

Media, race, and identity

Contemporary problems in US electronic media
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Comm 5210
Tu Th 2:30-3:45p
B60 Ford
Fall 2005

Course description and objectives

Racial prejudice and institutional racism are still common enough to be 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 to *argue* your position(s) well, not your ability to memorize and repeat the "right" answers.

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.*
- Richard Dyer, *White*
- Herman Gray, *Watching Race* [2004 edition]
- Noel Ignatiev & John Garvey (eds.), *Race Traitor*
- Wahneema Lubiano (ed.), *The House That Race Built*
- Danzy Senna, *Caucasia*
- Patricia J. Williams, *Seeing a Color-Blind Future*

There are also several articles available as PDF and HTML files on the course's WebCT site.

Graduate students

If you are a graduate student, a slightly different set of course rules applies to you. In particular:

- You are required to do *all* the readings listed on the syllabus.
- You are required to attend *all* class meetings.
- Your final research paper must be (a) 6250-7500 words long and (b) suitable for submission to a scholarly conference and/or journal.
- You must submit a proposed paper topic by 29 Sep and a completed paper by 15 Dec, but you do *not* have to meet any of the other intermediate paper deadlines/requirements.

Grading

Your final course grade will be based on two factors: attendance/participation (20%) and a major research project (80%). Grade point totals will translate to letter grades as follows:

A	93-100	B	83-86	C	73-76	D+	67-69	F	0-59
A-	90-92	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D	63-66	N	0-59
B+	87-89	C+	77-79	S	70-100	D-	60-62	I	n/a

- “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 250 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 throughout the semester counts more than isolated bursts of heavy activity: 100 words/week for 15 weeks will serve you better than 1500 words in one massive post.
- Quality counts for more than quantity: a brilliant and insightful 100-word Discussion Board post will typically be worth more than a mediocre 300-word post.
- “Fluff” contributions will not help your grade: I reserve the right to penalize people who make repeated and obvious efforts to pad their participation score with off-topic comments.

Research project

Your major assignment for this course is a research project that culminates in a 5000+ 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 2:30 pm on 15 Dec. There are several mandatory intermediate deadlines (29 Sep, 13 Oct, 27 Oct, 10 Nov) 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 15 Sep,
- register for Comm 3995 by 16 Sep, and
- earn a grade of B- or better on your completed project.

WebCT

We will use WebCT for several things this semester:

- graded online discussions of assigned readings and related issues,
- “virtual lectures” designed to stimulate (additional) online discussion,
- course-related business announcements, and
- a resource site for official course documents and all our non-book readings.

WebCT is accessible from the My U Portal (<http://www.myu.umn.edu>) via the “my Toolkit” tab. To use WebCT, your browser must have both Java and cookies enabled, and it must allow pop-up windows. Recent versions of Firefox, Netscape, and Internet Explorer (but, sadly, not Opera) should all work.

Academic integrity

I assume that the vast majority of students are honest, but to help us avoid potentially disastrous misunderstandings, the following is a partial list of major examples of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism in any of its forms
- copying papers (in whole or in part) written by other students
- having someone else research and/or write substantial portions of your research project for you
- 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, of course, 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 occasionally cover topics that provoke strong differences of opinion within the group. I do not expect us to walk away from our class meetings in perfect and total agreement about the issues under discussion, but I do expect all of our conversations to be characterized by mutual respect and collegiality. Impassioned arguments and 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 your cell phone in class, excessive side chatter, engaging in premature leave-taking behavior -- may result in penalties to your attendance/participation grade.
- If you wish to, you may make audio recordings of our class lectures and/or discussions, 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.

Miscellaneous

- My office hours are 12:30-2p on Tue and Thu, 2-3p on Wed, and by appointment. Don’t be shy. Take advantage of these. Please. It’s why they exist.
- If you miss an assignment deadline, I will penalize your grade in direct proportion to the lateness of your submitted assignment. Major life emergencies and major religious holidays constitute exceptions to this rule, but only if you provide the same type of documentation listed under “Attendance/participation” for such circumstances.

Reading/assignment schedule

Gray-shaded dates denote Graduate Seminar Days, which are optional *attendance* days for undergraduates, but the *readings* listed in the lefthand column are still required.

