

## **SC308: Race, Representation and the Myth of Colorblindness**

Mondays 3-5:20 PM

Spring 2007

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In our post-civil rights era, colorblindness is hailed as the new state of the American mind where the saying goes that it doesn't matter whether you are black, white, "green" or "blue," because everyone can experience the same opportunities, freedoms and pleasures in this capitalist and democratic society. This ideological colorblindness is one of the latest exemplary permutations of our rhetoric of "The American Dream" and meritocracy. Logic follows that race-less-ness results from the end of (de jure) segregation, the banishment of Jim Crow laws, and the implementation of policies that ostensibly allow for everyone to have similar access to life opportunities regardless of skin color. However, when we turn to realms of representation, we see that race remains a highly codified meaning system where knowledge on race is readily transpired through media representations. Moreover, we find that we have an outstanding cultural literacy and perceptual fluency with racial representations, as shown through the way we can ostensibly yet readily discern what acting "white" or representing "whiteness" is as opposed to acting "black" or representing "blackness."

To examine this paradox of ideological colorblindness and racial signification, we will first examine the discursive and socio-historical context in which we are situated. Then, we will examine domains of representation in the realm of popular culture, especially areas where racial imagery is highly trafficked, to see how media help produce and re-create salient racial coding schemes and meaning-making systems that animate the representations and patterns of consumption. We will explore the consequences and implications of how schemes of racial representation work in conjunction with rhetoric on meritocracy and colorblindness to maintain hegemony and inequality. Finally, we will examine and imagine possibilities of resistance within this regime of racial rhetoric and representation.

**Note: Since this course will involve openly discussing issues that may arouse numerous emotions, including discomfort and even anger, please be intellectually, mentally and emotionally prepared to:**

- 1) interrogate and explore your own assumptions and belief systems**
- 2) have others *respectfully* interrogate and explore your comments and**
- 3) *respectfully* interrogate and explore others' comments.**

### **Requirements:**

45% class attendance and participation  
20% 6-8 page analytic paper (due February 26)  
35% 16-20 page final paper or project (due May 7)

### **Class attendance and participation (45%)**

Because this is a seminar, your engagement with the material and contributions to class discussions will constitute the backbone of this course. Please recognize that you are empowered with partial ownership of this course, its direction and success. Each class meeting will open with a brief discussion to review that week's materials during which you

will help others and yourself clarify the readings and understand major arguments. Then, we will delve into more complex questions raised by the material.

To help you prepare for class discussions, please write down 2-3 thoughts on that week's readings (i.e. how the readings address larger questions about the persistence of stereotypes, the implications of racialized representations, or the perpetuation of racial inequality and injustice), a thought-provoking question or two for class discussion, and perhaps an example (like a website, show, movie) that helps illuminate some of the issues. You will hand in these prepared notes (your comments, questions, examples) at the end of class with any suggestions, feedback, or thoughts from that class.

Also, you are expected to learn each other's names so that you can openly and respectfully engage in a dialogue with each other.

### **Analytic paper (20%)**

Essay questions will be distributed in class on February 12 and papers are due in class on February 26. Your analytic papers will respond to one of the questions by drawing on the texts used in class.

### **Final paper or project (35%)**

Papers will be on a topic or question that has been raised by the readings or course discussions and that you are interested in exploring further. You will use texts from the course and several outside references/sources to support your thesis/argument. If you choose to do a final project instead of the paper, you will also explore a topic or question raised during the course, but are welcome to explore a range of multimedia options, like music, film, poetry, etc. for the (re)presentation of your ideas/arguments. Your project will entail the amount of work equivalent to that which would go into the final paper.

You will hand in a short description of your question of interest and your paper/project ideas in class on April 23. You can also share your project idea with other seminar participants to gather ideas, but ultimately the project is yours and all academic (and general) integrity rules apply.

### **Academic Integrity:**

For information on Boston College's Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Policy, please see <http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy/#integrity>

**Readings:** Textbooks are available at the bookstore and on reserve at O'Neill and all other readings are available either online or will be e-mailed to you.

### **Required Texts:**

Entman, Robert M. and Rojecki, Andrew. The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Harper, Phillip Brian. Are We Not Men? Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African-American Identity. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

hooks, bell. Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990.

Jackson, John L. Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Kelley, Robin D. G. Yo' Mama's DisFunktional: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1997.

Morrison, Toni, ed. Birth of a Nation'hood: Gaze, Script, and Spectacle in the O.J. Simpson Case. New York: Pantheon Books, 1997.

Pough, Gwendolyn D. Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 2004.

Watkins, S. Craig. Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2005.

