SC303.01: The Social Construction of Whiteness  
Spring 2009, O’Neill 211  
Mondays and Wednesdays 12:00-1:15 p.m.

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Office hours: Mondays/Wednesdays 4:30-5:30 p.m. and
Tuesdays by appointment 2:00-4:00 p.m.

Course Description
This course explores the social construction of race through the lens of whiteness. Why talk about whiteness? By examining whiteness and the privilege associated with it, we can enrich our understanding of oppression. By considering whiteness as both a race and historical system of privilege, we can gain a deeper understanding of the persistence of racism. Over the course of the semester, we will examine the distribution of privilege within American society at both the interpersonal and institutional levels, as well as consider how whiteness operates within the social constructs of class and gender. Through writing and in-class group discussion, you will examine your own identities and lived experiences and consider how consciously or unconsciously they are affected by these processes, as well as consider strategies for challenging racism and privilege at the individual and structural levels. Since this course deals with topics that are emotional at a gut level, it is important that we respect and listen to each other’s views. I try to encourage and maintain a classroom dynamic that is conducive to honest, open discussion. Although these topics may be uncomfortable to talk about, it is important to realize that we can learn a great deal from each other through active listening and dialoguing.

Course Objectives
* Gain a deeper understanding of the historical relationship between white privilege and inequality. 
* Be able to clearly define and differentiate the concepts of prejudice and racism. 
* Describe privilege and racism in its individual and institutional forms in contemporary society. 
* Identify and articulate your personal feelings, fears, attitudes and behaviors about the issues of privilege and racism by exploring your own experiences and identity development. 
* Conduct sociological research on how racial privilege operates in everyday life. 
* Develop specific strategies designed to challenge racism on both individual and structural levels.
Required Texts (available in bookstore and on reserve)


Course Requirements

Class participation (20% of your grade)

Much of the learning will take place in the classroom through participation in class discussions. I am not in the habit of taking attendance; however excessive absences and lateness will be noted as this has an effect on group discussion. It is expected that when you are in class you will participate. Students are expected to come to each class session prepared with at least one discussion question or one quote from the readings for class discussion.

Reflection Papers (25% of your grade)

I am asking that you submit a reflection paper at the end of each week. These papers should be a maximum of three (3), double-spaced pages and emailed to me every Friday by 4:00 p.m. In these papers, you may discuss how you are interacting with the course material and discussions—the ideas presented by the authors, the ways that you are integrating the readings into your thinking, and the way your personal experiences may/may not be related to the issues raised by the readings/discussions. The writing can be informal, but should be thoughtful and reflective. These entries should NOT simply be a summary of a reading or film, but rather enable you to relate the readings/film/class discussion to each other, to readings from other weeks, and/or your own life. You may also explore ideas that may or may not be covered in class or that you may be hesitant to assert verbally. These papers can focus on one class session or both class sessions for that particular week.

Possible questions to think about when writing: How do the readings, films, and/or discussions make me feel? Do I sometimes feel uncomfortable? Why? Do the readings make me think differently about my own life experiences? Does the author raise issues I have not thought about before? Is there something that has been bothering me that I have felt reluctant to bring up in class? Is the class raising issues I want
to learn more about? Is this class making me think about things in new ways? Each paper will be evaluated based on its thoughtfulness, insight, and engagement with the course material.

Directed thematic papers (20% of your grade)
I am asking you to complete two (2) short papers (approximately 5-7, double-spaced pages) on a particular theme discussed in class. Topic options are posted on Blackboard Vista.

Thematic paper #1  
Due Wednesday, February 18

Thematic paper #2  
Due Wednesday, March 25

Final paper (35% of grade)  
Due Wednesday, May 6

Over the course of the semester, I would like you to conduct sociological research on how racial privilege operates in everyday life. As a guide, your final paper should be between 12-15, double-spaced pages. Topic options are posted on Blackboard Vista.

Late work. If you have extenuating circumstances, you must come see me BEFORE the due date to discuss a possible extension; otherwise you will lose 5 points each day the assignment is late.

A note on academic integrity
In regards to this course, there will be many times when we will work in groups. Sharing of information and ideas are encouraged. However, when working on individual assignments, it is expected that you do your own work. In cases where you are required to use published work, you must cite the work. If you plagiarize or cheat in some other form, you will fail the assignment; repeated episodes will result in failure of the course. If there are any questions on proper method of citing, please see me. For more information on Boston College’s academic integrity policy, please visit: www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy/#integrity.
Course Schedule

Wednesday, January 14
How do we talk constructively about race?

