

Media, race, and identity

Comm 5221

office hours (120 Ford):

TuTh 10-11a, W 1:30-3:30p, and by appointment

Fall 2015

Prof. Gil Rodman

rodman@umn.edu

612.624.8092

Course description and objectives

Racial prejudice and institutional racism remain significant problems in the US today. Whatever advances have been made over the years with respect to racial politics, the US remains a nation deeply divided along racial faultlines, and race continues to matter tremendously when it comes to the distribution of education, jobs, housing, healthcare, justice, political power, and then some.

One of the most significant arenas where racial politics manifest themselves in US culture is the mass media. We will spend much of the semester studying the ways that this thing we call “race” both shapes and is shaped by a variety of media practices and policies. In particular, we will examine:

- the social construction of race and racial identity,
- the nature of racial identity formation and self-awareness,
- the public discourses around racial/ethnic assimilation and integration,
- the politics of media representation and invisibility,
- the history of interracial cultural borrowing and theft,
- the interplay between media and government institutions with respect to maintaining racial hierarchies,
- the vexed question of racial ambiguity and hybridity, and
- the variability of racial formations across different geopolitical contexts.

Bear in mind that few (if any) of the questions we’ll address this semester have easy answers. If simple solutions were truly effective in eliminating racism, it would have disappeared decades (if not centuries) ago, and there would be no need for courses such as this one. As such, soundbite approaches to these issues (e.g., “can’t we all just get along?” or “let’s just pretend race doesn’t exist”) will not serve you well, and a crucial part of your task this semester will be to think critically and complexly about the role of race and media in contemporary society.

Readings

The following required books are available at the University Bookstore in Coffman Union.

- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*
- Gilbert B. Rodman (ed.), *The Race and Media Reader*

Other required readings will be made available via the course website.

Students who choose to pursue a Senior Project in addition to the required course work are strongly encouraged to use the following recommended book (also available at the University Bookstore in Coffman Union under COMM 3995W) as a helpful guide for conceiving, planning, researching, and writing their final papers:

- Wayne C. Booth *et al.*, *The Craft of Research* [third edition]

Requiring you to buy a book for which I will receive royalties -- even tiny ones -- is an awkward thing to do. To avoid profiting from such sales, I will donate \$5 (i.e., more than the royalties I’ll actually receive) for every student on the roster as of 22 Sep to a charity of the class’ choosing. That charity should:

- fit the theme of the course clearly and directly
- not be an organization that anyone in the class actively works/volunteers for

Moodle

If you are on the official course roster, you should already have access to the course’s Moodle site. Simply point your web browser to the U’s main Moodle page (<https://ay15.moodle.umn.edu/>), log in using your University X.500 ID, and select the “COMM5221_001F15” link from the “My Courses” menu in the “Navigation” box.

We will use Moodle for several things this semester:

- a course blog where you will contribute posts and comments about the course material
- access to our required non-book readings
- our Virtual Class meeting from 7-17 Dec
- a repository for various media examples relevant to our required readings
- occasional business-related announcements about the course

More information on Moodle can be found at <http://it.umn.edu/course-management-system-moodle-related/students>

Graduate students

If you are a graduate student, the basic rules in this syllabus vary slightly for you:

- Unless we make an explicit mutual agreement to the contrary, you are required to attend all regular class meetings, do all the assigned readings, and make weekly contributions to the course blog.
- We will hold extra meetings every 3-4 weeks (dates and times to be determined) to discuss additional graduate-level readings (also to be determined). These extra meetings and readings are both required.
- You are *not* required to submit Critical Essays or Student-Provided Readings. Instead, your major assignment will be to research and write a final paper that (a) fits the course theme, (b) is at least 6250 words long and (c) is suitable for submission to a scholarly conference and/or journal. You must meet with me no later than 6 Oct to discuss your proposed paper topic, submit a formal topic proposal no later than 13 Oct, and submit a final version of your paper by 12:30 pm on 23 Dec.
- As a graduate student, you're presumably in this course because you have a genuine interest in the subject matter, rather than because you need to fulfill distributional requirements or pad your schedule with extra credit hours. As such, I assume that grades are counterproductive for you, since they encourage you to focus on numbers (e.g., how do I turn an 89 into a 90?), rather than on the substantive issues at hand. With this in mind, you can assume that successfully completing the graduate-level requirements described above will earn you an A for the course. That said, in cases where people are clearly slacking off, I reserve the right to go deeper into the alphabet when I submit final grades.

Undergraduates who believe that they can handle the extra work (and higher expectations) of the graduate-level requirements are welcome to meet with me to discuss the possibility of completing the course in such a fashion. If this describes you, that meeting must happen no later than 22 Sep, and you should come to that meeting prepared to convince me that you're capable of performing at graduate student level.

Grades

This course follows the University's published standards for A-F grading:

- A: "achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements"
- B: "achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements"
- C: "achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect"
- D: "achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements"
- F: "signifies that the work was . . . completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit."