date	required reading (all) due dates (undergraduate)	required reading (graduate) due dates (graduate)
6 Sep	no readings	no readings
8 Sep	American Anthropological Association, "Statement on 'Race'" Omi & Winant, "Racial Formation" Tatum, "Defining Racism: 'Can We Talk?'" McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"	Grossberg, "Cultural Studies: What's in a Name (One More Time)" Hall, "Race, Culture, and Communications: Looking Backward and Forward at Cultural Studies" Said, "The Politics of Knowledge"
13 Sep	<i>Seeing a Color-Blind Future</i> [all]	Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideology and the Media" Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?"
15 Sep	<i>White</i> [pp. xiii-40] Hitt, "Mighty White of You"	Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness" Frankenberg, <i>White Women, Race Matters</i> [selections]
20 Sep	<i>White</i> [pp. 41-144]	hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination" Roediger, "All About Eve, Critical White Studies, and Getting Over Whiteness"
22 Sep	<i>White</i> [pp. 145-183]	Leistyna, "White Ethnic Unconsciousness" Chvany, "'Do We Look Like Ferengi Capitalists to You?': <i>Star Trek's</i> Klingons as Emergent Virtual American Ethnics"
27 Sep	<i>White</i> [pp. 184-223]	Goldberg, "States of Whiteness" McPherson, "I'll Take My Stand in Dixie-Net: White Guys, the South, and Cyberspace"
29 Sep	paper topic 5-item bibliography <i>Watching Race</i> [pp. xiii-56]	paper topic Gray, "Prefiguring a Black Cultural Formation: The New Conditions of Black Cultural Production" Jhally & Lewis, <i>Enlightened Racism</i> [selections]
4 Oct	<i>Watching Race</i> [pp. 57-112]	Dyson, "Bill Cosby and the Politics of Race" Fiske, "Hearing Anita Hill (And Viewing Bill Cosby)"
6 Oct	<i>Watching Race</i> [pp. 113-176]	Sanneh, "Black in the Box: In Defense of African American Television" Willis, "I Want the Black One: Is There a Place for Afro-American Culture in Commodity Culture?"
11 Oct	<i>The New H.N.I.C.</i> [pp. ix-101]	Neal, "Toward a Black Public: Movement, Markets, and Moderns" Rose, "Soul Sonic Forces: Technology, Orality, and Black Cultural Practice in Rap Music"
13 Oct	thesis paragraph <i>The New H.N.I.C.</i> [pp. 102-160]	Rodman, "A Hero to Most?: Elvis, Myth, and the Politics of Race" Jacobs, <i>Speaking the Lower Frequencies</i> [selections]

18 Oct	<i>The White Boy Shuffle</i> [pp. 1-94]	Garabedian, "Reds, Whites, and the Blues: Lawrence Gellert, 'Negro Songs of Protest,' and the Left-Wing Folk-Song Revival of the 1930s and 1940s" Wald, "From Spirituals to Swing: Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Gospel Crossover"
20 Oct	<i>The White Boy Shuffle</i> [pp. 95-152]	hooks, "Gangsta Culture -- Sexism, Misogyny: Who Will Take the Rap?" hooks, "Madonna: Plantation Mistress or Soul Sister"
25 Oct	<i>The White Boy Shuffle</i> [pp. 153-226]	Tate, "Nigs R Us, or How Blackfolk Became Fetish Objects" Jafa, "My Black Death"
27 Oct	annotated 10-item bibliography <i>Caucasia</i> [pp. 1-82]	Senna, "The Mulatto Millennium" Jones, "Is Biracial Enough? (Or, What's This About a Multiracial Category on the Census?: A Conversation)" powell, "The Colorblind Multiracial Dilemma: Racial Categories Reconsidered"
1 Nov	<i>Caucasia</i> [pp. 83-165]	Sturm, "Opening" Perkins, "Australian Mixed Race"
3 Nov	<i>Caucasia</i> [pp. 166-253]	Ginsberg, "The Politics of Passing" Piper, "Passing for White, Passing for Black" Wald, "Race, Passing, and Cultural Representation"
8 Nov	<i>Caucasia</i> [pp. 254-337]	Rodman, "Race . . . and Other Four Letter Words: Eminem and the Cultural Politics of Authenticity" Wellman, "Minstrel Shows, Affirmative Action Talk, and Angry White Men: Marking Racial Otherness in the 1990s"
10 Nov	rough draft <i>Caucasia</i> [pp. 338-413]	Wallace, "The Good Lynching and <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> : Discourses and Aesthetics of Jim Crow" Maurice, "'Cinema at Its Source': Synchronizing Race and Sound in the Early Talkies" Werry, "National Cinema, Global Markets, and the Politics of Post-Ethnicity: Notes From Middle Earth"
15 Nov	<i>The House That Race Built</i> [pp. vii-86]	Gates, "Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes" Dyson, "Beyond Essentialism: Expanding African-American Cultural Criticism"
17 Nov	NO CLASS <i>The House That Race Built</i> [pp. 87-135]	NO CLASS Gilroy, "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity" Yu, "How Tiger Woods Lost His Stripes: Post-Nationalist American Studies as a History of Race, Migration, and the Commodification of Culture"
22 Nov	<i>The House That Race Built</i> [pp. 136-194]	Carby, "White Woman Listen!: Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood" Wallace, "Negative Images: Towards a Black Feminist Cultural Criticism"

24 Nov	NO CLASS <i>The House That Race Built</i> [pp. 195-252]	NO CLASS Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities" Brubaker & Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity'"
29 Nov	<i>The House That Race Built</i> [pp. 253-303] <i>Race Traitor</i> [pp. 1-31]	Gilroy, "The Crisis of 'Race' and Raciology" Lipsitz, "Bill Moore's Body"
1 Dec	<i>Race Traitor</i> [pp. 32-84]	Aal, "Moving From Guilt to Action: Antiracist Organizing and the Concept of 'Whiteness' for Activism and the Academy" Roediger, "In Conclusion: Elvis, Wiggers, and Crossing Over to Nonwhiteness"
6 Dec	<i>Race Traitor</i> [pp. 85-146]	Berlant, "The Face of America and the State of Emergency" Gallaher, "On the Fault Line: Race, Class, and the US Patriot Movement"
8 Dec	<i>Race Traitor</i> [pp. 147-246]	Michaels, "Autobiographies of the Ex-White Men: Why Race Is Not a Social Construction" Gutiérrez-Jones, "Color Blindness and Acting Out"
13 Dec	<i>Race Traitor</i> [pp. 247-292]	Goad, "Several Compelling Arguments for the Enslavement of All White Liberals" Newitz, "White Savagery and Humiliation, or A New Racial Consciousness in the Media"
15 Dec	NO CLASS final paper	NO CLASS final paper