

# Media, race, and identity

Comm 5221-002 [undergraduate section]

Prof. Gil Rodman

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office hours (253 Ford): TuTh 10-11:15a, W 10-11:30a, and by appointment

# Syllabus

Spring 2011

## 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. 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 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 at all, 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.

- Michael Awkward, *Burying Don Imus*
- 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*
- 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*

Please note that an earlier edition exists for the Lipsitz book. If you opt to acquire your books from alternate sources, make sure to acquire the edition listed above. Other required readings will be distributed in class.

Also note that the required book list for this section of the course (002) overlaps significantly with the required book list for the graduate section of the course (001). Unless you want extra reading, make sure to buy only the books required for section 002.

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) as a helpful guide for how to conceive, plan, research, and write their final papers:

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

## 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: "represents failure . . . and signifies that the work was . . . completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit."

Final course grades will be calculated using the following schedule:

Blog participation	30%
Critical response papers	30%
Take-home final	40%

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

A	93-100	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

Class meetings will typically be structured around discussions rather than lectures. This is *not* a course where passive spectators are likely to do well, and *every* student will be expected to (1) attend class regularly, (2) do the required reading, and (3) come to class prepared to discuss those readings in a productive and substantive fashion.

## Blog participation

30% of your overall course grade will be based on your contributions to the course blog. Blog grades will be calculated every week. In order to receive credit for any given week, you must post at least 200 words of thoughtful commentary about the required readings during that week. Each week of blog contributions is worth up to 3 points towards your overall course grade. This is a "pile it on" assignment: i.e., you can accrue grade points all semester long up to a maximum of 30 points. Further details about this assignment are available on a separate handout.

## Critical response papers

30% of your overall course grade will be based on essays that provide a critical (i.e., thoughtful and analytical) response to one or more of the assigned readings. Each critical response paper should be ~1000-1250 words in length, and is worth up to 10 points towards your overall course grade. Further details about this assignment are available on a separate handout.

## Take-home final

40% of your overall course grade will be based on a take-home final exam. The exam will be cumulative. Each question on the exam will require students to write an essay of ~1000-1250 words, and is worth up to 10 points towards your overall course grade. The exam is due no later than 1:30p on 12 May.

## Academic dishonesty

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) produced by other students
- having someone else research and/or write substantial portions of any graded assignment 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. Further information about the University's policies on academic dishonesty (including detailed explanations of what constitutes "plagiarism" and "cheating") can be found at <http://writing.umn.edu/tww/plagiarism/>

## Miscellaneous

- Our discussions will cover topics that are likely to evoke strong differences of opinion within our group. I don't 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.
- You may make audio and/or video recordings of class meetings for your personal use, provided you can 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.

## Reading/assignment schedule

<b>Jan 18</b>	no reading
<b>Jan 20</b>	American Anthropological Association, "Statement on 'Race'" Omi & Winant, "Racial Formation" Tatum, "Defining Racism" McIntosh, "White Privilege"
<b>Jan 25</b>	Williams, <i>Seeing a Color-Blind Future</i> [all]
<b>Jan 27</b>	hooks, <i>Where We Stand</i> , pp. vii-49
<b>Feb 1</b>	hooks, <i>Where We Stand</i> , pp. 50-100
<b>Feb 3</b>	hooks, <i>Where We Stand</i> , pp. 101-164
<b>Feb 8</b>	Lipsitz, <i>The Possessive Investment in Whiteness</i> , pp. vii-47
<b>Feb 10</b>	Lipsitz, <i>The Possessive Investment in Whiteness</i> , pp. 48-104
<b>Feb 15</b>	Lipsitz, <i>The Possessive Investment in Whiteness</i> , pp. 105-158
<b>Feb 17</b>	Lipsitz, <i>The Possessive Investment in Whiteness</i> , pp. 159-211
<b>Feb 22</b>	Lipsitz, <i>The Possessive Investment in Whiteness</i> , pp. 212-248 Gray, <i>Cultural Moves</i> , pp. 1-31
<b>Feb 24</b>	Gray, <i>Cultural Moves</i> , pp. 32-88
<b>Mar 1</b>	Gray, <i>Cultural Moves</i> , pp. 89-147
<b>Mar 3</b>	Gray, <i>Cultural Moves</i> , pp. 148-193
<b>Mar 8</b>	Farred, <i>Phantom Calls</i> [all]
<b>Mar 10</b>	<b>NO CLASS</b>
<b>Mar 15</b>	<b>NO CLASS -- SPRING BREAK</b>
<b>Mar 17</b>	<b>NO CLASS -- SPRING BREAK</b>
<b>Mar 22</b>	Awkward, <i>Burying Don Imus</i> , pp. xi-61

- Mar 24** Awkward, *Burying Don Imus*, pp. 65-135
- Mar 29** Awkward, *Burying Don Imus*, pp. 137-176
- Mar 31** Stabile, *White Victims, Black Villains*, pp. 1-56
- Apr 5** Stabile, *White Victims, Black Villains*, pp. 57-127
- Apr 7** Stabile, *White Victims, Black Villains*, pp. 128-188
- Apr 12** Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C.*, pp. ix-60
- Apr 14** Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C.*, pp. 61-101
- Apr 19** Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C.*, pp. 102-152
- Apr 21** Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, pp. 1-58
- Apr 26** Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, pp. 59-111
- Apr 28** Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, pp. 112-173
- May 3** Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, pp. 174-226
- May 5** Ignatiev and Garvey (eds.), *Race Traitor* [selections]
- May 12** **Take-home final due**  
**1:30p**