You earn points toward your final course grade as follows:

- 1 point for every class period that you attend that is not a PINO day (see "Attendance/participation" below)
- 1-1.5 points for every course week that you make gradeworthy contributions to the course blog
- 2.5 points for every gradeworthy Student-Provided Reading (SPR) you submit
- a variable number of points for every Critical Essay (CE) you submit

There will be occasional opportunities to earn additional points via in-class quizzes and/or extra assignments. Such opportunities will be the exception, rather than the rule, and they will *not* be offered on an individual basis.

Points will be awarded in a “pile it on” fashion: i.e., submitting more gradeworthy work adds more points to your grade. Point totals at the end of the semester will translate to letter grades as follows:

A	93+	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69
A-	90-92	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	60-66
		B-	80-82	C-	70-72	F	0-59

- “S/N” grades will only be given to students who have registered for the course on an S/N basis.
- “I” grades will only be given under extraordinary circumstances (i.e., major life emergencies).

Attendance/participation

This is not a course where passive spectators will do well. Our meetings will be structured around discussions, and so you will need to:

- attend class regularly,
- do the required readings carefully, and
- come to class prepared to discuss those readings in thoughtful fashion.

I will do my best to make sure that everyone gets a chance to make meaningful contributions to our conversations. This may mean that I will call on you by name if you have been exceptionally quiet. This may also mean that I will ask you not to speak for a while if you have been extra talkative and other students’ voices have not been heard.

Days when you are “present in name only” (PINO) will cost you grade points. As the name implies, PINO days are days when you are physically present for our scheduled class meetings, but where you do not contribute to our discussions and/or exercises in a substantive fashion. This includes (but is not limited to) days when:

- you are present for less than half of a given class meeting,
- you have clearly not done the assigned reading,
- you are primarily a passive spectator in our in-class activities, and/or
- your contributions to our discussions are superficial enough for me to believe that you have not done the required reading with the proper level of care and attention.

As a word of friendly advice, you are better off not coming to class than you are trying to bluff your way through discussions for which you are unprepared. Final decisions about what counts as a PINO day will be based on my assessment of your in-class performance, and I will inform you of any such assessment via email within 24 hours of the class meeting in question.

You earn 1 point for every class meeting you attend that is not a PINO day for you. Each PINO day you have will result in a 1-point penalty assessed against your course grade. There are 24 regular class meetings scheduled this semester. Combining the 24 points available from those meetings with the 4 points available courtesy of our Virtual Class (7-17 Dec), the maximum number of attendance/participation points you can earn is 28.

Course blog participation

The blog is an interactive forum where the class will engage in semi-formal discussions about the major issues raised by the course readings and our in-class conversations. Blog contributions can (and typically will) be shorter and less formal than Critical Essays, but they should still be thoughtful bits of prose (rather than mere summaries or casual reflections). In general, your blog contributions should stake out clear positions on some major issue related to the course content, and they should also build persuasive arguments in support of your positions.

The course blog can be found using the “Course blog” link on the main page of the course Moodle site. From there, you can start a new thread by clicking on the “Add a new topic” button. You can comment on an existing thread by clicking on the “Discuss this topic” link at the bottom right corner of the box for that thread.

Your blog contributions need to engage -- clearly, directly, and significantly -- with the major issues raised by our required readings and/or our in-class discussions. Posts/comments that (1) are primarily summaries of those readings/discussions, (2) veer off on lengthy tangents about minor facets of the material in question, (3) focus heavily on issues outside of the course content, and/or (4) offer nothing more than statements of simple agreement/disagreement will not count towards your grade.

Your blog contributions will be measured every course week (i.e., the seven-day cycle that begins each Tuesday at 2:30 pm). To earn credit for any given week, you must post at least 300 words of thoughtful commentary during that week about the assigned readings and/or our in-class discussions/exercises. Acceptable contributions can include new posts and/or comments on existing posts, and they can be spread over multiple posts/comments. For assessment purposes, only your own words count: e.g., quoting 300 words from the readings and following it up with 75 words of your own counts as 75 words, rather than 375. Similarly, in cases where there are significant amounts of empty/filler prose in your posts/comments, only the substantive words will count toward your grade.

For grading purposes, you will earn 1 point for every course week in which you meet the requirements described above. Additionally, as encouragement for you to make the blog a genuinely interactive forum, there is a bonus of 0.5 points available for every course week in which you meet all the following criteria:

- you contribute 300+ gradeworthy words as blog post(s) of your own.
- you contribute 300+ additional gradeworthy words as comments responding to your classmates.
- any given comment must be substantially different from both your own posts and your other comments: i.e., you don't earn bonus points for rephrasing claims and arguments you've made elsewhere on the blog.
- your comments need to be respectful and constructive -- especially when you're expressing your disagreement with something one of your classmates has written.

There are 15 course weeks in the semester, including Thanksgiving break and finals week, and so the maximum number of grade points you can earn through blog participation is also 15.

Tips

- Do not forget to blog on weeks when we do not meet in person, since you can still earn blog points then.
- There are no reading-related deadlines for the blog, and you can still earn points for "late" posts/comments on "old" readings/material, as long as those "late" posts/comments manage to add something new to our overall conversation about those "old" readings/material.

