

Topics in Black Studies: Critical Race Theory
21:014:303:01 / 21:050:488:01
Tues/Thur 2:30-3:50 in LSC Rm. 103
Instructor: Asha Best, asbest@scarletmail.rutgers.edu

A note on how to use this syllabus: Think of this syllabus as a course guide. While the course description, learning outcomes and practical details on this page will introduce you to the course, you should refer to the assignment descriptions, grading values and 'how-to' sections regularly in order to help you do well. Also, this syllabus is meant to be accessed electronically; there are hyperlinks throughout that provide examples, tools and texts that you should be using along with other helpful information. As you read through it, please click on each hyperlink embedded in the syllabus.

Course description: This course is about moving towards a more critical understanding of what race is, what race does and how contemporary racial meanings are (re)produced by grappling with some of the concepts and questions that are central to the field of Critical Race Theory. We'll read a variety of texts (such as fiction, interesting blogs, film, etc.) that will enable us to *deconstruct* the concept of race using a mixed bag of tools. Our readings are intended to stimulate fruitful discussions as we consider race and urban space, whiteness studies and the topic of 'post-race' amongst other relevant topics.

Goals for students (learning outcomes):

- To understand what it means to say that race is both constructed and (re)produced.
- To gain a wider vocabulary and set of references to draw on when talking about contemporary meanings of race and racial representation.
- To be able to recognize, critically engage and analyze how race is examined and/or represented in various genres (historical texts, blog posts, novels).
- To hone the ability to engage in meaningful and respectful discussions around the topic of race, both in class and online.
- To develop writing skills by engaging different types of written assignments (moving from micro-blogs to lengthier argumentative essays).

What and Where are the Required Texts:

Books (at the bookstore and on [reserve at Dana Library](#)):

The Life and Times of Martha Washington in the 21st century- Frank Miller

Black No More- George Schuyler

The Vulture- Gil Scott-Heron

Jasmine- Bharati Mukherjee

Articles/Essays/Stories (on Blackboard in Course Docs): Shorter texts will be provided electronically.

Required music/films/short videos are on reserve at Dana Library or Blackboard/Dropbox.

Office hours: To discuss your progress in the course, grades, any questions about course concepts, etc. you will have to make an appointment to meet during my office hours on **Tuesdays and Thursdays 1p-2p**.

How to schedule an appointment for office hours: You must use the [Google Calendar](#) to schedule an appointment for office hours. Please note that you will need a Google account to make appointments. If you have a *quick* question or can't make it to campus during the hours listed above, virtual office hours will be held via g-chat, every Wednesday 7p - 8p. (You can find me on g-chat using the email address listed above. Please note that you need a gmail account in order to use g-chat.)

How you will be evaluated (grading):

40%- Participation

Since you cannot participate if you are not present, participation is comprised of both attendance *and* active engagement in class discussions. To be actively engaged you should be able to make thoughtful comments throughout each class session that reflect that you have done the assigned reading, that you are grappling with the implications of the reading and that you can respond effectively in classroom debates about different interpretations of the reading. You can also ask questions if you are not sure about how to interpret the reading.

Active engagement in class discussions also involves listening to your classmates (and to your instructor). Please keep in mind that it is very difficult to actively engage while you are involved in another discussion on your cell phone, laptop or tablet (or, if you are old-school, by passing notes to one another on loose-leaf paper). Students who are repeatedly engaging in outside discussions (via text, chat, etc) will be asked to excuse themselves and will be marked absent for that session.

One unexcused absence (to be used at your discretion **except on the day of the writing workshop**) is allowed over the course of the semester. To indicate that you will be absent you will need to use Rutgers' [Self-Reporting absences](#) app. More than one unexcused absence, perpetual tardiness, and leaving early from class sessions will result in a reduction of your participation grade.

20%- Twitter essays/ blog posts

For every subsection of the course syllabus you will be asked to submit a Twitter essay or a blog post, so you will need to [sign up for a Twitter account](#) if you do not already have one. Because Tweets are only 140 characters long (no more than one Tweet per prompt) you are not expected to use conventional and/or grammatically correct sentence structures. This is, in fact, an opportunity for you to creatively disrupt conventional (or 'academic') writing while still critically responding to a prompt. Please include the handle @crtspring2013 when submitting Twitter essays.