Winant, Howard. The New Politics of Race: Globalism, Difference, Justice. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

## Course Outline

### **January 22: Examining racial politics and interrogating racial representations**

hooks chapters 1 and 6

- “Liberation Scenes: Speak this Yearning”
- “Critical Interrogation: Talking Race, Resisting Racism”

Winant

- Introduction “The Racial Present: State, Society, Identity”
- “One Hundred Years of Racial Politics”

Entman and Rojecki chapter 1

- “The Racial Chameleon”

### **January 29: Understanding and theorizing contemporary racial politics**

Winant pages 25-68, 81-107, 153-187, 205-216

- “Dialectics of the Veil”
- “Racism Today: Continuity and Change in the Post-Civil Rights United States”
- “Behind Blue Eyes: Contemporary White Racial Politics”
- “Babylon System: The Continuity of Slavery”
- “The Modern World Racial System”
- “One Hundred Years of Racial Theory”
- “Racial Dualism at Century’s End”
- “Conclusion: Racial Politics in the Twenty-first Century”

## **February 5: Reporting on racial representations in the media**

Entman and Rojecki chapters 4-11

- “The Meaning of Blackness in Network News”
- “Violence, Stereotypes, and African Americans in the News”
- “Benign Neglect in the Poverty of the News”
- “Affirming Discord”
- “Black Power”
- “Prime-Time Television: White and Whiter”
- “Advertising Whiteness”
- “Race at the Movies”

## **February 12: Representing race, constructing racism**

(essay questions distributed in class)

Kelley Introduction, chapter. 1-2

- “Looking for the ‘Real’ Nigga: Social Scientists Construct the Ghetto”
- “Looking to Get Paid: How Some Black Youth Put Culture to Work”

Judith Butler

- “Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia,” Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising (e-mailed to you)

Robert Gooding-Williams

- “Look, a Negro!” Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising (e-mailed to you)

## **February 19: Race, criminality, crossing over, and commodification**

From Birth of a Nation’hood

- Toni Morrison “The Official Story: Dead Man Golfing”
- George Lipsitz “The Greatest Story Ever Sold: Marketing and the O.J. Simpson Trial”
- A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., Aderson Bellegarde Francois, and Linda Y. Yueh “The O.J. Simpson Trial: Who Was Improperly ‘Playing the Race Card?’”
- Kimberle Williams Crenshaw “Color-blind Dreams and Racial Nightmares: Reconfiguring Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era”
- Leola Johnson and David Roediger “‘Hertz, Don’t It?’: Becoming Colorless and Staying Black in the Crossover of O.J. Simpson”
- Patricia Williams “American Kabuki”
- Ann duCille “The Unbearable Darkness of Being: ‘Fresh’ Thoughts on Race, Sex, and the Simpsons”

## **February 26: Bamboozled** (in class viewing)

(analytic paper due in class)

## **March 12: Interpreting representations and consuming race**

Entman and Rojecki chapters 2-3

- “White Racial Attitudes in the Heartland”
- “Culture, Media, and the White Mind: The Character of Their Content”

Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis

- “White Responses: The Emergence of ‘Enlightened’ Racism” Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show, Audiences and the Myth of the American Dream (online course reserves)

bell hooks

- chapter 2 “Eating the Other,” Black Looks: Race and Representation (e-mailed to you)

Saidiya V. Hartman

- “Innocent Amusements: The Stage of Sufferance,” Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America (online course reserves)

## **March 19: Theorizing race, gender, and sexuality**

Harper chapters 3-4, 6-8

- “What’s My Name?? Designation, Identification, and Cultural ‘Authenticity’”
- “Class Acts: The ‘Street,’ Popular Music, and Black-Cultural Crossover”
- “The Reassuring Shock of Recognition: Blackness, Social Order, and Crimes of Identity”
- “Extra-Special Effects: Televisual Representation and the Undoing of ‘The Black Experience’”
- “Backing Up, Crossing Over, Breaking Out: Social Significances of Pop-Musical Form”

## **March 26: Re-conceptualizing racial authenticity**

Jackson chapters 1, 3, 5, 7-9

- “Real Fictions”
- “Real Bodies”
- “Real Publics”
- “Real Emcees”
- “Real Names”
- “Real Loves”

## **April 2: Women and rap: Racial representations and resistance?**

Pough Introduction, chapters 3-5, Conclusion

- “Hip-Hop Is More Than Just Music to Me: The Potential for a Movement in the Culture”
- “I Bring Wreck to Those Who Disrespect Me Like a Dame: Women, Rap and the Rhetoric of Wreck”
- “(Re)reconstructing Womanhood: Black Women’s Narratives in Hip-Hop Culture”
- “Girls in the Hood and Other Ghetto Dramas: Representing Black Womanhood in Hip-Hop Cinema and Novels”
- “Imagining Images: Black Womanhood in the Twenty-first Century”

Tricia Rose

- “Bad Sistas: Black Women Rappers and Sexual Politics in Rap Music” [Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America](#) (online course reserves)

## **April 23: Narrating the life of hip hop as politics and as commodity**

Watkins (entire book)

(project idea due in class)

## **April 30: Resisting representations, revolutionizing imaginations**

hooks chapters 2-3, 7, 11, 13, 15-16, 18-19, 23

- “The Politics of Radical Black Subjectivity”
- “Postmodern Blackness”
- “Reflections on Race and Sex”
- “An Aesthetic of Blackness: Strange and Oppositional”
- “Culture to Culture: Ethnography and Cultural Studies as Critical Intervention”
- “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness”
- “Stylish Nihilism: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies”
- “Counter-Hegemonic Art: Do the Right Thing”
- “A Call for Militant Resistance”
- “A Final Yearning: January 1990”

Kelley chapter 5 and epilogue

- “Looking forward: How the New Working Class Can Transform Urban America”
- Epilogue “Looking b(l)ackward”

Entman and Rojecki, chapter 12

- “Reflecting on the End of Racial Representation”

## **Monday, May 7: final papers and projects due by 5 pm**