Panel One

Jim Crow Riding High: The Latest Assaults on African-American Voting Rights
Prof. Richard K. Scher
Dept. of Political Science

The aftermath of the shooting of Trayvon Martin raises serious issues about a possible double standard between the enforcement of civil rights for African-Americans and white Americans. This paper discusses two key voting rights – hence, civil rights - enforcement issues, voter suppression and disenfranchisement. While the 1965 Voting Rights Act guarantees the right to vote to all qualified Americans, there is substantial evidence that this right is often denied minorities. It has included strenuous efforts to suppress the black vote. How extensive is this effort, and what effect did suppression have on recent elections, including the Presidential election of 2012? Legislative districting can create “functional disenfranchisement” for African-Americans, by which ostensibly they retain the right to vote, but the meaning and instrumentality of that vote is rendered null and void. To what extent did the 2010 round of redistricting in Florida and other states promote functional disenfranchisement of African-Americans, the effect of which could be to minimize their voice in and impact on electoral politics?

“Dr.” George Zimmerman: Racial Profiling in Medicine
Kevin Ahmaad Jenkins, Ph.D. student
Dept. of Health Services Research, Management & Policy

The alleged profiling of Trayvon Martin spawned a national debate about racism and legal power. While many believe racism is an issue of the past, racial profiling dangerously influences many factions of the health care industry. Science often justifies racial stigmas through race-based medicine and disparities research. From the past to the present, race characterizes a dual existence in medicine. Scholars have widely debated racism’s presence in this approach. Institutional racism in the health care industry spans centuries and stretches. Medical education historically accepted the premise of Black inferiority. Today the legal contradictions within the American constitutional framework often ignore the reality and repercussions of racial profiling in medicine. This paper synthesizes the literature on how the law, medical institutions, and societal attitudes of racism bleed into medicine.

Racism in a Black White Binary: On the Reaction to Trayvon Martin’s Death
Prof. Peter Westmoreland
Dept. of Philosophy

Some philosophers have contended that racism necessarily involves a binary structure. In the United States, the binary is coded in terms of Blacks and Whites and functions in part in this way: it describes violence as racist only if committed by whites against blacks and prescribes that all such violence is potentially racist. This concept operated during the immediate aftermath of Trayvon Martin’s death in both allegations of racism without strong evidence and assertions against George Zimmerman’s being white that were intended to protect him. While perhaps no racism was involved in Martin’s death, we do well to remember that racism takes many forms. I contend that a non-binary conceptualization of racism can better locate racism as well as the voices of victims, which may aid our pursuit of justice in cases like Martin’s: I recommend we adopt policies that approach this end.
Racial socialization and fear of crime  
Prof. Jodi Lane & Ashley Kuhn (Ph.D. student)  
Dept. of Sociology and Criminology & Law  

Several studies have found a link between ethnocentric attitudes and fear of crime, where negative attitudes toward other races are associated with fear of crime. In the literature on fear, this is referred to as subcultural diversity. It may be that people are socialized to fear other racial and ethnic groups and that this will impact how they respond to stressful situations. That is, if people have a heightened fear of people who look different than they do, some may be more likely to respond to perceived threats with violence in an effort to protect themselves. In this paper, we consider the idea that racial socialization and fear of crime might have played a part in the killing of Trayvon Martin. Specifically, using a sample of undergraduate students, we will examine the presence of parental racial socialization (cultural socialization, preparation for bias, and promotion of mistrust) and its impact on fear of crime, comparing these attitudes by race and gender. We will then examine how these factors impact responses in a situational scenario similar to the Trayvon Martin case.

Trayvon Martin and the International Press  
Prof. Michael Leslie & Stania Antoine (Ph.D. student)  
College of Journalism and Communications  

Just as international coverage of the Emmett Till case in 1955 marshaled domestic support for the civil rights movement, international coverage of the Trayvon Martin murder focused attention on the disgraceful mishandling of the Martin’s murder case, spurring international, national and local public protests, and ultimately forcing the indictment of his killer. This paper examines the international discourse generated around the Martin affair and argues that such discourse widened domestic discourse regarding the murder, transforming the murder of yet another black youth into a referendum on the functioning of the American criminal justice system and the myth of the American ‘post racial’ society. We examine international press coverage leading up to the killer’s indictment, asking the following question: What perspective did the international press take? What issues did it foreground? Finally, how can communication research empower social justice movements by highlighting the important role international press and opinion play in forwarding domestic criminal justice reforms?

