

# Media, race, and identity

Comm 5221

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office hours (253 Ford): TuTh 2:30-4p, W 2-3p, and by appointment

# Syllabus

Spring 2008

## 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,
- 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 racism -- in any of its forms -- were simple enough to be eliminated with easy solutions, it would have disappeared decades (if not centuries) ago, and there would be no need for courses such as this one. A crucial part of your task in this course 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.

- Ien Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese*
- Paul Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*
- Todd Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C.*
- Herman S. Gray, *Cultural Moves*
- bell hooks, *Where We Stand*
- George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* [revised and expanded edition]
- Catherine R. Squires, *Dispatches From the Color Line*
- Carol A. Stabile, *White Victims, Black Villains*
- Patricia J. Williams, *Seeing a Color-Blind Future*

Please note that an earlier edition exists for the Lipsitz book. Students who opt to acquire their books from alternate sources should make sure that they acquire the edition listed above. Other required readings will be distributed in class.

## Grading

(a) Graduate students. Presumably, your primary motivation for being in this course includes a genuine desire to engage with the course material in a thoughtful and critical fashion -- and that's the way it should be. With this in mind, my default assumption when it comes to graduate-level grades is that it's counter-productive to worry about how your work for this course translates into a letter grade. As of Day One, you begin the course with an A. If you show up for all our class meetings, participate intelligently in our discussions (both in class and online), and complete the final research paper in satisfactory and timely fashion, you'll keep that A. That being said, in cases where people are clearly slacking off, I reserve the right to go deeper into the alphabet when I submit final grades (and I've actually done so in the past). Under such unfortunate circumstances, your grade will be calculated using the following formula:

Attendance/participation	25%
Final paper	75%

(b) Undergraduate students. If you're officially enrolled in this course as an undergraduate, then you and I have already communicated about my plan to design this course with graduate students in mind -- and you've signed up knowing that the workload would probably be heavier than what you are used to. Given this, I am willing to begin the semester under the assumption that you, too, have a genuine desire to engage with the course material in a thoughtful and critical fashion, and that you will approach the course with your very best effort.

At the same time, I recognize that you may still be surprised (and even overwhelmed) by the heightened workload of a graduate-level course. You should arrange to meet with me one-on-one no later than 5 Feb to discuss your comfort zone with respect to the course's workload and, if necessary, to opt out of the research project in favor of a take-home final exam.

Attendance/participation	25%
Final paper OR take-home final exam	75%

## Attendance/participation

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),
- contribute significantly to our in-class discussions every time we meet, and
- contribute productively to our online discussions on a consistent basis.

Under normal circumstances, there is no formal portion of your grade attached to either attendance or participation, but I reserve the right to invoke the "deeper into the alphabet" policy described above for students who fall significantly short of the expectations described above.

## Research project

Your major assignment for this course is a research project that will culminate in a paper of 4000+ words (for undergraduates) or 6250+ words (for graduate students). 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.

- Graduate students should approach this project with the goal of producing a paper that is appropriate for submission to a scholarly conference and/or journal. You must submit a proposed paper topic by 12 Feb, and your completed paper is due by 4 pm on 6 May, so that we can workshop them as a group on 13 May.

- Undergraduate students have a slightly different set of requirements for this project than graduate students: i.e., a shorter paper, more intermediate deadlines (12 Feb, 11 Mar, 22 Apr), and a later final deadline (4 pm on 13 May).

## Take-home final exam

Undergraduates who opt out of the research project must complete a take-home final exam instead. This exam (due 13 May) will consist entirely of essay questions and will be based on the assigned readings and our in-class discussions. It will consist of one mandatory question and two questions that you will choose from a larger selection. Each essay should be 1250-1500 words long and will be weighted equally in your exam grade.

