

Philosophy 475  
**Racial Justice: Tommie Shelby's *Dark Ghettos***

Spring 2023  
Amherst College

Professor: Rafeeq Hasan  
Email: rhasan@amherst.edu  
Meeting: Th 2:30-5:00pm

Office: 209 Cooper House  
Office Hours: Tu 1:00-2:00pm; W 3:00-5:00pm  
Class Room: Cooper House 201

### **Course Description**

Does philosophy have anything to contribute to the problem of deeply disadvantaged neighborhoods? Social scientists have long studied concentrations of poverty and racial segregation in the United States. Drawing on this body of literature, Tommie Shelby's book, *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform* (Harvard, 2016), asks: What is racial justice and what does it demand with respect to the urban poor?

We will engage Shelby's arguments as a way of thinking more broadly about racism. Difficult questions of political morality will be central to our discussions. Should governments integrate neighborhoods? Is crime ever justified? Do the oppressed have duties to help overthrow their own oppression? Alongside *Dark Ghettos* we will read key sources for Shelby's thinking, including sociological work on race and racism, and classics of political thought in the Black radical, Marxist, and liberal egalitarian traditions.

Students will actively participate in discussion with four visitors speakers over the course of the term about their recent work on racial justice and injustice: Myisha Cherry, Erin Kelly, Vanessa Wills, and Shelby himself.

### **Required Text [Available at Amherst Books]**

Tommie Shelby, *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform* (Harvard, 2016). ISBN: 9780674984073

Other required readings will be made available via Moodle. Please bring hard copies of the relevant readings to class.

### **Assignments/Grading:**

Midterm Essay 1200-1400 words (~4-5 pages)	Due: 3/10	30%
Final Essay 2000-2500 Words (~8-10 pages)	Due: 5/15	50%
Class participation (including 11 weekly reading responses)		20%

### **Policies/Requirements:<sup>1</sup>**

#### **1. Academic Honesty**

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<sup>1</sup> Some of what follows is borrowed from syllabi from two friends and colleagues, Katia Vavova (Mt. Holyoke) and James Wilson (University of Chicago).

According to the Honor Code's Statement of Intellectual Responsibility, "the College considers it a violation of the requirements of intellectual responsibility to submit work that is not one's own or otherwise to subvert the conditions under which academic work is performed by oneself or by others."<sup>2</sup>

I expect you will adhere to the Code. Therefore, everything you turn in should be *your own work* and *in your own words*. If your discussions of class topics with your friends, parents, etc., are helpful, cite them. Credit all sources appropriately, even (especially) Wikipedia and anything from your Googling bounty.

**Use of generative text programs (like ChatGPT) to actually write your papers constitutes plagiarism. I reserve the right to submit any written work to random testing for plagiarism.**

Please also consult the information contained in 'Intellectual Responsibility and Plagiarism' on the Dean of Students website: <https://www.amherst.edu/offices/student-affairs/community-standards/intellectual-responsibility-and-plagiarism>. Particularly helpful is:

<https://www.amherst.edu/offices/student-affairs/community-standards/intellectual-responsibility-and-plagiarism/using-sources>

If questions remain about what constitutes academic honesty or dishonesty, please ask me.

**The penalty for plagiarism in my course is failure, absolutely no exceptions. Don't risk it.**

## 2. Deadlines

Late policy: If you find that you are unable to complete an assignment by the deadline because of a crisis or emergency, you must contact me no later than 2 days before the due date. I MAY be able to grant a slight extension. **Work that is submitted late and without an extension will be marked down .3 (see #10 for grading scale) for every day of lateness. This means that even one day of lateness turns a B+ into a B.**

**Assignments received late may not receive full comments.** This is not about punishing you for getting in late work. It's about enabling me to schedule my time.

Finally, keep in mind first, that I am here to help. Get in touch if you're worried about anything. Second, when it comes to assignments, late > never > plagiarized.

## 3. Communication

Important announcements and assignments will sometimes be communicated to you via email, usually through Moodle. It is your responsibility to make sure you are up to date with the latest news. Get in the habit of checking your email at least once daily and don't miss class. If you do miss class, check with your classmates.

Of course, you are always welcome to email me with any questions. But please keep in mind that there are a lot more of you than there are of me and modern email demands are crazy-making. To stay sane:

- I do not answer emails in the evening (after 5pm Eastern) or on weekends.
- I respond as promptly as I can, but not always on the same day.
- I can't guarantee a response to emails about assignments that are due within 24 hours of the email.

These rules are here so that I can respond promptly to questions that do need to be answered via email.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/provost\\_dean\\_faculty/fph/policies/sir](https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/provost_dean_faculty/fph/policies/sir)

#### 4. Attendance

Attending class, on time, and well-rested is a crucial aspect of engagement with this course. I will take attendance at the *beginning* of every class.

