

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

Mondays 3-5:20 PM, Carney 333

Fall 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. Supposedly, race-less-ness results from the end of (de jure) segregation, the banishment of Jim Crow laws, and the implementation of anti-discrimination policies that ostensibly allow for everyone to have similar access to life opportunities regardless of skin color. However, when we turn to mediated 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 morally-charged and problematic racial representations, as shown through the way we can readily recognize, conjure and deploy stereotypes.

To examine this paradox of ideological colorblindness and pervasive 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 of meritocracy and colorblindness to maintain hegemony and inequality. Additionally, we will examine the process of producing and consuming representations through understanding the intersectional nature of race, gender, class and sexuality and the compulsion to commodify race. 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 October 29)  
35% 16-20 page final paper or project (due December 14)

### **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. While the first half of class generally will be in a lecture format to review that week's materials, the second half of class will entail **small group discussions** during which you will help others and yourself clarify the readings, understand major arguments and delve into more complex questions raised by the material. To facilitate group discussions, I may assign different discussion leaders each week. (Also, you are expected to learn each other's names so that you can openly and respectfully engage in a dialogue with each other.)

**By 8 PM on the Sunday prior to class, please post your comments about that week's readings on the course website (through WebCT).** Your comments may address larger questions from the course (i.e. the persistence of stereotypes, the implications of racialized representations, or the perpetuation of racial inequality and injustice), draw connections with other weeks' readings and topics, and/or present a thought-provoking question or two for class or online discussion. You may also want to share a media example (like a website, TV show, or movie) that helps illuminate some of the issues. Please include your own comments about the media example.

If you must miss a class and would still like to receive participation credit for that missed class, you can e-mail me a 2-3 page analytical essay about that week's course material. Please e-mail me your essay by 1 PM on the day of your missed class so that your thoughts can be integrated into class discussion.

**Analytic paper (20%)**

The assignment will be distributed in class on October 15 and papers are due in class on October 29. Your analytic papers will draw on the texts used in class to support your argument.

**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.

**To get feedback, you will share with the class your paper/project ideas in class on November 26.** 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. All other readings are available either through online course reserves, will be e-mailed to you or will be posted on the course website

**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.

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.

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

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

## COURSE OUTLINE

### September 10

#### **Setting the stage: Examining racist politics and developing a critical consciousness**

Howard Winant

- “Introduction: The Racial Present: State, Society, Identity”
- “One Hundred Years of Racial Politics”
- “Racism Today: Continuity and Change in the Post-Civil Rights United States”

bell hooks

- “Liberation Scenes: Speak this Yearning” (chapter 1)
- “Critical Interrogation: Talking Race, Resisting Racism” (chapter 6)

### September 17

#### **Theorizing racial dualism and hierarchy**

Howard Winant

- “Dialectics of the Veil”
- “Behind Blue Eyes: Contemporary White Racial Politics”
- “One Hundred Years of Racial Theory”
- “Racial Dualism at Century’s End”
- “Conclusion: Racial Politics in the Twenty-first Century”

Anthony Paul Farley

- “Accumulation,” Michigan Journal of Race and Law, Volume 11:51, Fall 2005

### September 24

#### **Reporting on racial representations in the media**

Entman and Rojecki

- “The Racial Chameleon” (chapter 1)
- “The Meaning of Blackness in Network News” (chapter 4)
- “Violence, Stereotypes, and African Americans in the News” (chapter 5)
- “Benign Neglect in the Poverty of the News” (chapter 6)
- “Affirming Discord” (chapter 7)
- “Black Power” (chapter 8)
- “Race at the Movies” (chapter 11)

### October 1

#### **Recognizing whiteness and interrogating white privilege**

Entman and Rojecki

- “White Racial Attitudes in the Heartland” (chapter 2)
- “Culture, Media, and the White Mind: The Character of Their Content” (chapter 3)
- “Prime-Time Television: White and Whiter” (chapter 9)
- “Advertising Whiteness” (chapter 10)

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

Shannon Sullivan

- “Appropriate Habits of White Privilege,” Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege

*Recommended:*

Shannon Sullivan

- Introduction and Conclusion, Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege

Daniel R. Nicholson

- “Developing a Media Literacy of Whiteness in Advertising,” from White Reign: Deploying Whiteness in America (eds. Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, and Chennault)

Barbara G. Brents and Melissa J. Monson

- “Whitewashing ‘The Strip’: The Construction of Whiteness in Las Vegas,” from White Reign

Vicki K. Carter

- “Computer-Assisted Racism: Toward an Understanding of ‘Cyberwhiteness,’” from White Reign