You may also respond to the given prompt with a blog post to be posted on [our course blog](#). Blog posts submitted for this class must be more than paragraphs of free thought; you may do a '[Mixtape](#)' or a '[Weekly Round-up](#)' that uses short video clips, music, photos and (of course) words to respond critically to the assigned prompt.

20%- 5 pg. argumentative essay

You will be asked to draw on one of your Tweets or blog posts in order to develop a 5 pg. [argumentative](#)

[essay](#) due on March 14th via Blackboard. Unlike Twitter essays and blog posts, this is an exercise in using more conventional/ 'academic' writing. Because this type of writing is an area of weakness for some (and an area of strength for others) part of this assignment is about collaboration and includes working through and submitting a draft, peer reviewing the work of others, having your own writing constructively critiqued, and attending the in-class writing workshop.

20%- You are responsible for completing *one* of the following (due at the end of the semester):

-**Take-home exam** comprised of short-essay questions that ask you to respond to several texts and concepts that we've analyzed this semester.

-**10 pg. essay** developed from an original prompt having to do with one of our course themes and approved by the course instructor. The essay would use the same conventions and format practiced in the 5 pg. essay completed earlier in the semester.

-5 pg. **event response/review** which can be submitted in the form of a 5-7 paragraph blog post, and should include relevant photos and/or other media from the event.

-**Developing a [Prezi](#)** that highlights your understanding of key texts and themes from the semester and

includes a text that you would add to the syllabus. You will make a 5-10 minute in-class presentation of your Prezi on the last day of class.

Please note: Assignments submitted past the due date will not be accepted.

About the course readings: The term Critical Race Theory emerged from debates within Critical Legal Studies and from conflicts over legal education. As mentioned above, our course takes a slightly different approach to critically theorizing race. While we are drawing on key questions, concepts and thinkers of Critical Race Theory, we will be reading an array of genres throughout the semester. (If you are interested in reading the foundational texts, there are a few [anthologies](#) that will introduce you to the key texts that formed Critical Race Theory as a discourse. Kimberle Crenshaw's article "[Twenty Years of Critical Race Theory: Looking Back to Move Forward](#)" is also really useful.)

Besides the required texts (listed below) you should be reading our course blog, [The Crunk Feminist Collective](#), and [Racialicious](#) regularly as we will draw on them from time to time in class discussions.

How to approach the reading & what to take notes on:

- Pay attention to **genre**. Reading a novel is different than reading a blog, and likewise, different than reading a chapter out of a book. Is the text a satire or is it a memoir?
- Look at the **discussion topic** for the upcoming class. How does the assigned text fit into a discussion on urban space or sexuality (for example)?
- **Note specific passages**, page numbers, song lyrics (etc.) that you would like to talk about in class or in your essay assignments.

Our reading/ discussion schedule is organized around the following themes:

A Priori Understandings (Science, History & the Law)

Deconstructing Race (Urban Space, 'the' Nation, Whiteness)

Intersections (Post-colonial studies, Sexuality)

The Post-Racial Epoch (The '80s, Aesthetics, The Digital)

Schedule of readings, assignments & discussion topics:

Tue Jan 22- Introductions

Due by next class: Watch the film *CSA The Confederate States of America* (you can find this on YouTube

and also on reserve at Dana); also choose one reading/post from the Django Roundup to read (see course blog) and come prepared to discuss.

Thu Jan 24- A Priori Understandings: Race as 'Historical Artifact'

Due by next class: Read pgs. 1-100 in George Schuyler's *Black No More*

Tue Jan 29- A Priori Understandings: Race as 'Scientific'

Due by next class: Finish *Black No More*

Thu Jan 31- A Priori Understandings: Race as 'Scientific'

Due by next class: Read Patricia Williams' "Crimes without Passion" & "The Obliging Shell" from *The*

Alchemy of Race & Rights

Tue Feb 5- A Priori Understandings: The Deracialization of Law

Due by next class: Read *The Life & Times of Martha Washington in the 21st century* and submit Twitter essay and/or blog post on the following question: Can you give an explanation/example of how race is imagined as either historical artifact or a simple matter of biology?

