

ENGLISH 382 SYLLABUS
RACE AND ETHNICITY IN U.S. LITERATURES

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office hours:

odd days 11:00—11:30 am; even days 1:00—2:00 pm;
and also by appointment

English 382, fall 2009

time: odd days, 9:40—10:50 am

place: SJU Quad 347

THE IDEA OF THE COURSE

This course will focus on novels, stories, poems, and essays written by American authors who are members of prominent ethnic or minority communities within the U.S., specifically African-American, Asian-American, Native-American, Latino/a, and other communities living in diaspora. As we read the literature, we will explore such questions as: is there such a thing as “race”?, what about ethnicity?, what role do “race” and “ethnicity” play in the texts by minority authors?, what is American?, and perhaps most importantly, what role do race and ethnicity play in how we appreciate not only minority literatures in particular but also American literature in general?

In addition to race and ethnicity, we will also reflect on key concepts such as diversity, representation, multiculturalism, transnational, freedom, justice, hybridity, diaspora, migration, borders, globalization, and community. To help us with such re-conceptualizations of American literature (and of our society in general), we will read some short essays that pose arguments not only about literature but also about the social nature of identity and what it means to belong.

TEXTS IN BOOKSTORE

Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*

Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

Louise Erdrich, *The Plague of Doves*

Chang-Rae Lee, *Native Speaker*

Josefina Lopez, *Real Women Have Curves*

Dinaw Mengestu, *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*

Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation*

Other Assigned Reading Will Be Available on Moodle.

WHAT WE WILL DO

The course will be organized around seven units. Each unit explores a different way to approach race and ethnicity in American literature. We will begin each unit with an open discussion of some theoretical questions, followed by a lecture on some of the themes, theoretical concepts, historical context, and biographies of the authors. On the remaining days, we will have a mix of

student presentations and class discussion about the assigned texts. On the final day of the unit, you will come to class with a one page, single spaced essay on the assigned reading. You will spend the first half of the class time in small groups discussing what you wrote, and then you will spend the second half of class time re-envisioning your essay by writing on the back of it. For one unit, instead of turning in a short essay at the end of the unit, you will give a short presentation to the class.

Finally, at the conclusion of the semester, you will take either one of your short essays or your presentation and develop it into a longer 3-4 page, single spaced essay. We will devote some class time to work-shopping this essay, and you will have to share with the class what you are working on.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Six one-page, single spaced essays	10% each (60% total)
Presentation	10%
Final Paper	15%
Attendance and Participation	15%

ONE-PAGE ESSAYS

Your essays will answer one or more of the questions posed by engaging with at least three of the texts assigned for that unit (and one of these must be the primary long text.) I will grade you on (1) how well you formulate and answer the question, (2) how well you support your claims with evidence from the texts, and (3) your reasoning and organization.

Your essays should be *exactly* one page – no more, no less – single spaced, using 11 point Times New Roman font, with one inch margins. As for the header, at the top left, put your name and date, and at the top right, put the name of this class – English 382 -- and the number of the paper (e.g., unit # paper). There should be one line of space between the header and the essay, and no title.

On the back of your essay, after 40-45 minutes of group discussion, you will re-think what you wrote based on the conversation you had with your group. Your in-class essay will be graded on (1) how honestly you re-think what you wrote, (2) how well you draw upon the conversation with your group, and (3) how well you support your new ideas with evidence from the texts.

PRESENTATION

For one unit – instead of writing an essay – you will give an oral presentation in class. Each of you must sign up for a time at the beginning of the semester.

In contrast to the essay, your presentation should be more open-ended so as to invite further discussion and debate among your class-mates. Begin with a question (or set of questions) and entertain more than one possible answer to that question. Ultimately, you should clearly argue for one of those answers and have a strong thesis, but begin with the possibility that there is more than one way to look at the various texts before you. As with your essay, support your argument with evidence from the texts.

Also, your presentation should bring in outside information – perhaps some historical context or biographical information that you looked up on your own. You may even have some video, audio, or images to show.

At the end of your presentation, you should return to the questions with which you began and invite the class to respond and discuss. Your presentation should be at least 10 minutes and no longer than 15 minutes. I also encourage you to meet with me beforehand to discuss your plans.

FINAL PAPER

Take either one of your six essays or your presentation and develop it into a 3-4 page paper (single spaced). Probably, you will significantly revise or re-think your earlier paper/presentation and come up with a slightly different set of questions, research agenda, and/or thesis. The goal of this assignment is for you to develop a critical apparatus for analyzing race and ethnicity in American literature. You will learn more about what a “critical apparatus” is over the course of the semester, but for now consider it to be something like a conceptual “lens” through which you “read” literature or “see” culture. (Hint, each of the units for this course centers on a different “critical apparatus.” In your final paper, you may want to come up with your own apparatus and distinguish it from one or more of the apparatuses we dealt with in the class.)

