

Media, race, and identity

Special topics in communication theory

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Office hours: TuTh 2:00-3:30p, W 3:00-4:00p, and by appointment

Comm 5110-003

Tu Th 12:45-2:00p

150 Ford

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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 general distribution of education, jobs, housing, healthcare, justice, and political power.

One of the most significant arenas where racial politics manifest themselves in US culture is the mass media. As such, 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 assimilation and integration,
- the politics of media representation and invisibility,
- the history of interracial cultural borrowing and theft, and
- the vexed question of racial ambiguity and hybridity.

Bear in mind that few (if any) of the questions we’ll address this semester have easy answers. How well you do in this class will depend on your ability to think critically about the role of race and media in contemporary society and your ability to argue your position(s) well.

Readings

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

- Paul Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*
- Todd Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C.*
- Grant Farred, *Phantom Calls*
- Herman S. Gray, *Cultural Moves*
- bell hooks, *Where We Stand*
- Noel Ignatiev & John Garvey (eds.), *Race Traitor*
- George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* [revised and expanded edition]
- Carol A. Stabile, *White Victims, Black Villains*
- Patricia J. Williams, *Seeing a Color-Blind Future*

[The non-book readings assigned for Jan 18 will be distributed in class.]

You are strongly encouraged to use the following recommended book (also available at the University Bookstore) as a helpful guide for how to conceive, plan, research, and write your final papers:

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

Graduate students

The basic course rules outlined in this syllabus apply to graduate students except as follows:

- There will be an extra meeting every 3-4 weeks (places, dates, and times to be determined) for the discussion of additional graduate-level readings (also to be determined). Graduate students are required to do these extra readings and to attend and participate in these extra sessions.
- The graduate student version of the “major research project” should result in a paper that is (a) 6250-7500 words long and (b) suitable for submission to a scholarly conference and/or journal. Graduate students are expected to submit a paper topic by 30 Jan and a final version of their paper by 11 May, but are not required to submit “verification pages” or to meet any of the other intermediate paper deadlines/requirements.
- Graduate students are required to attend all regular class meetings and do all the assigned readings, but are not required to complete the “reading journal” assignment.

Grading

Final course grades for undergraduates will be calculated using the following schedule:

Attendance/participation	20%
Reading journal (10 entries @ 2% each)	20%
Major research project	60%

Final course grades for graduate students will be calculated using the following schedule:

Attendance/participation	20%
Major research project	80%

Final grade point totals will translate to letter grades as follows:

A	93-100	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	63-66
A-	90-92	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D-	60-62
B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69	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

I will take attendance every time we meet. Unexcused absences, late arrivals, and early departures will all affect your grade. In general, the only absences that will count as “excused” are those resulting from:

- major life emergencies (with suitable documentation (hospital receipts, funeral notices, etc.)) or
- major religious holidays (with written notice presented at least a week in advance).

Our class meetings will be structured around discussions rather than lectures. As such, this is not a course that will reward passive spectators, and you will be expected to make significant contributions to our discussions -- both in class and online -- on a regular basis. Ideally, you should aim to:

- attend all required class meetings (this includes arriving on time and staying until the end),
- make at least one significant contribution to our in-class discussions every time we meet, and
- contribute roughly 200 words of productive commentary to our online discussions every week.

Meeting all the goals above will earn you an A for attendance/participation. Should you fall short in one of these areas, you can make up for it with extra work in one of the others . . . but bear in mind that:

- In-class presence matters. If you miss a class, you should contribute more extensively to our online discussions immediately thereafter.
- Consistent effort counts. All other things being equal, 100 blog-words/week for 15 weeks will serve you better than 1500 blog-words in one massive post.
- Quality counts. A brilliant and insightful 100-word blog post will typically be worth more than a mediocre 300-word post.
- “Fluff” doesn’t count. I reserve the right to *penalize* people who make repeated and obvious efforts to boost their grade with off-topic comments and/or “padded” blog posts.