Thur Feb 7- Deconstruction: Race & Nation

Due by next class: Finish *The Life & Times of Martha Washington in the 21st century*

Tue Feb 12- Deconstruction: Race & Nation (contd.)

Due by next class: Read Evie Shockley's "[separation anxiety](#)," watch Santigold's '[The Keepers](#)'

Thu Feb 14- Deconstruction: 'Urban' Space

Due by next class: Read *The Vulture* and submit Twitter essay and/or blog post

Tue Feb 19- Deconstruction: 'Urban' Space

Due by next class: Read [Introduction](#) to Lipsitz's *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* and Darnell Moore's "[Post-Whiteness](#)"

Thu Feb 21- Deconstruction: Whiteness

Due by next class: bell hooks' "[Eating the Other](#)" and "[Who is the Other? Analyzing bell hook's reading through the San Pedro society](#)"

Tue Feb 26- Deconstruction: Whiteness

Due by next class: Read "[Racists Like Us](#)," listen to *Kala* and submit Twitter essay and/or blog post (prompt TBA)

Thu Feb 28- Intersections: Post/Neo-colonialism

Due by next class: Watch *District 9* and create a prompt/thesis from a Twit-essay of your choice

Tue Mar 5- Intersections: Post/Neo-colonialism

Due by next class: Submit full draft of essay (3-5 pgs.) to writing groups (copy instructor on email)

Thu Mar 7- No class- Work on papers and peer reviews

Due by next class: Complete [peer review worksheet](#) for each member of your writing group

Tue Mar 12- In-Class Writing Workshop

Due by next class: 5 pg. argumentative essay

Thu Mar 14- No class- **Submit papers electronically by 2:30p via Blackboard. Please note that papers submitted late/via email will not be accepted.**

Spring Break

Tue Mar 26- Intersections- Sexuality

Due by next class: Read pgs [TBD] in *Jasmine*

Thu Mar 28- Intersections: Sexuality
Due by next class: Finish *Jasmine*

Tue Apr 2- Intersections: Sexuality
Due by next class: Read '['Queer' Studies, or \(Almost\) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother](#)' - E. Patrick Johnson and submit Twitter essay and/or blog post

Thu Apr 4- Intersections: Sexuality

Tue Apr 9- TBA

Thu Apr 11- TBA

Tue Apr 16- TBA

Thu Apr 18
Due by next class: Read Derrick Bell's "[The Space Traders](#)" and listen to "[B-Movie](#)"

Tue Apr 23- The Post Racial-Epoch: The '80s
Due by next class: Read both *What was the Hipster? A Sociological Investigation* (select chpts) and Madison Moore's "[Tina Theory: Notes on Fierceness](#)"

Thu Apr 25- The Post Racial-Epoch- Aesthetics
Due by next class: Read Guillermo Gómez-Peña's "[Life in the Global Rancho](#)"

Tue Apr 30- The Post-Racial-Epoch- The Digital
Due by last class: Submit Twitter essay and/or blog post on the following question: What is the meaning of post- in post-racial?

Thu May 2- Wrap-up and Final Presentations

Final projects/paper due Thursday May 9th.

Additional Information:

A Note to Students with Documented Disabilities: This class welcomes all different kinds of learners and needs. Students with disabilities should consult with the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, Room 302, Robeson Center to get recommendations and arrange for necessary assistance and accommodations, and be in touch with the course instructor as well.

A Note on Academic Integrity: All assignments done in the course must adhere to Rutgers University's [policy on academic integrity](#). Rutgers University treats cheating and plagiarism as serious offenses, and violations of the university honor code will be prosecuted to the full extent that is permitted. All students must sign off on the "Academic Integrity Agreement" form on the course's Blackboard site.