Virtual class (VC)

Due to professional obligations that will take me out of the country, we will hold VC from 7-17 December. Instead of the face-to-face meetings that we would normally have on 8, 10, and 15 December, we will use Moodle to hold online discussions about the readings assigned for those days. I will post discussion prompts related to those readings roughly 24 hours in advance of when we would normally have met.

During VC, you can earn up to 3 Attendance/Participation points, 1 each for:

- a 200+ word response to a discussion prompt (maximum 1 point/prompt)
- a 200+ word post of your own about the assigned reading(s) (maximum 1 point/post)
- a 200+ word comment on a classmate's VC post (maximum 1 point/response)

You can earn the full 3 points using any combination of the options above (e.g., 2 prompt responses and 1 post of your own, or 3 responses to classmate posts, etc.). Additionally, you can earn 1 bonus point if -- and only if -- your VC participation includes at least 1 of each of the three options listed above.

For grading purposes, VC will start as soon as I post the first discussion prompt (no later than 7 Dec), and end at 5:00 pm on 17 Dec. I will create a separate VC forum on the course Moodle site, which is where the discussion prompts will appear, and where you should place all your VC contributions. The regular course blog will still be available during VC for your contributions, though (of course) your VC and blog contributions during this period should not duplicate each other.

Critical essays (CEs)

The goal of this assignment is for you to take a clear stand on a significant issue related to the course material and to make an extended, persuasive argument in support of your chosen position. You must write at least one CE, and you can submit as many additional CEs as you like over the course of the semester. Any individual CE must:

- be at least 1000 words in length,
- engage in critical (i.e., thoughtful and analytical) fashion with the major issues raised by one or more of our required readings, and

- be substantially different -- in both theme and content -- from both your blog posts/comments and any other CE that you submit.

You have two major options for what to write about in your CEs.

Option #1 involves writing a critical response to one (or more) of our required readings. In general, there are two types of approaches that work well for this option:

- Argue against a particular position expressed in a given reading. Explain why the authors in question are wrong to make the claims they do and what a more appropriate way of looking at the issues might be. (N.B.: This approach works best (a) if you're disagreeing with a major argument from the reading, rather than a small, secondary issue, and (b) if you actually have a well-reasoned counter-argument to make, rather than disagreeing with the author simply for the sake of doing so.)
- Take a major argument from a given reading and apply it to a new topic (e.g., "Given what author X says about topic A, s/he would most likely make the following argument about topic B," where "topic B" (a) still fits the course theme, and (b) is different from "topic A" in significant ways, but (c) is a topic that author X doesn't discuss). (N.B.: This approach works best if you recognize that author X's argument will almost always need to be modified somewhat when applied to a new topic.)

Option #2 involves using one (or more) of our required readings to help you make a critical response to an outside source (e.g., a journal article, a blog post, a news report) related to the main themes of the course. Any outside source you use must meet all the following criteria:

- it must have been published in 2014 or 2015
- it must be at least 1000 words long
- it must be publicly accessible (e.g., no unpublished essays, no blog posts hidden behind paywalls)
- it cannot be written by a current UMN student or employee, or a member of your immediate family
- it cannot be written by the same author(s) who wrote the required reading(s) you are using for your CE
- it must engage substantially with a major social, cultural, and/or political issue related to the course theme

You must provide full and accurate citations (in either APA or MLA style) for all outside sources you use. You cannot use the same outside source for more than one CE.

The two options above are not exhaustive -- there are other approaches to this assignment that can work well -- but if you feel inspired to try some other approach, it would be wise to consult with me in advance.

Your grade for any given CE will be based on both its quality and its length. Its maximum point value will be 1 point for every 100 words in length. Its actual point value will be the percentage of its maximum value that corresponds to its letter grade. For example, a 1300-word CE that earns a grade of B- will be worth 10.4 points (13 x 0.8). Additionally:

- CEs that merely assert a position without arguing it or that are primarily summaries/paraphrases of the reading(s) will not meet the requirements of this assignment.
- When I calculate the maximum point value for CEs, I will not use fractions, nor will I round up: e.g., a 1472-word essay is worth a maximum of 14 points.
- Regardless of their length, CEs that earn grades of D or F will be worth a fixed number of points on a sliding scale: the first such CE you submit will earn 5 points, the second will earn 4 points, and so on.
- Failing to submit at least one CE will result in a 10-point penalty assessed against your course grade.

All CEs are due no later than 12:30 pm on 23 Dec. That said, you would be wise to submit one or more CEs much sooner than that. As a rough estimate, the total CE wordcount necessary for most students to pass the course is ~5000 words. That is not a lot of writing when you spread it out over several months, but it's a very formidable task to give yourself during finals week. As an incentive to follow this advice, you will receive bonus points for any CEs that (1) are strong enough to earn a grade of C- or better, and (2) you turn in no later than the following dates: 1 Oct (+3 points), 29 Oct (+2 points), 26 Nov (+1 point).

