

AM 331: CRITICAL WHITENESS IN THE UNITED STATES
Spring 2008

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Course Meeting:

Wednesday 6:30 – 9:30 pm, Tisch Learning Center 305

Office Hours:

Tuesday and Thursday 2:30-3:30 pm, Wednesday 4:30-5:30 pm, and by appointment. I am usually available before and after class. Since people frequently “drop by” during my office hours, I recommend scheduling an appointment with me in advance of your office visit.

Course Description:

An examination of whiteness in United States culture and history. The course explores critical whiteness studies. Various competing claims of whiteness studies scholars are critiqued. Students will examine the relationship between whiteness and other components of identity. White privilege and access to whiteness will be reviewed, and whiteness will be examined within law, literature, music, film, social structures, and space.

Themes and Periodization:

Historical trends are part of this American Studies course, yet this is not a comprehensive review of whiteness’ history. Through primary sources, legal cases, historical accounts, literary analysis, cultural criticism, and statistical analysis, the course will begin with reviewing historical periods to understand the role of whiteness at various points in U.S. history, such as the creation of whiteness in the Colonial period, whiteness and slavery and Jim Crow, how specific ethnic groups became white, whiteness and miscegenation, and whiteness and immigration. After presenting students with a base of knowledge, we will turn to contemporary studies to understand the current role of whiteness in individual and structural instances.

Course Objectives:

- To engage with American Studies’ methods and approaches
- To foster knowledge about U.S. society and culture
- To understand the concept of whiteness
- To explore historical trends related to white people
- To examine historical and contemporary notions of power and privilege
- To understand whiteness as a cultural phenomenon

- To utilize ethnographic research methods
- To develop skills in written and oral communication

Texts:

All required textbooks are available at the Skidmore Shop and on reserve at Scribner Library.

Required:

- 1) Bernard, Emily. Some of My Best Friends: Writings on Interracial Friendships. Amistad Press (Harper Collins), 2005. ISBN-13: 9780060082772
- 2) Gilman, Rebecca. Spinning into Butter: A Play. Faber and Faber, 2000. ISBN-13: 9780571199846
- 3) Haney-Lopez, Ian. White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race. 10th Anniversary Edition. New York University Press, 2006. ISBN: 9780814736944
- 4) Ignatiev, Noel. How the Irish Became White. Routledge, 1995. ISBN: 0415918251
- 5) Jensen, Robert. The Heart of Whiteness: Confronting Race, Racism, and White Privilege. City Lights, 2005. ISBN: 0872864499
- 6) Larsen, Nella. Quicksand and Passing. Ed. Deborah E. McDowell. Rutgers University Press, 1986. ISBN: 0813511704

Recommended:

- 1) Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic, ed. Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror. Temple University Press, 1997. ISBN: 1-56639-532-1
(on reserve at Scribner Library)

Attendance and Punctuality:

Regular attendance is required. Students are responsible for work missed during absences. Because this class meets once per week, only **one absence is permitted (but not encouraged)**. Students missing more than one class will have their grade lowered. Five points will be deducted from the final grade for each day missed after one absence (so if you have an 80 in the class your grade will be lowered to a 75). According to the *Student Academic Handbook* and the *Faculty Advisor Handbook*, "any students who miss more than a third of the [class] sessions [in this case more than 4 absences] may expect to be barred from the final examination. In such cases, the course grade will be recorded as F."

Students are expected to arrive on time to class. Tardiness will not be permitted. **Two late arrivals to class will count as one absence.**

The Skidmore Honor Code:

Because the College functions as a tightly integrated community of curricular and co-curricular experiences, a strict allegiance to its standards of conduct is essential for every student's well-being and intellectual growth. Students should make certain they understand the high value we place on honesty, cooperation, and consideration and the

penalties the College imposes for infractions in these areas. Skidmore not only promotes intellectual honesty vigorously but severely punishes such offenses as plagiarism and cheating on exams.

The Honor Code Commission requires students to write on their tests and exams the following statement:

“WHILE TAKING THIS EXAMINATION, I HAVE NOT WITNESSED ANY WRONGDOING, NOR HAVE I PERSONALLY VIOLATED ANY CONDITIONS OF THE SKIDMORE COLLEGE HONOR CODE.”