Half-Baked: Weed, Race, and the Demonization of Trayvon Martin  
Alex Tepperman, Ph.D. student  
Dept. of History  

Following Trayvon Martin’s shooting death, numerous right-leaning pundits placed responsibility for the incident upon the victim, portraying Martin as a dangerous, threatening hoodlum. The Neo-Nazi website Stormfront.com, seizing on Martin’s recent suspension from school for marijuana possession, was a particularly vigorous proponent of this view, leveling numerous false accusations about Martin’s past as a drug dealer. This paper will investigate Stormfront’s success in convincing “mainstream” conservative media outlets, including BusinessInsider.com and Twitchy.com, to pick up a story which, though quickly debunked, has maintained a great deal of popularity online. The successful labeling of the victim as a “deviant” shows, quite clearly, Americans’ hypocritical views on the issue of marijuana possession. What’s more, given its wildly disproportionate and inequitable affects on the African-American community, it comes as no surprise that the nation’s longtime War on Drugs has fostered ambivalent, highly racialized attitudes on the issue of drug possession throughout American culture at large.
“I am Trayvon Martin:” Visual Culture, Trauma, and the Incarceration Crisis
Prof. Amy Abugo Ongiri
Dept. of English

Political scientist Cathy Cohen has characterized the post-Reagan era African American community as caught in “a period of contradictions and advanced marginalization.” Cohen notes that while African American participation in electoral politics has grown exponentially since the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, African Americans are increasingly marginalized economically as well as socially. One of the major factors in social marginalization is what African American Studies scholar Richard Iton has characterized as “hyperincarceration.” This presentation will explore the apparently contradictory conditions in the U.S. that created the possibility of both Trayvon Martin’s murder and the triumph of Black electoral politics through the ascendency of the first Black president. It will examine the visual iconography surrounding the case to explore the role of visual culture in negotiating both dissent and consent with the mass incarceration of African Americans and also the structuring role of incarceration in contemporary African American culture.

Panel Three

Learning and Unlearning Racial Prejudice: The Role of Schools
Profs. Dorene Ross & Elizabeth Bondy
College of Education

Implicit and unexamined prejudice learned within a culture of systemic racism undoubtedly contributed to the fact that George Zimmerman saw a young Black male as a threat to his gated, townhouse community. This is not an isolated incident, and racial attitudes do not seem to be improving. An Associated Press poll released in October 2012, reported that racial prejudice has increased since 2008 and that over half of White Americans express “explicitly anti-Black sentiments.” We draw on scholarship in education to examine the role that schools and school systems play in reinforcing racial prejudice, particularly as related to Black boys. We present strategic actions that school systems, schools, and teachers can take to counter stereotyped messages about Black youth, messages that are so powerfully communicated within schools and the broader society that even those who question their validity are impacted implicitly.

License to Kill: Theoretical Critique of “Stand Your Ground” Policies
Prof. Lonn Lanza-Kaduce & Andrea Davis (Ph.D. student)
Dept. of Sociology and Criminology & Law

This paper extends themes from sociologist Austin Turk’s theory of normative-legal conflict to the Martin tragedy and Florida’s “Stand Your Ground Law” as a point of entry for examining more general theoretical notions about how legal and social statuses can combine in counterintuitive ways. His theory is premised on deference and the impact that different ways of structuring social interaction will have on the probabilities that conflict will become overt. In some contexts, the relationship between legal status and social status allow the potential for conflict to de-escalate. In others, the relationship aggravates the prospect for overt conflict. Because laws like “Stand Your Ground” designate legal statuses and role expectations, it erects a kind of authority structure between people who interact with each other. Turk maintains that overt conflict is more likely to occur when the official legal norms and corresponding behavioral expectations are congruent with individuals’ social norms and behaviors. The social norms include norms of deference that have been linked to race. We consider how displacing the “retreat” rule in threatening interactions outside the home with the “Stand Your Ground” legal norm authorizes confrontation rather than de-escalation and invites social norms regarding the racialization of crime and race-based norms of deference to enter the interaction and aggravate the probability of overt conflict.
Neighborhood Watch coordinator George Zimmerman’s February 2012 fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed, 17-year old African American in a gated community in Sanford, Florida has raised serious questions concerning racial profiling. Although a violation of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, ample evidence attests to racial profiling’s pervasiveness as a law enforcement tactic in contexts of street-level crime, counterterrorism, and immigration control. Since September 11, 2001, the longstanding problem of racial profiling has both deepened and expanded in terms of the populations targeted. Incentives to profile have been built into laws and policies that sacrifice civil liberties and rights for the purported sake of homeland security. Escalating anxieties over security in transnational, national and local contexts have produced a volatile climate in which individuals perceived to fit stereotypes of Islamist terrorists, illegal immigrants, and ghetto thugs are subjected to indiscriminate profiling, which is a form of racial discrimination. This paper examines the Trayvon Martin tragedy from the vantage point of the international human rights community. The paper’s point of departure is the 2009 report that the United Nations’ Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance submitted to the Human Rights Council on his data-gathering mission to the United States.