Tips

- The most common problem that people have with writing good CEs is that they assert their major claims instead of arguing them. Remember that your task isn't simply to demonstrate that you have an opinion: it is to make a strong case for why your position on the issue at hand is the best one to hold (or, at the very least, a better one to hold than most others).
- There is no single "right" answer that I look for when I grade CEs. The overall quality of the argument you make in any given CE matters more than the specific position you take.
- That said, some positions are much harder to defend successfully than others. Whatever position you take should be well supported by (a) the available facts and (b) a persuasive, well-constructed argument.
- Focus on the main argument(s) in the readings/sources in question (rather than trivial side issues), and make sure that your CE does more than simply summarize or rephrase those arguments.
- Tailor any given CE so as to make the strongest argument you can in support of your thesis, rather than aiming for a specific word count. Making an essay longer does not automatically make it stronger. If you're simply adding words to boost the length-multiplier part of your grade, you may very well be lowering the quality of your argument enough to earn a lower point total than you would have if you'd submitted a stronger, shorter essay. For example, a 1000-word essay that earns an A- is worth 9 points, while a 1200-word essay that earns a C- is only worth 8.4 points -- and adding 200 words of unhelpful filler to what is otherwise a tight, well-argued essay can easily reduce its grade that much.

Student-provided readings (SPRs)

You must locate and provide at least one reading that will potentially be added to our syllabus. For each of your SPRs, you must submit two things:

- A clean, complete, legible copy of the reading. If a PDF copy is available, that is ideal. In many cases, however, you will need to provide a photocopy (single-sided and on white 8.5"x11" paper) of your reading. If your reading is available online (e.g., a blog entry, a podcast, a YouTube video), then the URL should suffice. Copies (digital or otherwise) that are missing pages, excessively marked up, or otherwise illegible will not be accepted. Any reading you submit must:
 - be at least 1000 words long
 - clearly fit the course theme
 - serve as a useful starting point for a productive in-class discussion.

Any online reading you submit:

- must be available for free,
- must not be located behind any password barriers (except for the ordinary UMN X.500 ones),
- must be submitted with a URL that points directly to the reading in question, and
- must not require additional instructions to explain which piece of the linked material is actually required.

SPRs involving the following types of readings are will not be accepted:

- works by authors that are already represented on our syllabus
- readings that appear on syllabi for other courses that I've taught (see <http://www.gilrodman.com/syllabi>)
- A 300+ word annotation. Your annotation must include three things:
 - a full and proper citation (in APA or MLA style) for the reading in question,
 - a brief, accurate summary of the reading's major claims/arguments, and
 - a brief, persuasive argument for why the reading in question is worth making the whole class read.

Each annotation must be at least 300 words (not including the required citation). The summary portion of your annotation must consist primarily of your own words: i.e., extended quotes from the actual reading are not appropriate. The argumentative portion of your annotation should be longer than the summary portion, and it should offer a detailed rationale for adding the reading in question to the syllabus. Vague rationales such as "this is a very smart article" or "this essay offers important information" are not appropriate. Similarly, additional summary (e.g., "this article should be added to the syllabus because it says the following three things . . .") does not count as a persuasive rationale.

All SPRs are due no later than 2:30 pm on 10 Nov. Because I will need to read everyone's SPRs, select which of those will be added to the syllabus, and then scan and upload those readings to the course Moodle site, absolutely no late submissions will be accepted for this assignment. The required readings for our "Virtual Class" (7-17 Dec) will be selected from the various SPRs submitted, and uploaded to the course Moodle site no later than 30 Nov.

You will earn 2.5 points for every SPR you submit that meets the requirements described above. Failing to provide at least one gradeworthy SPR will result in a 5-point penalty assessed against your overall course grade. There is no formal limit on the number of SPRs that you may submit. Submissions that do not meet all the requirements above will not earn grade points.

Tips

- Argumentative/academic readings tend to fit this assignment much better than descriptive/journalistic ones.
- Readings should provide enough context and/or background information to stand on their own. Op/ed columns and blog posts that are written with current events/controversies in mind don't always do this sort of work, and so they may not always be productive choices for this assignment (especially if those columns/posts are old or obscure enough that the event in question isn't likely to be intelligible to your classmates without additional details).
- The most common stumbling block that students have with this assignment is that they provide weak rationales. A good rationale will speak clearly and directly to the substance of the reading in question. Vague "rationales" that could describe any SPR (e.g., "this article should be added because it relates to the course theme and it would be interesting to see what the class thinks about it") will not suffice.
- Think about SPRs in relation to existing readings on the syllabus, and how your SPRs might extend, challenge, and/or critique those readings.

Senior project

If you want to fulfill the Senior Project requirement in connection with this course, you must write a well-researched, argumentative essay of 2500+ words on a topic that fits the course's main theme. Because this project results in a separate grade and earns you an extra credit hour, it involves work above and beyond the course requirements.