Academic Integrity:

Any of the following acts, when committed by a student in any academic exercise, will not be tolerated and shall constitute academic dishonesty:

- *Plagiarism*: intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one's own, including direct quotation, paraphrase, or borrowed facts or information
- *Cheating*: intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids
- *Falsification*: intentional and unauthorized falsification or fabrication of any information or citation
- *Facilitating academic dishonesty*: intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to violate any provision of this Code.
- *Other forms of Academic Dishonesty*: Multiple submission, forgery, sabotage, or alteration will not be tolerated.

When completing your writing assignments, please consult the “Academic Integrity Checklist” found at the Dean of Studies webpage:

http://cms.skidmore.edu/dean_of_studies/integrity/checklist.cfm

All questions regarding academic integrity should be directed to the professor. Academic dishonesty has serious consequences and may result in failure of the assignment, failure of the course, referral to the Integrity Board, probation, suspension, or dismissal.

Accommodations:

If you are a student with a disability, please bring the professor your semester memo of accommodations as soon as you obtain it. If you think that you need accommodations but do not yet have them, set up a meeting with the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities in the Office of Student Academic Services. It is the student's responsibility to follow up with the professor regarding all accommodations that require the Professor's participation. To ensure full use of testing accommodations the student is advised to speak with the professor at least 7 days before any test or examination date listed on the syllabus.

Use of Electronic Devices:

Please turn-off all cellular telephones, pagers, and other electronic devices during class meetings. If you must have your device turned on, then please switch it to vibrate.

Assignments and Grading:

When completing written work for this class, students should consult *The Skidmore Guide to Writing*, which may be found online:

http://cms.skidmore.edu/writing_guide/index.cfm

Class Participation—Students are expected to actively participate in class, reflecting their completion of assigned readings. Both quantity and quality of class participation will be considered in grading. As a class we will devise guidelines for classroom discussion. Class participation will be calculated based upon: a) attendance; b) write-up of an external lecture or activity that relates to course themes; c) participation in class discussion; d) in-class assignments, and, if necessary, e) reading quizzes.

Discussion Leading—Working in pairs, students will sign-up to help frame seminar discussion once during the semester. Utilizing key questions, handouts, worksheets, websites, or other devices, students will cover the readings and generate student engagement with the material.

Film Review—Students will select and review a film with a whiteness focus. Part of the review is to justify the selection of the specific film. The focus on whiteness should be evaluated. In the body of this **five-page** review, students should critique the presentation of the material, strengths, weaknesses, purpose, scope, and content. (February 27th)

Adding to the Syllabus—Students will research and compose a proposal for adding another text to our course. This proposal should take the form of a **seven-page** essay where students explain why this text should be included and how its inclusion could extend and/or challenge course themes, arguments, and assumptions. (April 2nd)

Final Paper—The final paper is a research project that requires students to use interdisciplinary research methods in producing their written **12-page** effort on a whiteness topic. Primary and secondary sources must be consulted and properly referenced in this paper. Students will present their research paper topic and findings. (May 6th 9-noon)

Papers are due at the beginning of class on the assigned day. PLEASE NOTE that late papers will not be accepted and a grade of zero will be recorded.

Class Participation 20%

Discussion Leading	10%	
Film Review	20%	February 27 th
Adding to the Syllabus	20%	April 2 nd
Final Paper	30%	May 6 th 9:00-noon

Course Readings: (Subject to change) Readings are due on the date listed. Unless noted, they may be found on the "Course Reserves" section of Scribner Library webpage. *= Assignment Due.

Jan. 23 **Class Introduction and Syllabus Discussion**

Elsa Barkley Brown, "African-American Women's Quilting: A Framework for Conceptualizing and Teaching African-American Women's History," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 14.4 (Summer 1989): 921-929.

Jan Arminio, "Waking Up White," About Campus (March/ April 2000): 29-30.

Jan. 30 **Theoretical Frameworks**

Toni Morrison, "Recitatif" in The Ancestral House: The Black Short Story in the Americas and Europe, ed. Charles H. Rowell. Westview Press, 1995: 422-436.

Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," Independent School (Winter 1990).