Given that we are still in a global pandemic, however, it is important for your well-being, and the well-being of your classmates, that you stay home if you are not feeling well or need to isolate. If you need to miss class because of illness, family emergency, or some other pressing matter, please let me know by email before class begins. Excused absences will not negatively affect your participation grade, but you do need to get caught up with the material.

***I couldn't attend class. Did I miss anything important?*** Of course you did! To learn what you missed, contact your classmates, check Moodle for handouts, and make sure you get caught up. *After* you've done all that, feel free to come see me in office hours with questions and comments on the readings.

Things happen. **But you are expected to attend every class and all three evening lectures.**

#### 5. Participation

In order to get full credit for participation, you must also regularly *participate* in class. Be ready to explore ideas critically, boldly, and creatively with others.

Your participation grade turns on the quality, not the quantity, of your contributions, and the extent to which you exhibit the respect and care necessary to promote good discussion. Contributions do not have to be in the form of “answers” or completed “theories” about a text or position—thoughtful questions are highly encouraged, and you will certainly not be penalized for a spirit of humility. While good contributions obviously vary immensely, I especially value comments and questions that pay close attention to the relevant text and those that build on, and reflect attention to, others' contributions.

***Why do I have to participate in class?*** Philosophy is a communal activity, and you've chosen to join our community this semester. Don't talk just for the sake of talking, but also don't wait for brilliance or insight to hit you before raising your hand. Shy? Nervous? Me too. Participation is more difficult for some of us than others, but writing papers, understanding the readings—these too are more difficult for some of us than others. And all of these are skills we must work on. If you have trouble speaking in class, please see me and we will work on it together—just as we would on any other aspect of the class that you find difficult.

#### 6. Office Hours

*Office hours:* I will hold office hours from **1:00-2:00pm on Tuesdays** and **3:00-5:00pm on Wednesdays** (EST). To meet with me, please schedule a 20-minute appointment at:

[calendly.com/rafeeq-hasan/](https://calendly.com/rafeeq-hasan/)

You can schedule up to 10 days in advance. Since there are many more of you than there are of me, I ask that you please not schedule more than one meeting with per week unless we've made prior arrangements. **My office hours will fill up, so try to book at least one week in advance.**

Office Hours will be in person UNLESS the global health situation and/or College policy around masking changes. If necessary, they will be moved to Zoom.

I sincerely hope you schedule an office hours appointment with me! Just a few minutes of one-on-one discussion can often help clarify a lot of issues. Please don't feel as if you have to have something brilliant to say to schedule an appointment. You are not intruding by coming by.

***Can we meet outside office hours?*** If you can't make my office hours because of a class or work conflict, or if all the spots are full, then email early in the week with a list of times when you are free to meet and I will *try* my best to find an alternative.

## 7. Reading

This is a course about making, analyzing, and evaluating arguments. All of the readings are dense, and some are written in outdated language. Leave yourself ample time to complete the readings.

Take the reading process seriously: read actively, doing your best to think about, and respond to, the works you are reading. Active annotation (e.g., underlining, tabbing, note-taking) will help you track down important passages when you come back to them later, such as in class or when writing a paper.

Some reading advice: **1. I will send out reading questions for almost every session. Use these to help focus your attention on what is most important.** 2. If you encounter a passage that you don't understand, re-read it a few times. If you still don't understand it, pass over it! Try to get a sense of the whole instead of getting lost in the part. 3. Jot down any questions or confusions you have about any particular passage or argument and raise them in class. (Note: if you're nervous about speaking in class, having a prewritten question on hand can help.) 4. Skim over the reading again after class discussion. It should be much easier to understand at this point. 5. If you're still unclear about something get help: ask other classmates, schedule office hours, etc.

## 8. Weekly Reading Responses

11 times this semester you will be given a short response assignment on the week's readings. The assignment will be posted to Moodle by Tuesday @ 9pm for class on Thursday. Your 200-250 word response (~1 page, double-spaced, 12 pt. font) should be organized like a mini-essay. In other words, there should be a central claim, distinct paragraphs with topic sentences, etc.

**You must bring your printed out response to class on Thursday. For the weeks we have visiting speakers, you must also email me your response by 9pm on Wednesday.**

I will not provide written comments on your responses, though I will read them. They will play an integral role in class discussion. Although I will not grade the responses, if you are not putting forth your best effort, this will adversely affect your class participation grade. Putting forth your best effort does not mean providing the "right" answer. Rather, it involves your: 1. engaging with the text; 2. explaining rather than merely summarizing, and 3. organizing your response in a clear manner (e.g., paragraphs, topic sentences, etc.).