There are several mandatory deadlines built into the project that should (1) prevent you from procrastinating too much, (2) allow me time to give you constructive feedback, and (3) give you time to act on that feedback:

21 Sep	Register for Comm 3995W-005
29 Sep	Meet with me to discuss your project
6 Oct	Topic proposal / 10-item bibliography
22 Oct	Thesis paragraph draft
12 Nov	Rough draft
23 Dec	Final paper and verification pages

Except for 23 Dec (when the deadline is 12:30 pm), all the deadlines above are at 2:30 pm. They are also all "drop dead" deadlines: i.e., failing to meet any of them (which includes failing to meet their minimum requirements) means that you are no longer eligible to fulfill your Senior Project requirement in this class. Further details about the Senior Project are available on a separate handout.

Paperless (mostly) assignments

With two exceptions, everything you'll submit for a grade this semester must be submitted digitally. Obviously, course blog contributions can only happen online. CEs, annotations for SPRs, and (almost) all Senior Project work should be submitted as file attachments via email to rodman@umn.edu. Acceptable formats for those assignments are LibreOffice/OpenOffice (.odt), Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx), and Rich Text Format (.rtf). With two potential exceptions, assignments submitted in other formats (including PDFs and paper) will not be accepted.

Exception #1 involves the copy of any reading you submit as an SPR. If and only if a given reading is not readily available in digital format (e.g., it's not a website, or it's not already available online as a PDF), you can submit a clean, complete photocopy of the reading in question.

Exception #2 applies only to the Senior Project, where the verification pages that are due with your final draft should be submitted in hard copy format. I will accept verification pages in digital form, but only if you can meet all the following criteria:

- You must submit a “test run” of your verification pages no later than 12 Nov. (N.B.: Failing to submit electronic verification pages with your rough draft does not affect your Senior Project grade; it simply means that you are required to submit the final version of your verification pages in hard copy format.) That “test run” must include verification pages for at least 5 of your potential sources.
- Digital verification pages must be submitted (1) as a single file, and (2) in PDF form. That file should consist of verification pages for all the sources in your bibliography, in the same order (i.e., alphabetical by author) as they are listed in your bibliography.

Academic dishonesty

The following is a partial list of examples of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism in any of its forms
- copying assignments (in whole or in part) produced by other students
- “double-dipping” (i.e., using the same work to earn more than one grade -- including attempts to reuse work that you have submitted for a grade in some other course)
- having someone else research and/or write substantial portions of any graded assignment for you
- deleting and/or re-editing blog posts/comments after they’ve been placed on the course Moodle site
- knowingly assisting someone else in their efforts to engage in any of the above practices

The minimum penalty for academic dishonesty is a zero for the assignment in question. Put bluntly, the risks are high (most plagiarism cases are very easy to identify), the penalties are higher (as severe as expulsion from the University), and the potential benefits are usually trivial (e.g., you get a “free” blog post that might turn a course grade of C into a C+). More crucially, the time and effort it takes to engage in “good” (i.e., undetectable) plagiarism is probably more time and effort than it would take to do the assignment in question the honest way.

Some helpful resources to avoid academic dishonesty include:

- <http://oscai.umn.edu/avoid-violations/avoiding-scholastic-dishonesty>
- <http://www.gilrodman.com/2015/03/01/how-to-plagiarize-well-tips-for-my-undergraduates-rerun-sunday/>

Planning your semester

Compared to a traditional percentage-based grading system, the “pile it on” system gives you lots of flexibility for how you earn your grade. But it can also hold a few unpleasant surprises, if you don’t plan carefully. With that in mind, here are a few important things for you to consider as you plan your semester:

- You need to earn a C- or better (i.e., a cumulative point total of at least 70) to receive credit for this course as part of the Communication Studies major. The same may hold true for students hoping to use this course to fulfill other requirements: check with your academic adviser to be sure.
- Perfect attendance/participation and course blog participation will earn you 50.5 points. In this scenario (which is possible, but rare), you would need to earn at least 19.5 points from SPRs and CEs in order to earn a C- or better for the course. In this perfect scenario, if you submit the minimum number of SPRs (i.e., one), you would need at least 17 points from CEs to earn a C- or better for the course. Not counting any “early bird” bonus points, the most straightforward way to earn 17 points from CEs is to write 1 1200-word and 1 1300-word CE, each of which earns a C- ($25 \times .7 = 17.5$).
- The perfect scenario above suggests that you need to write 2500 words worth of CEs in order to pass the course, but your actual total wordcount will probably be need to be higher than that, since it’s rare to get through the semester without ever missing a class or a blog week. And you will certainly want to submit more than 2500 words worth of CEs if you’re hoping for a course grade higher than a C-.
- Resist the temptation to wait to turn in the bulk of your CEs. The last few weeks of your semester will be filled with exams and deadlines that you cannot change, and so you’ll already have a lot of work -- and a lot of stress -- during that period. Turning in multiple CEs in the first 10 weeks of the semester will minimize your workload for this course during crunch time, making it easier for you to focus on your other obligations.
- If you choose to ignore the previous tip, do not double-down on that risky bet by trying to earn the majority of your course grade with one extra-long CE. Every semester that I’ve used the “pile it on” system, someone has tried to pin their entire course grade on one massive CE, and this strategy has failed far more often than it’s worked. With exactly one exception, that extra-long paper has been a sloppy mess. It’s been disorganized, poorly written, weakly argued, unfocused, and filled with padding. It has earned a D or an F -- and thus it has not earned the student in question anywhere near enough points to pass the course.