<http://www.case.edu/president/aaction/UnpackingTheKnapsack.pdf>

Michael Omi and Howard Winant, Part II: "Racial Formation" and "The Racial State," in Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s. Routledge, 1994: 53-91.

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 17.2 (Winter 1992): 251-274.

Feb. 6 **Historical Studies of Whiteness**

Noel Ignatiev, How the Irish Became White. Routledge, 1995: 1-188.

Feb. 13 **Whiteness and Ethnicity**

Jennifer Guglielmo, "Introduction: White Lies, Dark Truths," in Are Italians White?: How Race is Made in America, ed. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno. Routledge, 2003: 1-14, 265-268.

Mia Tuan, "Introduction," Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites?: The Asian Ethnic Experience Today. Rutgers University Press, 1998: 1-20, 181.

Neil Foley, *Becoming Hispanic: Mexican Americans and Whiteness*," in White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism. 2nd Edition. Worth Publishers, 2005: 55-65.

Karen Brodtkin, "How Jews Became White Folks," in White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism. 2nd Edition. Worth Publishers, 2005: 41-54.

Feb. 20 **Whiteness and the Law**

Thomas J. Davis, "Race, Identity, and the Law" in Race on Trial: Law and Justice in American History, ed. Annette Gordon-Reed. Oxford University Press, 2002: 61-76.

http://supreme.lp.findlaw.com/supreme_court/landmark/plessy.html

Ian Haney López, "Preface-Chapter 4," White By Law. New York University Press, 2006: xiii-77.

Feb. 27 Kevin Powell, "Sexism from a Male Perspective." 7 pm Gannett Auditorium. (meet at 6:30 pm to hand-in review & attend lecture together)
***Film Review Due**

March 5 **Whiteness and the Law Continued**

Haney López, "Chapter 5-Appendix B," White By Law: 78-182.

March 12 **NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK**

March 19 **Whiteness and Literature**

Nella Larsen, Passing. Rutgers University Press, 1986: 143-246.

Deborah E. McDowell, Introduction," Quicksand and Passing: ix-xxxv.

Toni Morrison, "Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination" in Critical White Studies: 79-84.

March 26 **Whiteness and Class**

George Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the 'White' Problem in American Studies," American Quarterly 47.3 (September 1995): 369-387.

Film: People Like US: Social Class in America (Louis Alvarez and Andrew Kolker, 2001). Screen Parts 1 & 2 before class. Parts 3 & 4 screened in class.

April 2 **Whiteness and/as Performance**

***Adding to the Syllabus Assignment Due**

Judith Butler, "Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion" Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex." Routledge, 1993: 121-140. (Handout)

bell hooks, "Is Paris Burning?" Reel to Real: Race, Sex and Class at the Movies. Routledge, 1996. (Handout)

Linda L. Ammons, "Mules, Madonnas, Babies, Bathwater: Racial Imagery and Stereotypes" in Critical White Studies: 276-279.

Film: *Paris is Burning* (Jennie Livingston, 1990)

April 9

Whiteness in the Arts

Rebecca Gilman, Spinning into Butter: A Play. Faber and Faber, 2000: 1-105.

Geoffrey Stacks, "Simon Wasn't There: The Sambo Strategy, Consumable Theater, and Rebecca Gilman's Spinning into Butter," African American Review 40.2 (Summer 2006): 285-297.

Staged Reading: TBA

April 16

White Privilege

Robert Jensen, The Heart of Whiteness: Confronting Race, Racism, and White Privilege. City Lights, 2005: 1-96.

Marcella Fleischman Pixley and Laura Schneider VanDerPloeg, "Learning to See White," English Education 32.4 (July 2000): 278-289.

Tim Wise, "White Like Me: Race and Identity Through Majority Eyes" in When Race Becomes Real: Black and White Writers Confront Their Personal Histories, ed. Bernestine Singley. Chicago Review Press, 2002: 225-240.

Beverly Daniel Tatum, "Choosing to Be Black: The Ultimate White Privilege?" in When Race Becomes Real: 215-224.

April 23

Contemporary Whiteness and Friendship

Emily Bernard, Some of My Best Friends: Writings on Interracial Friendships. Amistad Press, 2005: 1-217.

Course Wrap-Up

***Final Papers Due May 6, 2008, 9:00-noon**