Written assignments: general rules

(a) Where/how to submit assignments. All written assignments *must* be submitted in *both* printed *and* digital versions, and the text of each version must be identical.

- Printed versions should be double-spaced and stapled (do *not* use plastic covers/binders).
- Digital versions should be e-mailed to rodman@umn.edu as file attachments.
- Acceptable digital formats are OpenOffice, WordPerfect, Word, RTF, PDF, HTML, and plaintext.
- I will *not* print out hard copies of digital submissions, and so you will *not* receive written feedback unless you submit both versions.
- If you submit printed versions of assignments outside of class, *either* hand such work directly to me *or* place it in my campus mailbox in 250 Ford. Do *not* submit work under my office door.

(b) Deadlines. At least one -- and preferably both -- versions of any assignment must be submitted by 12:45 pm on the relevant due date. If you submit only one of the required versions on time, you have until 3:30 pm on the due date to submit the other version before grade penalties are assessed. The minimum penalty in all such cases will be one full letter grade deducted from that assignment’s grade.

(c) Grammar/spelling/etc. Grades for written assignments will be based primarily on content, rather than form: insightful, smartly argued essays that contain a few spelling errors will almost always receive higher grades than grammatically flawless papers that have weak arguments. Nonetheless, grammar, spelling, and style still matter to the effective presentation of a strong argument, and assignments suffering from significant “form” problems will be penalized accordingly.

Research project

Your major assignment for this course is a research project that will culminate in a 4000+ word paper. This paper must be on a topic appropriate to the course’s central theme and it should make a persuasive, well-supported argument about your topic. Your final paper is due *by 12:30 pm on 11 May*. There are several *mandatory* intermediate deadlines (30 Jan, 13 Feb, 27 Feb, 6 Mar, 20 Mar, 10 Apr) that will help you complete this project in a timely and satisfactory fashion.

This assignment is explicitly designed so that it can be used to satisfy the Senior Paper requirement for Communication Studies majors. If you intend to use this project for this purpose, you will need to:

- inform me *in writing* of your intent to do so by 25 Jan,
- register for Comm 3995 by 26 Jan, and
- earn a grade of B- or better on your completed project.

Further details about this assignment are available on a separate handout.

Reading journals

All undergraduate students must write and submit a minimum of ten (10) short (~250 word) journal entries, each of which will consist of a thoughtful response to a different reading assignment. Each journal entry is due by 12:45 pm on the class date for which the reading in question is assigned. Further details about this assignment are available on a separate handout.

Course blog

In addition to our face-to-face meetings, we will conduct a significant amount of discussion and course business online via a course blog. A partial list of the ways we will use the course blog includes:

- graded discussions of assigned readings and other issues related to the theme of the course,
- occasional “virtual lectures” designed to stimulate (additional) online discussion, and
- course-related business announcements.

Full details on how to access and contribute to the blog are available on a separate handout.

Academic integrity

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

- plagiarism in any of its forms,
- copying assignments (in whole or in part) written by other students,
- having someone else research and/or write substantial portions of any graded assignment, and
- 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 . . . and in cases that involve your final research paper, such a penalty will result in a final course grade of F.

Further information about the University’s official policies with respect to academic dishonesty -- including more detailed explanations of what constitutes “plagiarism” and “cheating” -- can be found online at <http://writing.umn.edu/tww/plagiarism/>

Etiquette

- The discussion portions of our class sessions will cover topics that provoke strong differences of opinion within the group. I do not expect our class meetings to produce unanimous agreement about the issues under discussion, but I *do* expect *all* of our conversations to be characterized by mutual respect and collegiality. Strongly expressed opinions are acceptable in this class; 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 -- may result in penalties to your attendance/participation grade.
- If you wish to, you may make audio recordings of our class meetings, provided you can do so without disrupting the ordinary flow of the class. The purchase and/or sale of either written notes or audio recordings of our class meetings, however, is strictly prohibited.