**October 15** (paper assignment distributed in class)

**Inscribing race: Racial markings and violated bodies**

Judith Butler

- “Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia,” from Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising

Robert Gooding-Williams

- “Look, a Negro!,” from Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising

Bibi Bakare-Yusuf

- “The Economy of Violence: Black Bodies and the Unspeakable Terror,” from Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader (eds. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick)

Anthony Paul Farley

- “The Black Body as Fetish Object,” Oregon Law Review, Vol. 76, 1997

**October 22**

**Complicating and constituting racial representations: Race, gender and sexuality**

Londa Schiebinger

- “Theories of Gender and Race,” from Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader (eds. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick)

Evelyn M. Hammonds

- “Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality: The Problematic of Silence,” from Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader

Frank Rudy Cooper

- “Against Bipolar Black Masculinity: Intersectionality, Assimilation, Identity Performance, and Hierarchy,” University of California, Davis, Vol. 39:853, 2006

hooks

- “Reflections on Race and Sex”
- “Counter-Hegemonic Art: Do the Right Thing”

Tricia Rose

- “Bad Sistas: Black Women Rappers and Sexual Politics in Rap Music,” Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America

**October 29** (analytic paper due in class)

**Spike Lee’s *Bamboozled*** (in class viewing)

### **November 5**

#### **Re-conceptualizing racial authenticity**

Jackson

- “Real Fictions” (chapter 1)
- “Real Bodies” (chapter 3)
- “Real Publics” (chapter 5)
- “Real Emcees” (chapter 7)
- “Real Names” (chapter 8)
- “Real Loves” (chapter 9)

### **November 12**

#### **Producing “crossover appeal”: The commodification of race, difference and “authenticity”**

Vijay Prashad

- “Of the Mysterious East,” The Karma of Brown Folk
- “Of Sly *Babas* and Other Gurus”

Phillip Brian Harper

- “Class Acts: The ‘Street,’ Popular Music, and Black-Cultural Crossover,” Are We Not Men?: Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African-American Identity

Margaret Cho

- “Miracle?” I’m the One that I Want (chapter 11)
- “Fame! I Want to Live Forever...” (chapter 12)
- “Tales of the Reconstruction” (chapter 14)

### **November 19**

#### **(Re)investigating the O.J. case**

(all readings from Birth of a Nation’hood: Gaze, Script, and Spectacle in the O.J. Simpson Case)

Toni Morrison

- “The Official Story: Dead Man Golfing”

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”

### **November 26**

#### **Marketing, consuming and cannibalizing race**

Ann duCille

- “The Unbearable Darkness of Being: ‘Fresh’ Thoughts on Race, Sex, and the Simpsons,”  
from Birth of a Nation’hood

George Lipsitz

- “The Greatest Story Ever Sold: Marketing and the O.J. Simpson Trial, from Birth of a Nation’hood

bell hooks

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

bell hooks

- “Spending Culture: Marketing the Black Underclass” (chapter 13), Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations

Davis W. Houck

- “Attacking the Rim: The Culture Politics of Dunking” (chapter 10) from Basketball Jones: America above the Rim

### **December 3**

#### **Exploring racial and gender politics of basketball**

(all readings from Basketball Jones: America above the Rim, eds. Todd Boyd and Kenneth L. Shropshire)

Julianne Malveaux

- “Gladiators, Gazelles, and Groupies: Basketball Love and Loathing” (chapter 3)

Kenneth L. Shropshire

- “Deconstructing the NBA” (chapter 6)

Earl Smith

- “Incivility and Basketball” (chapter 9)

Tara McPherson

- “Who’s Got Next?: Gender, Race, and the Mediation of the WNBA” (chapter 13)

Sohail Daulatzai

- “View the World from American Eyes: Ball, Islam, and Dissent in Post-Race America” (chapter 14)

Aaron Baker

- “Hoop Dreams in Black and White: Race and Basketball Movies” (chapter 15)

### **December 10**

#### **Redefining difference, resisting representations, and revolutionizing imaginations**

Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider

- “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference”

Entman and Rojecki

- “Reflecting on the End of Racial Representation” (chapter 12)

hooks

- “The Politics of Radical Black Subjectivity” (chapter 2)
- “Sitting at the Feet of the Messenger: Remembering Malcolm X” (chapter 9)
- “An Aesthetic of Blackness: Strange and Oppositional” (chapter 11)
- “Culture to Culture: Ethnography and Cultural Studies as Critical Intervention” (chapter 13)
- “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness” (chapter 15)
- “A Final Yearning: January 1990” (chapter 23)

**December 14: final papers and projects due by 5 pm**