect with class, gender, and sexuality? What will it take to achieve educational equity?
- 3) What are the major education-policy-reforms being implemented (or at least discussed) by state education leaders and leaders of urban school districts? What type of evidence is there of the potential effectiveness of these reforms? How do

we actually go about implementing new evidence-based reforms? How can centering theories of democracy and race help us develop strategies for implementing policy that generates long-term equity?

### **Course Hour Requirements**

The total of in-class hours and out-of-class work for all full-credit courses at Brown is approximately 180 hours for a semester. In this course, students will spend 40 hours in class. Required reading is expected to take up approximately 10 hours per week (70 hours). In addition, writing implementation proposals, working on team-based project, and conducting research on policy reports will take approximately 70 hours over the course of the term.

### **Assignments and Grading**

The final grade will be based on: 1) class participation (15%), 2 short implementation proposals (25%), a team implementation project (30%), and a final paper (30%).

Class participation will be determined by a combination of classroom attendance and participation in seminars. Students are allowed two unexcused absences during the semester. Beyond the two, all absences will count against the participation grade. A third absence will result in the final grading dropping a full letter.

The course will also require two short policy implementation proposals. Proposal 1 will be a short paper outlining your idea for developing a new implementation strategy. You will make an argument for ways to reform a specific U.S. urban school district (e.g. Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Providence, New Haven, Boston). Describe the way that the district currently goes about implementing policy, and present your idea for how to improve the process. Clearly identify what makes that's process better (e.g. more democratic? More equitable?) The proposal should be 3-5 pages in length (double-spaced).

Proposal 2 will focus on a specific policy. Students are to identify a policy that a specific urban district could implement to better serve the student population. The proposal should include evidence on the effectiveness of the policy and details of how the policy would be implemented (At what level of government? What is political support is needed? How will its effectiveness be determined?) The proposal should be 3-5 pages in length (double-spaced).

For the team project, students will sign-up for group. Each group will be charged with studying a nearby governing institution (Providence Public Schools, Central Falls Public Schools, East Providence Public Schools, Rhode Island Department of Education). Groups must collect data on the school district using a combination of the following two methods: 1) board meeting observations (can be general meetings and committee meetings), 2) interviews of a district officials (board member, superintendent, district

office employee, teacher, principal, etc.) or stakeholders (parents, students, district residents). Groups should mine at least three observations (e.g. 3 meeting observations; 3 interviews; 2 interviews and 1 meeting observation; 2 meeting observations and 1 interview). Groups are to identify a policy debate happening amongst the school board and evaluate the implementation process. Is it clear what policy (or policies) the board is considering? How democratic is their process of crafting the policy? Is there a discernable commitment to equity? Groups should then offer suggestions on how institutions could improve the implementation process. What specific mechanisms could be put in place to make it more democratic and/or more equitable? Why the specific mechanisms you propose? What will be the indicators of whether or not your new process is successful?

For the final paper, students will put together a plan for implementing a specific policy in a specific urban district. The paper will highlight a policy, bring in literature on the effectiveness of the policy, and describe how the policy needs to be implemented in a specific urban district (taking seriously questions of democracy and racial equity). The final paper should be 10-15 pages in length (double-spaced).

## **Reading Assignments and Discussion Topics**

### **September 5**

#### **Overview and Introductions**

### **September 10**

#### **Theories of Democracy I**

Macey, Jonathan R. "[Representative democracy](#)." *Harv. JL & Pub. Pol'y* 16 (1993): 49.

Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. "Fateful Alliances." *How Democracies Die*. Broadway Books, 2018.

### **September 12**

Trounstein, Jessica. "[Representation and accountability in cities](#)." *Annual Review of Political Science* 13 (2010): 407-423.

Lupia, Arthur, and John G. Matsusaka. "[Direct democracy: new approaches to old questions](#)." *Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci.* 7 (2004): 463-482.

## **September 17**

### **Theories of Democracy II**

Gutmann, Amy, and Dennis Thompson. *Why deliberative democracy?*. Princeton University Press, 2009. [Chapter 1 only].

## **September 19**

Astor, Maggie. "[What Is Democratic Socialism? Whose Version Are We Talking About?](#)" *New York Times*.

Guinier, Lani. "[More Democracy](#)." U. Chi. Legal F. (1995): 1.

## **September 24**

### **Theories of Race and Difference I**

Lisa-Cole, Nikki. "[What Is Racial Formation Theory?](#)" *ThoughtCo*.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo, and David Dietrich. "[The sweet enchantment of color-blind racism in Obamerica](#)." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 634, no. 1 (2011): 190-206.

## **September 26**

Harris-Perry, Melissa. "Crooked Room." *Sister Citizen*. Yale University Press. 2011.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. "[Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color](#)." *Stan. L. Rev.* 43 (1990): 1241.

"[Do School Dress Codes Unfairly Target Girls of Color?](#)" *Governing*

## **October 1**

### **Theories of Race and Difference II**

Hill, Jane. H. "Language in White Racism: An Overview." *The Everyday Language of White Racism*.

Tesler, Michael. "[Economic anxiety isn't driving racial resentment. Racial resentment is driving economic anxiety.](#)" *Washington Post*

**October 3**     **[Proposal 1 Due by Start of class – submit via email]**

Case, Kim A., and Annette Hemmings. "[Distancing strategies: White women preservice teachers and antiracist curriculum.](#)" *Urban Education* 40, no. 6 (2005): 606-626.  
School Funding

**October 8**

**Major Federal Policies**

"Executive Summary of the No Child Left Behind Act." *United States Department of Education*.

"[Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as Amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act-Accountability and State Plans.](#)" *Federal Register*. [executive summary only].

Wong, Kenneth K. "Federalism revised: The promise and challenge of the No Child Left Behind Act." *Public Administration Review* 68 (2008): S175-S185.