You should arrange to see me to discuss your plan as soon as you can, and I expect you to consult *at least* two secondary sources through the MLA bibliography or JSTOR (library databases). If you are unsure what the difference is between a primary and a secondary source, or if you do not know how to use those databases, please ask.

As with your six short essays, your final paper will be graded on (1) how well you formulate your critical apparatus, (2) how well you support your claims with evidence from the texts, and (3) your reasoning and organization.

As for the format, this paper should be single spaced, 11 point font, one-inch margins just like the other five shorter essays. For this paper, however, you should have a title in bold face between the header and your essay. You should also add a Works Cited at the end, which need not be a separate page, but should be distinguished and properly formatted according to MLA style guidelines.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

I expect you to come to class on time everyday. If you miss more than three classes, I will lower your grade as I deem appropriate.

Participation means not just talking, but also listening, respecting your classmates, and being prepared (i.e., having completed the reading assignment.)

SCHEDULE OF UNITS

Unit One –What, Why, and How?

Questions:

What do we mean when we say we are studying minority literature?
Why do we study race and ethnicity in American literature?
How ought we to go about it?

Texts:

Walt Whitman, “I Hear America Singing”
Langston Hughes, “I, too” and “Theme for English B”
Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, preface and ch. 1
Ralph Ellison, “Introduction” and “Prologue” to *The Invisible Man*
Jeff Chang, *Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop*
John Sayles, *Lone Star* (movie)

Calendar:

Aug. 26 (W) Whitman;
Hughes

Aug. 28 (F) Ellison, “Introduction”;
Morrison, preface;
Chang, “Introduction” and “Prelude”

Sept. 1 (T) *Playing in the Dark*, ch. 1; Ellison “Prologue”

7:20 p.m., screening of *Lone Star* in Quad 346 on Tuesday, Sept. 1

Sept. 3 (Th) *Lone Star*

Sept. 8 (T) **unit one paper due**

Unit Two – Identity, Representation, and Figuration

Questions:

How does representation work? Can individuals represent communities?
Is artistic representation a “mirror to nature”? In other words, does it reflect identity?
Or, rather, does the act of representation change and even produce identity?
How is representation (and perhaps also identity) always figurative? metaphorical?

Texts:

Richard Dyer, “White” plus review of *White* (one Moodle)
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*
Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, ch. 2-3
Rob Epstein, et al., *The Celluloid Closet* (movie)
Axis of Evil Comedy Tour and *Arab American Comedy Tour* (movies)
Jeff Chang, *Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop*

Calendar:

Sept. 10 (Th) Dyer, "White" and review;
Playing in the Dark, ch. 2

7:20 pm screening of *Axis of Evil* and *Arab American Comedy Tour* in Quad 346
on Thursday, Sept. 10 and Sunday, Sept. 13

Sept. 14 (M) *Axis of Evil* and *Arab American Comedy Tour*
Bluest Eye pp. 1-58

Sept. 16 (W) *Bluest Eye* pp. 59-93
Chang, *Can't Stop*, ch. 1 and 2
Kanye West, "All Falls Down"

7:20 pm screening of *Celluloid Closet* in Quad 346 on Thursday, Sept. 17

Sept. 18 (F) *Celluloid Closet*
Bluest Eye pp. 94-183
Li-Young Lee "Persimmon"

Sept. 22 (T) *Bluest Eye* pp. 184-216; *Playing in the Dark*, ch. 3

Sept. 24 (Th) **unit two paper due**

Unit Three – Hybridity and Dialectic

Questions:

Are our identities stable, changeable, singular, multiple, or hybrid?

Is there such a thing as authenticity? In other words, is there such thing as authentic
"black" or "white" or "red" culture?

What does the word "hybridity" mean and what is difficult about it? In other words,
given the complexity of social relations, which often include relations of power,
how does one represent hybridity in literature or experience hybridity in life?

What does the word "dialectic" mean, and how can we think of identity and culture
dialectically?

Texts:

Louise Erdrich, *The Plague of Doves*

W. E. B. Du Bois, "Forethought" and "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" from *The Souls of
Black Folk*

Zitkala Sa, "Impressions of an Indian Childhood" and "School Days of an Indian Girl"

James Baldwin, "Encounter on the Seine: Black Meets Brown" and
"A Question of Identity" from *Notes of a Native Son*

Calendar:

Sept. 28 (M) Du Bois;
Zitkala Sa;
Plague of Doves, 1-86

- Sept. 30 (W) Baldwin;
Chang, ch. 3-4;
Plague of Doves, 87-134
- Oct. 2 (F) *Plague of Doves*, 134-179
- Oct. 6 (T) *Plague of Doves*, 180-268
- Oct. 8-9 FALL BREAK
- Oct. 12 (M) *Plague of Doves*, finish
unit three paper due

Unit Four – Language, Power, Nation

Questions:

- What does language have to do with identity?
What does it have to do with the American dream?
How, psychologically speaking, do we learn language and other skills?
Is there really a difference between public and private language? Or can we deconstruct that binary?