Reading/assignment schedule

Jan 16	no reading	
Jan 18	American Anthropological Association, "Statement on 'Race'" Omi & Winant, "Racial Formation" Tatum, "Defining Racism" McIntosh, "White Privilege" [recommended: Booth <i>et al.</i> , chapter 1]	
Jan 23	Williams, <i>Seeing a Color-Blind Future</i> [all] [recommended: Booth <i>et al.</i> , chapter 2]	
Jan 25	hooks, <i>Where We Stand</i> , pp. vii-23 [recommended: Booth <i>et al.</i> , chapter 3]	
Jan 30	hooks, <i>Where We Stand</i> , pp. 24-100	Paper topic due
Feb 1	hooks, <i>Where We Stand</i> , pp. 101-164 [recommended: Booth <i>et al.</i> , chapter 4]	
Feb 6	Lipsitz, <i>The Possessive Investment in Whiteness</i> , pp. vii-69 [recommended: Booth <i>et al.</i> , chapter 5]	
Feb 8	Lipsitz, <i>The Possessive Investment in Whiteness</i> , pp. 70-139 [recommended: Booth <i>et al.</i> , chapter 6]	
Feb 13	Lipsitz, <i>The Possessive Investment in Whiteness</i> , pp. 140-184	5-item biblio. due
Feb 15	Lipsitz, <i>The Possessive Investment in Whiteness</i> , pp. 185-248 [recommended: Booth <i>et al.</i> , chapter 7]	
Feb 20	Gray, <i>Cultural Moves</i> , pp. vii-51 [recommended: Booth <i>et al.</i> , chapter 8]	
Feb 22	Gray, <i>Cultural Moves</i> , pp. 52-113 [recommended: Booth <i>et al.</i> , chapter 9]	
Feb 27	Gray, <i>Cultural Moves</i> , pp. 114-147 recommended: Booth <i>et al.</i> , chapter 10]	Thesis paragraph due
Mar 1	Gray, <i>Cultural Moves</i> , pp. 148-194 [recommended: Booth <i>et al.</i> , chapter 11]	
Mar 6	Stabile, <i>White Victims, Black Villains</i> , pp. 1-56	10-item biblio. due
Mar 8	Stabile, <i>White Victims, Black Villains</i> , pp. 57-104 [recommended: Booth <i>et al.</i> , chapter 12]	

Mar 13	NO CLASS -- SPRING BREAK	
Mar 15	NO CLASS -- SPRING BREAK	
Mar 20	Stabile, <i>White Victims, Black Villains</i> , pp. 105-152 [recommended: Booth <i>et al.</i> , chapter 13]	2000-word draft due
Mar 22	Stabile, <i>White Victims, Black Villains</i> , pp. 153-188 [recommended: Booth <i>et al.</i> , chapter 14]	
Mar 27	Boyd, <i>The New H.N.I.C.</i> , pp. ix-60 [recommended: Booth <i>et al.</i> , chapter 16]	
Mar 29	Boyd, <i>The New H.N.I.C.</i> , pp. 61-101	
Apr 3	Boyd, <i>The New H.N.I.C.</i> , pp. 102-152 Farred, <i>Phantom Calls</i> , pp. 1-35	
Apr 5	Farred, <i>Phantom Calls</i> , pp. 36-95	
Apr 10	Beatty, <i>The White Boy Shuffle</i> , pp. 1-58	4000-word draft due
Apr 12	Beatty, <i>The White Boy Shuffle</i> , pp. 59-111	
Apr 17	Beatty, <i>The White Boy Shuffle</i> , pp. 112-173	
Apr 19	Beatty, <i>The White Boy Shuffle</i> , pp. 174-227	
Apr 24	Ignatiev & Garvey, <i>Race Traitor</i> , pp. 1-57	
Apr 26	Ignatiev & Garvey, <i>Race Traitor</i> , pp. 85-141	
May 1	Ignatiev & Garvey, <i>Race Traitor</i> , pp. 147-194	
May 3	Ignatiev & Garvey, <i>Race Traitor</i> , pp. 247-292	
May 11	NO CLASS	Final paper due