McGuinn, Patrick. "Stimulating reform: Race to the Top, competitive grants and the Obama education agenda." *Educational Policy* 26, no. 1 (2012): 136-159.

**October 10**

**State and Local Power**

Briffault, Richard. "The local school district in American law." *Besieged: School boards and the future of education politics* (2005): 24-55.

Ayscue, Jennifer B., and Gary Orfield. "[School district lines stratify educational opportunity by race and poverty.](#)" *Race and Social Problems* 7, no. 1 (2015): 5-20.

**October 15**

**Desegregation?**

[“Brown V. Board of Education Decision.”](#) *Legal Information Institute*. Cornell University.

Hannah- Jones, Nikole. [“It Was Never About Busing.”](#) *New York Times*

Trounstein, Jessica. “A Theory of Segregation by Design.” *Segregation by Design: Local Politics and Inequality in American Cities*.

## **October 17**

### **Applied Reading**

[“The City that Believed in Desegregation.”](#) *Atlantic*.

[“Segregating N.Y. Schools was his Top Priority: What Happened?”](#) *New York Times*

## **October 22**

### **Teachers**

Moe, Terry. “The Problem of Union Power.” *Special Interest: Teachers’ Unions and America’s Public Schools*.

Collins, Jonathan. “Do Teachers Want Democracy? Deliberative Culture and Teachers’ Evaluations of Schools.” *Urban Affairs Review*. (2019).

Jackson, Kirabo. C. “The Full Measure of a Teacher.” *Education Next*.

[“Does Teacher Diversity Matter in Student Learning?”](#) *New York Times*

## **October 24**

### **Applied Reading**

[“Assembly OKs Bills That Would Bring Change For Wisconsin Teachers, Classrooms.”](#) *Wisconsin Public Media*.

## **October 29**

### **Curriculum and Instruction**

Burris, Carol Corbett, Ed Wiley, Kevin Welner, and John Murphy. "Accountability, Rigor, and De-Tracking: Achievement Effects of Embracing a Challenging Curriculum as a Universal Good for all Students." *Teachers College Record* 110, no. 3 (2008): 571-607.

[“Diversity in Schools Must Include Curriculum.”](#) *The Century Foundation*.

[“Making Dual-Language Schools Work for English-Learners, Too.”](#) *The Century Foundation*.

Levinson, Meira. “The Civic Empowerment Gap.” *No citizen left behind*. Vol. 13. Harvard University Press, 2012.

### **October 31**

#### **Applied Reading**

[“Forget reading and math — Carranza wants focus on racial privilege, activism.”](#) *New York Post*.

### **November 5**

#### **Testing and Accountability**

Kelleghan, Thomas, George F. Madaus, and Peter W. Airasian. “The Effects of Standardized Testing: Controversy and Research.” *The Effects of Standardized Testing*. . Vol. 1. Springer Science & Business Media, 2012.

[“Testing, Testing 1-2-3.”](#) *Education Next*.

[“Is It Time to Kill Annual Testing?”](#) *Education Week*.

Jencks, Christopher, and Meredith Phillips. "[The black-white test scope gap: Why it persists and what can be done.](#)" *The Brookings Review* 16, no. 2 (1998): 24-27.

### **November 7 [Proposal 2 Due by Start of class – submit via email]**

#### **Applied Reading**

[“There are better ways to assess students than with high-stakes standardized tests. These schools are using them with success.”](#) *Washington Post*.

### **November 12**

#### **Social Emotional-Learning**

Durlak, Joseph A., Roger P. Weissberg, Allison B. Dymnicki, Rebecca D. Taylor, and Kriston B. Schellinger. "The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions." *Child development* 82, no. 1 (2011): 405-432.

[“The Psychological Approach to Educating Kids.”](#) *Atlantic*.

[“The good news: Social-emotional learning is hot. The bad news: Some of it is giving cognition a bad name.”](#) *Washington Post*.

[“Social-Emotional Learning Won't Happen Without a Culturally Relevant Start Wrap-Around Services.”](#) *Education Week*.

## **November 14**

### **Applied Reading**

[“City to expand Social-Emotional Learning and Restorative Justice across all DOE schools.”](#) *Queens Courier*.

## **November 19**

### **English-Language Learners**

Gersten, Russell, and Scott Baker. "[What we know about effective instructional practices for English-language learners.](#)" *Exceptional children* 66, no. 4 (2000): 454-470.

[“Dual Language Immersion Doesn’t Work If English-Speaking Students Are Given Preference.”](#) *The 74*.

## **November 21**

### **Applied Reading**

[“This Math Program Helped Students Blow State Test Scores Out of the Water.”](#) *EdSurge*.

## **November 26**

**[Final Paper Proposal Due by Beginning of Class via email]**

### **Bullying & Safety**

Sharp, Sonia, and Peter Smith. “The Problem of School Bullying.” *School bullying: Insights and perspectives*. Routledge, 2002.

[“Armored school doors, bulletproof whiteboards and secret snipers: Billions are being spent to protect children from school shootings. Does any of it work?”](#) *Washington Post*

[“L.G.B.T. Students in Oregon Were Bullied and Forced to Read Bible, Report Says.”](#) *New York Times*.



## **December 5**

### **Alternative School Models**

“[A Life Lesson on Civics](#).” *Education Next*.

“[LeBron James Opens a School and Speaks Democracy to Power](#).” *Education Week*.

“[Union hopes to show and tell](#).” *The Boston Globe*.

“[At Greensboro Freedom School, each day starts with a dance](#).” *News & Record*.

## **December 10**

### **Group Presentations**

## **December 12**

### **Group Presentations**

**\* Final Paper Due By December 15 at 11:59pm**