Miscellaneous

- Our discussions will cover topics that are likely to evoke strong differences of opinion. I don't expect our class meetings to produce unanimous agreement about those topics, but I do expect our discussions to be characterized by mutual respect and collegiality. Strong opinions are acceptable; verbal bullying and personal attacks, on the other hand, will not be tolerated under any circumstances.
- Significant disruptions of the normal flow of course-related business -- e.g., using cell phones in class, excessive side chatter, premature leave-taking behavior -- may result in grade penalties.
- You may make audio and/or video recordings of class meetings for your personal use, provided you do so without disrupting the ordinary flow of the class. The purchase and/or sale of either written notes or recordings of class meetings is strictly prohibited.
- I will make every reasonable effort to accommodate students' needs relating to religious holidays and/or documented disabilities. By University policy, you must provide me with written notice (for religious holidays) and/or official documentation (for disabilities), and you must do so with enough lead time for appropriate accommodations to be arranged.
- University policy prohibits sexual harassment as defined in the December 1998 policy statement (see <https://diversity.umn.edu/eoaa/>). Questions or concerns about sexual harassment should be directed to the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (274 McNamara).

General tips

(1) **Read your syllabus and handouts.** These documents contain the basic ground rules for this course. Under exceptional circumstances (e.g., life and death emergencies), I may be willing to bend those rules, but your failure to know the rules is not such a circumstance.

(2) **Do the required readings as scheduled.** Most of the grades you will earn this semester will depend on how carefully you've done the assigned readings. If you blow them off, it will hurt your grade.

(3) **Think about what you read.** None of our readings are intended to be consumed rapidly or passively. They present arguments that you should approach thoughtfully, critically, and carefully. If you're only reading to absorb facts or to be entertained, you will not do well.

(4) **Attend class.** Our meetings will be spent discussing the assigned readings, rather than summarizing them. Those discussions will often address issues that won't be obvious from the readings, and I will assume you have a basic familiarity with those issues when I grade your written work.

(5) **Come to class prepared to discuss the readings.** Pay close attention as you read, and then come to class having thought carefully about what you've read. You should always be able to address the following questions:

- What is the main argument of the reading?
- What evidence does the author provide in support of his or her thesis?
- Is the author's argument convincing? Why or why not? If not, what would a better argument look like? If so, what are the broader implications of that argument?

(6) **Take advantage of my office hours.** If you don't understand why you received a given grade, if the reading has you baffled, or if you're not sure whether an idea you have for an assignment is suitable, come to see me during my office hours. That's what they're there for.

(7) **Do not overburden yourself.** You may thrive on tight deadline pressure, or you may be comfortable carrying 18 credit hours while holding down 3 part-time jobs and being a single parent. If so, that's a rare gift. Mere mortals, however, should recognize that trying to juggle too many major tasks will cause their performance in at least one (and often more than one) of those areas to suffer.

(8) **Plan ahead.** The work required of you this semester takes time. Pace yourself. This is not a course where trying to cram most of that work in during finals week will earn you an acceptable grade. The semester will go by much faster than you think, so plan accordingly.

Writing tips

(1) Meet the basic requirements of the assignments. One of the most common mistakes that students make is that they ignore some vital part of an assignment's instructions: e.g., they turn in a descriptive essay rather than an argumentative one, they submit only one part of a two-part assignment, etc.

(2) Present your work as if it matters to you. Spellcheck it. Proofread it. Copy-edit it. If you don't care enough about what you've written to make it as polished as possible, you shouldn't expect it to earn a good grade.

(3) Trim the fat. Extending your essays with unnecessary description, extra-long quotations, and/or needless repetition is not a recipe for success. In most cases, such padding will lower the quality (and thus the grade) of your essay, since it will distract from (and even undermine) your main argument. In general, a strong argument is finished when there's nothing left for you to cut, rather than when there's nothing left for you to add.

(4) Show your evidence. Use quotations and citations from the required readings to support the claims you're making. Know when a claim you're making needs to be supported with outside sources. And, if you're drawing on outside sources, make sure to cite those sources properly.

(5) Argue your points. Don't merely assert them. Simply saying that you think that Author Q is wrong is far less convincing than explaining why you think so. Similarly, if your main point boils down to "I agree with what Q says" or "This reading taught me something new," you will not do very well. Such vague claims don't constitute the core of an actual argument. Your main task is to persuade your reader -- who may not see the world the same way you do -- that your position on the issue at hand is the correct one to hold.

(6) Argue your points well. Get the facts straight. Make sure the facts support your case. Know the difference between correlation and causation. Perhaps most importantly, anticipate counter-arguments to your position -- especially if your argument runs contrary to ideas we've already covered. You are free to disagree with our readings but, if you do, you'll need to be able to explain why you're right and those readings are wrong.