## 9. Written Work

***When will my work be graded?*** I aim to return work within two weeks of the date submitted. I realize it's hard to wait, but it's also hard to grade. I want to give your work the care and attention it deserves.

***Can I send you a draft of my essay to read?*** I'm happy to help you with your essay, but I don't read complete drafts. Feel free to schedule office hours with questions, an outline, a paragraph you've written, an argument you're considering, etc. We can talk through your ideas and questions. You can also visit the

Writing Center with drafts. This is a great resource. To schedule an appointment, visit

<https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/support/writingcenter/makeappointment>

***What sources should I use for writing my paper?*** For the midterm essay, you ***do not*** need to read any additional material beyond the assigned reading. However, if you do consult outside sources, you must remember to *always* cite your sources. The final essay will involve a research component.

As for my expectations on writing, David Foster Wallace put it well in his own syllabus:

“If you want to improve your academic writing and are willing to put extra time and effort into it, I am a good teacher to have. But if you’re used to whipping off papers the night before they’re due, running them quickly through the computer’s Spellchecker, handing them in full of high-school errors and sentences that make no sense, and having the professor accept them “because the ideas are good” or something, please be informed that **I draw no distinction between the quality of one’s ideas and the quality of those ideas’ verbal expression**, and that I will not accept sloppy, rough-draftish, or semiliterate college writing. Again, I am absolutely not kidding. If you won’t or can’t devote significant time and attention to your written work, I urge you to drop... and save us both a lot of grief.”<sup>3</sup>

## 10. Grading

You will be given both a number grade and a letter grade for each assignment. Only the numerical grade is taken into account in determining your final grade. Numerical grades correspond to letter grades as follows:

A 10-9.5; A- 9.4-9.0; B+ 8.9-8.7; B 8.6-8.3; B- 8.2-8.0; C 7.9 or below.

## 11. Electronic Devices in the Class

All devices with an ON/OFF switch—laptops, phones, etc.—must be switched off during class, unless they are serving a medical purpose. The empirical evidence is pretty clear that people don’t learn as well with laptops, phones, and other gadgets in the classroom. Plus, you won’t need it. You’ll be expected to join in the discussion, not keep a written record of everything that is said. I’ll often provide handouts that summarize the main points, and you will have brought the relevant readings. If for some reason you really do need to bring some technology to class, come see me.

## 12. Accommodations

This course is open to all students who meet the academic requirements for participation. Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should make an appointment to speak with an Accessibility Services Staff Member. In order to receive reasonable accommodations for a disability, you must register with the *Office of Accessibility Services* at Amherst College (even if you are a 5-College student). (<https://www.amherst.edu/offices/student-affairs/accessibility-services>). This office will provide a letter describing the appropriate accommodations. Once you have this letter, set up an appointment with me and we will discuss how to accommodate you.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://alasophia.blogspot.com/2008/09/david-foster-wallaces-syllabus.html>

### 13. Summary of Requirements

1. Don't plagiarize.
2. Do all required readings. Bring readings to class in hard copy.
3. Do 11 reading responses. Bring printed copies to class.
4. Participate in class discussion.
5. Write two essays.

#### Reading Schedule

*Note: This schedule is not a contract. It is entirely provisional. We may speed up, slow down, skip readings, or add readings, depending on where our discussion leads and the interests of members of the class.*

#### Week 1:      **“Rethinking the Problem of the Ghetto”**

Th 2/2:       Shelby, *Dark Ghettos*, “Introduction” (pp. 1-15)<sup>4\*</sup>

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (1971), sections 1-4 (pp. 3-22)\*

Elijah Anderson, “The Iconic Ghetto” (2012)

Daniel Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (1965) (pp. 1-14, 29-32)  
[aka the “Moynihan Report”]

*The Unmute Podcast*, Myisha Cherry and Shelby discuss *Dark Ghettos*:

<https://unmutetalk.podbean.com/e/episode-023-tommie-shelby-on-dark-ghettos/>

RR #1 Due in class

#### Week 2:      **“Injustice”**

Th 2/9:       *Dark Ghettos*, chapter 1 (pp. 19-48)\*

Charles Mills, “Dark Mores: Some Comments on Shelby’s *Dark Ghettos*” (2022)\*

Optional: Iris Marion Young, “Political Responsibility and Structural Injustice” (2003)<sup>5</sup>

RR #2 Due in class

#### Week 3:      **“Community” & “Culture”**

Th 2/16:      *Dark Ghettos*, chapters 2-3 (pp. 49-116)\*

Elizabeth Anderson, “The Future of Racial Integration” (2008)\*

Anderson, Review of *Dark Ghettos* in *Mind* (2018)

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<sup>4</sup> Please bring any text marked with a \* to class in hard copy.