## 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:

- 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

- Our discussions will cover topics that are likely to evoke 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 grade penalties.
- 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 22** no reading
- Jan 24** American Anthropological Association, "Statement on 'Race'"  
Omi & Winant, "Racial Formation"  
Tatum, "Defining Racism"  
McIntosh, "White Privilege"
- Jan 29** Williams, *Seeing a Color-Blind Future* [all]  
Said, "The Politics of Knowledge"
- Jan 31** hooks, *Where We Stand*, pp. vii-69  
hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination"
- Feb 5** hooks, *Where We Stand*, pp. 70-164  
Gallaher, "On the Fault Line: Race, Class, and the US Patriot Movement"
- Feb 7** Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, pp. vii-69  
McPherson, "I'll Take My Stand in Dixie-Net: White Guys, the South, and Cyberspace"
- Feb 12** **paper topic due [all students]**  
**5-item bibliography due [undergraduate students]**  
Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, pp. 70-139  
Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters* [selections]
- Feb 14** Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, pp. 140-184  
Berlant, "The Face of America and the State of Emergency"
- Feb 19** Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, pp. 185-248  
Roediger, "All About Eve, Critical White Studies, and Getting Over Whiteness"
- Feb 21** Gray, *Cultural Moves*, pp. vii-73  
Jhally & Lewis, *Enlightened Racism* [selections]
- Feb 26** Gray, *Cultural Moves*, pp. 77-130  
Dyson, "Bill Cosby and the Politics of Race"
- Feb 28** Gray, *Cultural Moves*, pp. 133-194  
Rose, "Soul Sonic Forces: Technology, Orality, and Black Cultural Practice in Rap Music"
- Mar 4** Squires, *Dispatches From the Color Line*, pp. 1-53  
Piper, "Passing for White, Passing for Black"
- Mar 6** **NO CLASS**  
Squires, *Dispatches From the Color Line*, pp. 55-100  
Wald, "Race, Passing, and Cultural Representation"
- Mar 11** **thesis paragraph / annotated 10-item bibliography due [undergraduate students]**  
Squires, *Dispatches From the Color Line*, pp. 101-148  
powell, "The Colorblind Multiracial Dilemma: Racial Categories Reconsidered"

- Mar 13** Squires, *Dispatches From the Color Line*, pp. 149-210  
Sturm, "Opening"
- Mar 18** **NO CLASS -- SPRING BREAK**
- Mar 20** **NO CLASS -- SPRING BREAK**
- Mar 25** Stabile, *White Victims, Black Villains*, pp. 1-56  
Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideology and the Media"
- Mar 27** Stabile, *White Victims, Black Villains*, pp. 57-127  
Maurice, "'Cinema at Its Source': Synchronizing Race and Sound in the Early Talkies"
- Apr 1** Stabile, *White Victims, Black Villains*, pp. 128-188  
Wallace, "The Good Lynching and *The Birth of a Nation*: Discourses and Aesthetics of Jim Crow"
- Apr 3** Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C.*, pp. ix-60  
hooks, "Gangsta Culture -- Sexism, Misogyny: Who Will Take the Rap?"
- Apr 8** Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C.*, pp. 61-101  
Rodman, "A Hero to Most?: Elvis, Myth, and the Politics of Race"
- Apr 10** Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C.*, pp. 102-152  
Rodman, "Race . . . and Other Four Letter Words: Eminem and the Cultural Politics of Authenticity"
- Apr 15** Ang, *On Not Being Chinese*, pp. 1-74  
Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities"
- Apr 17** Ang, *On Not Being Chinese*, pp. 75-111  
Gilroy, "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity"
- Apr 22** **rough draft due [undergraduate students]**  
Ang, *On Not Being Chinese*, pp. 112-176  
Yu, "How Tiger Woods Lost His Stripes: Post-Nationalist American Studies as a History of Race, Migration, and the Commodification of Culture"
- Apr 24** Ang, *On Not Being Chinese*, pp. 177-201  
Werry, "National Cinema, Global Markets, and the Politics of Post-Ethnicity: Notes From Middle Earth"
- Apr 29** Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, pp. 1-94  
Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?"
- May 1** Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, pp. 95-150  
Hall, "Race, Culture, and Communications: Looking Backward and Forward at Cultural Studies"

- May 6**            **final paper due [graduate students]**  
Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, pp. 151-226  
Goad, "Several Compelling Arguments for the Enslavement of All White Liberals"
- May 8**            Ignatiev and Garvey (eds.), *Race Traitor* [selections]  
Aal, "Moving From Guilt to Action: Antiracist Organizing and the Concept of 'Whiteness'  
for Activism and the Academy"
- May 13**           **NO CLASS for UNDERGRADUATES**  
**take-home final exam due [undergraduate students]**  
**final paper due [undergraduate students]**  
**final paper workshop day [graduate students]**