(7) Don't overstate your case. Sweeping generalizations about what "everyone" knows or about what has "always" been true are rarely accurate. Similarly, overblown claims (e.g., "Twitter is the most important invention since fire") are usually bad ideas. If there are important truths to be found in such hyperbolic statements, you need to present them with appropriate nuance and subtlety.

(8) Avoid the passive voice. There are moments when the passive voice is appropriate -- and even necessary -- but a persuasive, argumentative essay is usually not one of them. In most cases, passive phrasing weakens your argument by rendering invisible the people and institutions who are central to whatever claim(s) you're trying to make. Saying "bad things happened" leaves the vital question of who did those "bad things" unaddressed. There's a huge difference between "Tamir Rice was shot and killed" and "Timothy Loehmann shot and killed Tamir Rice."

(9) Avoid formulaic writing. The "five-paragraph essay" may have gotten you through high school, but it won't serve you well in this class. There's nothing magical about five paragraphs (or any similar "rule" about how to structure an essay) that helps you craft strong, persuasive arguments. Similarly, avoid cliches. If your argument depends on some well-worn aphorism being true, then you're probably not building a very strong case.

(10) Use a dictionary, but do so carefully. If you don't know what a word means, a dictionary is a good place to start filling that gap in your knowledge. But leaning heavily on dictionary definitions in your own arguments is usually unwise. The specific definition that Webster's (or American Heritage, or dictionary.com, etc.) offers for a word may not reflect the way that word is used in real life. And there are very few contexts in which quoting the dictionary at length will provide useful supporting evidence for your main argument.

(11) Be careful with personal anecdotes. Used properly, stories from your own life can provide valuable support for a good argument. But anecdotes that merely provide another example of a phenomenon described in the reading (“this happened to me too!”) typically do more to pad your wordcount (see #3 above) than they do to help your argument. Moreover, your personal experiences may not be representative of the population as a whole, and so it may be risky to use those to support a thesis that purports to address broader social and cultural phenomena.

(12) Be careful with history. History matters, but the relationship between the past and the present is rarely simple. Things to consider:

- Avoid “present-ism”: i.e., assuming that anything that is “too old” is no longer relevant or accurate simply because of its age. This is especially dangerous if the something in question is only “old” from the perspective of, say, people born after 1990.
- Avoid “traditionalism”: i.e., assuming that anything that has “stood the test of time” is somehow true, beneficial, desirable (etc.) simply because it hasn’t disappeared from the face of the earth. By this standard, after all, murder, war, poverty, and disease should all be things that we celebrate.
- Avoid “filler” history: i.e., setting up a 2-page argument with a 5-page summary of the historical backdrop to whatever your topic is. An argument about the ethics of filesharing (for instance) does *not* need to be prefaced by an extended explanation of the rise of Napster. Any historical background you include should be so vital that your entire argument would be unintelligible and/or unpersuasive if you left it out.

(13) Don’t make your argument rely exclusively on sequencing. The most common form of this problem involves statements such as, “It’s possible to see the world *that way*, but it’s also possible to see the world *this way*” as a way to prove that “this way” is the best way. You can’t prove the validity of “this way” over “that way” simply by putting it on the trailing side of the “but.” If some claim you make is just as true with its major clauses/sentences placed in the reverse order, then you haven’t done the work necessary to build a persuasive argument.

And finally...

(1) Your grade is based on your performance, not your effort. Trying hard is a good thing (it’s certainly better than not trying at all), but it’s not the same thing as succeeding. Hard work will probably improve your grade but, by itself, it does not guarantee that you’ll earn the grade you want.

(2) You have to earn your grade; I don’t simply give it to you. To earn an A on an assignment, you need to do A-level work. To earn an A for the course, you need to do the quantity and quality of work that will earn you enough points to get that A. You will not earn a passing grade simply because you’ve paid your tuition, because you’re graduating, because you’re on the broomball team, because you’ve never gotten a bad grade before, etc. If you need a particular grade to graduate, keep your scholarship, stay in school, start a new job, etc., then you need to do the work that will earn you that grade.

(3) The semester lasts fifteen weeks -- and they all count. Your course grade is based on the work you do all semester long, not just part of it. Finishing strong will not automatically repair the damage done by blowing off the first two months of the semester. Similarly, a strong beginning to the semester will rarely allow you to safely coast through the final month without doing any work at all.

(4) The time to worry about your grade for this course is now. Do not wait until finals week to try and earn the grade you need/want. And *definitely* do not wait until after final grades have been turned in. Turning up after the semester is over to plead for a better grade will typically only succeed in (the very rare) cases where I’ve made a significant math error in calculating your final grade. It will never succeed in cases where you’re working harder to convince me that you deserve a grade change than you actually worked to earn your original grade.

(5) Your chance to earn your grade ends when the semester does. The *only* exceptions to this rule involve the sort of major life emergencies (e.g., extended hospitalization, death in the family) that force you to miss large portions of the semester. In such cases, you will be required to provide independent verification of the emergency in question, and you will receive a final grade of “I” pending the completion of the work that you’ve missed.