Texts:

- Richard Rodriguez, from *Hunger of Memory*
Tomas Rivera, “Richard Rodriguez’ Hunger of Memory as Humanistic Antithesis”
Lalo Alcaraz, from *Migra Mouse*
Chang-rae Lee, *Native Speaker*
Lorna dee Cervantes, “Visions of Mexico while at a Writing Symposium in Port Townsend, Washington”

Calendar:

- Oct. 14 (W) Rodriguez;
Rivera;
Alcaraz
- Oct. 16 (F) *Native Speaker*, pgs. 1-99
- Oct. 20 (T) Cervantes;
Chang, ch. 5-6
- Oct. 22 (Th) **unit three paper due**

Unit Five -- Diversity, Class, and Redistributive Justice (or, “multiculturalism and its discontents”)

Questions:

- What does the word diversity mean? Are there false and true forms of diversity?
What are the conceptual limitations of “diversity” for thinking about justice, rights, and relations of power?
If diversity is to be valued, how so? Or is there a better concept that we can use?

Texts:

Chang-Rae Lee, *Native Speaker*
Nancy Fraser, “From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemma’s of Justice in a Postsocialist Age” from *Justice Interruptus*
Richard Wright, “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow”
Spike Lee, *Do the Right Thing* (movie)
selections from Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory* and Tomas Rivera’s response

Calendar:

Oct. 26 (M) Wright;
Fraser

Oct. 28 (W) *Native Speaker*, pgs. 100-155;
Chang, ch. 7-10

Oct. 30 (F) *Native Speaker*, pgs. 155-276;
Chang, ch. 11-15

7:20 pm screening of *Do the Right Thing* in Quad 346 on Monday, Nov. 2

Nov. 3 (T) *Do the Right Thing*;
Chang, ch. 16;
finish *Native Speaker*

Nov. 5 (Th) **unit four paper due**

Unit Six – Borders, Migrations, and Diaspora

Questions:

What social conditions produce borders?
What social conditions are produced by borders?
What role does literature have in representing the movement of peoples?
How does literature not just represent but also participate in the movement of peoples?

Texts:

selections from Lola Alcaraz, *Migra Mouse*
Sandra Cisneros, “Mericans”
selected passages from Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera*
Josefina Lopez, *Real Women Have Curves* (play and movie)
Deadwood, season one
Vine Deloria, Jr., “Indian Affairs 1973: Hebrews 13:8”
“Gold Rush Brides” by 10,000 Maniacs

Calendar:

Nov. 9 (M) Alcaraz;
Cisneros;
Anzaldua;
Deloria, Jr., “Indian Affairs 1973: Hebrews 13:8”
“Gold Rush Brides”

Nov. 11 (W) *Real Women Have Curves* (play)

screening of *Real Women Have Curves*, time and place to be announced

Nov. 13 (F) *Real Women Have Curves* (movie); Chang, ch. 17-18

Nov. 17 (T) **unit five paper due**

Unit Seven – Multicultural Nations / Multinational Cultures

Questions:

How do the concepts multicultural, transnational, multinational, global, diaspora, and post-national differ? What do we mean when we use them? Why use them?

What does it mean to celebrate a multicultural nation in a globalizing world?

What are the limits of multiculturalism for conceptualizing literature and society?

Instead of multiculturalism, how might other concepts change our understanding of how literature and culture work?

Texts:

Dinaw Mengestu, *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*

selected passages from Rebecca Haile, *Held at a Distance*

Steven Thomas, “Ethiopia and Oromia in the American Literary Imagination” and/or
“An Oromo Renaissance?” at www.ogina.org

Nick and Marc Francis, *Black Gold* (movie)

Li-Young Lee, “Self Help for Fellow Refugees” “Immigrant Blues” and “Mnemonic”

selections from Lillian Faderman with Ghia Xiong, *I Begin My Life All Over*

selections from Kao Kalia Yang, *The Latehomecomer: a Hmong Family Memior*

Calendar:

Nov. 19 (Th) begin *Beautiful Things*

Faderman and Xiong, p. xiii-15 and 252-54

Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, prologue and epilogue

screening of *Black Gold*, time and place to be announced

Nov. 23 (M) *Black Gold*;

Thomas;

Haile

Nov. 26-29 THANKSGIVING BREAK

Nov. 30 (M) finish *Beautiful Things*;

Chang, ch. 19;

“Fallen Beats” from *Ogina* (summer 2008) www.ogina.org

“Cyber Hip Hop” from *Ogina* (fall 2008) www.ogina.org

Li-young Lee

Dec. 2 (W) **unit six paper due**

Conclusion – Individual Research

Questions:

Reflect on the previous six essays you have written so far and come up with your own question. Formulate a modest research agenda – drawing from previous work – to develop an answer.

Texts:

Your research.

Calendar:

- Dec. 4 (F) final paper topics workshop – refine research agenda
- Dec. 8 (T) research day
- Dec. 10 (Th) rough drafts of final paper, presentations and workshop
- Dec. 16 (W) **final paper due**