Readings:
* Tatum, Chapter 2 (The Complexity of Identity)
* Tatum, Chapter 10 (Embracing a Cross-Racial Dialogue)

Monday, January 19
No class, Martin Luther King Day

I: THEORIZING RACE AND WHITENESS

Wednesday, January 21
Why study race and whiteness?

Readings:
* Rothenberg, Introduction; Chapter 1 in Part one (Richard Dyer, The Matter of Whiteness)

Monday, January 26
Researching race

Reading:

Wednesday, January 28
What does it mean to say that race is socially constructed?

Film in class: Race: The Power of an Illusion Episode 1: The Difference Between Us (56m)

Readings:
**Monday, February 2**  
Historical constructions of whiteness

* **Film in class:** Race as an Illusion, Episode 2: The Story We Tell (56m)

* **Readings:**  
  * Rothenberg, Chapter 7 in Part two (Charles Mills, Global White Supremacy)

**Wednesday, February 4**  
Fluidity of whiteness

* **Readings:**  
  * Rothenberg, Chapter 3 in Part two (Karen Brokin, How Jews Became White Folks); Chapter 4 in Part two (Neil Foley, Becoming Hispanic: Mexican Americans and Whiteness)

**Monday, February 9**

* **Film in class:** Tim Wise on White Privilege: Racism, White Denial & the Costs of Inequality (57m)

**Wednesday, February 11**  
Prejudice, racism, and privilege

* **Readings:**  
  * Rothenberg, Chapter 3 in Part three (Peggy McIntosh, White Privilege)
  * Tatum, Chapter 1 (Defining Racism)
  * Trepagnier, Chapter 1 (Rethinking Racism)

**Monday, February 16**  
Prejudice, racism, and privilege (continued)

* **Readings:**  
  * Rothenberg, Chapter 2 in Part three (Allan G. Johnson, Privilege as Paradox); Chapter 3 in Part one (bell hooks, Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination); Chapter 6 in Part three (Leonard Pitts, Jr., Crazy Sometimes)
Wednesday, February 18

The heterogeneity of whiteness and privilege

**Readings:**
* Rothenberg, Chapter 1 in Part three (Stephanie M. Wildman and Adrienne D. Davis, Making Systems of Privilege Visible)

II. RACISM AND PRIVILEGE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Monday, February 23
Exploring our racial identities

**Readings:**
* Tatum, Part II (Understanding Blackness in a White Context, all chapters); Part III (Understanding Whiteness in a White Context, Chapter 6); Part IV (Beyond Black and White, all chapters)
* Trepagnier, Chapter 5 (Race Awareness Matters)

Wednesday, February 25
Exploring our racial identities (continued)

SPRING BREAK MARCH 2-6

Monday, March 9
White talk

**Readings:**
* Trepagnier, Chapter 2 (Silent Racism)

Wednesday, March 11
White talk (continued)
Monday, March 16
Whiteness on the college campus

*Film in class:* Some Place I Call Home: Racism on the Trinity College Campus (65m)

*Readings:*


Wednesday, March 18
Whiteness on the college campus (continued)

Monday, March 23
Whiteness and interracial relationships

*Readings:*


Wednesday, March 25
Whiteness and interracial relationships (continued)

Monday, March 30
Whiteness and institutional racism

*Readings:*

- Tatum, Part III (Understanding Whiteness in a White Context, Chapter 7)
- Trepagnier, Chapter 4 (The Production of Institutional Racism)

Wednesday, April 1
Whiteness and institutional racism (continued)

*Readings:*

- To be determined based on student interest
Monday, April 6
Whiteness and institutional racism (continued)

Readings:

Wednesday, April 8
Whiteness and institutional racism (continued)

Monday, April 13
No Class, Easter Break

III. CHANGE AND RESISTANCE

Wednesday, April 15
What do we do with whiteness?

Readings:
* Rothenberg, Chapter 2 in Part four (Joe Feagin and Hernan Vera, Confronting One’s Own Racism); Chapter 3 in Part four (Paul Kivel, How White People Can Serve as Allies to People of Color in the Struggle to End Racism)
* Trepagnier, Chapter 6 (Antiracist Practice); Chapter 7 (Epilogue)

Monday, April 20
No Class, Marathon Monday

Wednesday, April 22
What to do with whiteness (continued)

Possible guest speaker

Monday, April 27
What to do with whiteness (continued)

Possible guest speaker

Wednesday, April 29
Last class

Final Paper Due: Wednesday, May 6th @5:00 p.m.