<sup>5</sup> You need not read every optional reading. But your final paper must engage with **at least two** of the optional readings.

Optional: Derek Hyra, *Race, Politics, and Class in the Cappuccino City* (2017), ch. 4

Alex Madva, "Integration, Community, and the Medical Model of Social Science" (2019)

RR#3 Due in class

**Week 4: Discussion with Vanessa Wills (George Washington University)**

W 2/23: RR#4 Due Wednesday @ 9pm

Th 2/23: Readings TBD; Discussion with Wills via Zoom 2:30-4:00; 4:00-5:00 Review

MIDTERM ESSAY ASSIGNED

**Week 5: "Reproduction" & "The Family"**

Th 3/2: *Dark Ghettos*, chapters 4-5 (pp. 119-174)\*

Emmalon Davis, "Procreative Justice Reconceived" (2022)\*

Japa Pallikkathayil, Comments on Shelby on the Family (unpublished)\*

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act Of 1996 [aka: the "Welfare Reform Act"]

RR#5 Due in Class

**Week 6: "Work"**

Th 3/9: *Dark Ghettos*, chapter 6 (pp. 175-200)\*

Elijah Anderson, *Streetwise* (1992), Introduction & Ch. 2

Optional: Lucas Stanczyk, "Productive Justice" (2012)

F 3/10: MIDTERM ESSAY DUE @ 9pm EST

**3/13-3/19 Spring break: start thinking about final paper topics!**

**Week 7 "Crime" and "Punishment"**

Th 3/23 *Dark Ghettos*, chapters 7-8 (pp. 203-251)\*

Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, sections 18-19 (pp. 108-117)\*

Jeffrie Murphy, "Marxism and Retribution" (1973)\*

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (2012), ch. 1

Optional: Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003)

Shelby, *The Idea of Prison Abolition* (2022), Introduction & Chapter 1

Shelby, *The Idea of Prison Abolition* (*New Books* Podcast):  
<https://newbooksnetwork.com/the-idea-of-prison-abolition>

RR#6 Due in class

**Week 8:** **Guest Visit: Tommie Shelby (Harvard University). Note: class meets from 2:30-4:00**

W 3/29: RR#7 Due Wednesday @ 9pm

Th 3/30: No new reading: discussion with Shelby

Lecture: Shelby, “The Idea of Prison Abolition: Slavery and its Legacy” 5:00-6:30pm (Pruyne)

**Week 9:** **“Impure Dissent”**

Th 4/6: *Dark Ghettos*, chapter 9 & Epilogue (pp. 252-284)\*

Adolph Reed Jr., “Posing as Politics” (2001)\*

Michele Moody-Adams, *Making Space for Justice* (2022), Intro. and ch. 4 (pp. 1-10; 117-155)\*

Bernard Boxill’s Review of *Dark Ghettos* in the Journal of Philosophy (2018)

Optional: Thomas Hill, Jr. “Symbolic Protest and Calculated Silence” (1979)

Forrest Stuart, *Ballad of the Bullet* (2020), Preface & ch. 1

RR#8 Due in class

**Week 10:** **Critical Reflections on Shelby**

Th 4/13: Hayward, Threadcraft, Lebron, Shelby, Symposium on *Dark Ghettos* in Political Theory (2019)\*

Michael Dawson and Emily Katzenstein, “Articulated Darkness: White Supremacy, Patriarchy, and Capitalism in Shelby’s *Dark Ghettos*” (2019)\*

RR#9 Due in class

**Week 11:** **Guest Visit: Myisha Cherry (Riverside). Note: class meets from 2:30-4:00**

W 4/19: RR# 10 due by Wednesday @ 9pm



Th 4/20: Cherry, *The Case for Rage* (2021), Intro. and Ch. 1 (pp. 1-32)

Lecture: Cherry, “The Misuses of Anger: Audre Lorde, Self-Hatred, and the Anger it Fuels” 5:00-6:30pm ((Pruyne)

**Week 12:** **Guest Visit: Erin Kelly (Tufts). Note: class meets from 2:30-4:00**

M 4/24: FINAL ESSAY PROPOSAL DUE @ 9pm EST

W 4/26: RR# 11 due by Wednesday @ 9pm

Th 4/27: Reading TBD

Lecture: Kelly, “Restorative Justice” 5:00-6:30pm ((Pruyne)

**Week 13:** **Your Final Essay Projects!**

Th 5/4: Essay Workshops (schedule tbd)

**Finals Week:**

W 5/15: **FINAL ESSAY DUE @ 9pm (NO EXCEPTIONS)**