(6) Your life outside this class is your responsibility. There are lots of things in this world more important than this course. But the vast majority of those won't excuse you from the course requirements (and the ones that will tend to be major life emergencies). It's certainly your prerogative to decide that (for instance) your internship at Target matters more to you than this course. But you need to recognize that your coursework (and thus your grade) will suffer if you put this class too low on your list of priorities.

Reading/assignment schedule

[Readings should be completed prior to the dates listed. Readings with asterisks can be found on our Moodle site.]

8 Sep	no reading
10 Sep	syllabus American Anthropological Association, "Statement on 'Race'" (<i>RMR</i> ch. 1) Tatum, "Defining Racism" (<i>RMR</i> ch. 3) McIntosh, "White Privilege" (<i>RMR</i> ch. 4)
15 Sep	Omi & Winant, "Racial Formation" (<i>RMR</i> ch. 2) Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes" (<i>RMR</i> ch. 5)
17 Sep	***Coates, "The Case for Reparations"
22 Sep	Senior Project deadline #1 (register for Comm 3995W-005) ***Lipsitz, "Bill Moore's Body" Lipsitz, " <i>Lean on Me</i> " (<i>RMR</i> ch. 7)
24 Sep	Ontiveros, "No Golden Age" (<i>RMR</i> ch. 6) Newman, "The Forgotten Fifteen Million" (<i>RMR</i> ch. 9)
29 Sep	Senior Project deadline #2 (meeting) hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination" (<i>RMR</i> ch. 8) Jhally & Lewis, "White Responses" (<i>RMR</i> ch. 10)
1 Oct	CE "early bird" deadline #1 (+3 points) Rose, "Fear of a Black Planet" (<i>RMR</i> ch. 11)
6 Oct	Senior Project deadline #3 (topic proposal/bibliography) Graduate Student Project deadline #1 (meeting) McLeod, "Copyright, Authorship and African-American Culture" (<i>RMR</i> ch. 12) Jafa, "My Black Death" (<i>RMR</i> ch. 13)
8 Oct	Rodman, "Race . . . and Other Four Letter Words" (<i>RMR</i> ch. 14) ***Hayes & Rodman, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Film"
13 Oct	Graduate Student Project deadline #2 (topic proposal) Shimakawa, "Mind Yourself" (<i>RMR</i> ch. 15) Bird, "Imagining Indians" (<i>RMR</i> ch. 16)
15 Oct	NO CLASS Chvany, "Do We Look Like Ferengi Capitalists to You" (<i>RMR</i> ch. 17)
20 Oct	Dyer, "The Light of the World" (<i>RMR</i> ch. 18) Gray, "Jazz Tradition, Institutional Formation, and Cultural Practice" (<i>RMR</i> ch. 19)

- 22 Oct** **Senior Project deadline #4 (thesis paragraph draft)**
Farred, "Phantom Calls" (*RMR* ch. 20)
- 27 Oct** McBride, "Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch" (*RMR* ch. 21)
Dyson, "Unnatural Disasters" (*RMR* ch. 22)
- 29 Oct** **CE "early bird" deadline #2 (+2 points)**
Lipsitz, "The Hip Hop Hearings" (*RMR* ch. 23)
- 3 Nov** Stabile, "Criminalizing Black Culture" (*RMR* ch. 24)
Williams, "The Distribution of Distress," (*RMR* ch. 27)
- 5 Nov** Stabile, "The Typhoid Marys of the Left" (*RMR* ch. 26)
- 10 Nov** **SPR deadline**
Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities" (*RMR* ch. 25)
Anzaldúa, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" (*RMR* ch. 28)
- 12 Nov** **Senior Project deadline #5 (rough draft)**
Sharma, "Taxi Cab Publics and the Production of *Brown Space* After 9/11" (*RMR* ch. 29)
- 17 Nov** Yu, "How Tiger Woods Lost His Stripes" (*RMR* ch. 30)
Piper, "Passing for White, Passing for Black" (*RMR* ch. 31)
- 19 Nov** Bell, "Racial Realism -- After We're Gone" (*RMR* ch. 32)
- 24 Nov** Berlant, "The Face of America and the State of Emergency" (*RMR* ch. 33)
Awkward, "Burying Don Imus" (*RMR* ch. 34)
- 26 Nov** **CE "early bird" deadline #3 (+1 point)**
NO CLASS -- THANKSGIVING
- 1 Dec** Coates, *Between the World and Me*, pp. 1-71
- 3 Dec** Coates, *Between the World and Me*, pp. 72-152
- 8 Dec** **VIRTUAL CLASS**
***readings (SPRs) t.b.a.
- 10 Dec** **VIRTUAL CLASS**
***readings (SPRs) t.b.a.
- 15 Dec** **VIRTUAL CLASS**
***readings (SPRs) t.b.a.
- 23 Dec** **Final deadline for CEs, blog posts/comments, and Senior Projects**
(12:30 pm)