SC303.01: The Social Construction of Whiteness  
Spring 2014, McGuinn 400  
Tuesdays, 12:00-2:30 p.m.

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McGuinn 425

Office hours: Tuesdays 2:30-4:30 p.m.

Seminar Description

This discussion-based seminar course explores the social construction of race through the lens of whiteness. Why talk about whiteness? Contrary to popular belief that we are now living in a post-racial society, systemic racial discrimination and inequality persists. By considering whiteness as both a race and historical system of privilege, we can gain a deeper understanding of the persistence of racism that can better inform our strategies to end it. Over the course of the semester, we will draw upon the work of critical race scholars and theoretically and practically 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 in both small and larger groups, 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. There are many pathways to practicing a critical civic engagement for racial justice. This seminar will facilitate the development of a critical racial consciousness by building a cognitive understanding of racism and critically reflecting upon one’s life experiences in the context of privilege. This is the first step to becoming a racial justice advocate. Moving beyond denial and guilt and working to redefine one’s identity as a racial justice advocate is not an easy process. 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. Therefore classroom participation is a mandatory requirement for this course.

“Hidden biases are bits of knowledge that are stored in our brains because we encounter them so frequently in our cultural environments. Once lodged in our minds, hidden biases can influence our behavior toward members of particular social groups, but we remain oblivious to their influence. Most people find it unbelievable that their behavior can be guided by mental content of which they are unaware.” [Banaji and Greenwald, 2013 in Blindspot, pp. xii]
Seminar Objectives

- **Increase one’s cultural competency:** Identify and articulate your personal feelings, fears, attitudes and behaviors about the issues of privilege and racism in order to build a better understanding of self. Develop an empathetic understanding of a perspective different from your own and demonstrate receptiveness to being challenged on views and beliefs. Recognize and discuss how white privilege operates in everyday discourse.

- **Build the components of a racial consciousness:** Explain the historical relationship between white privilege, inequality and racism and how it has and continues to structure contemporary society. Be able to clearly define and differentiate the concepts of prejudice and racism. Understand one’s own racism and racial prejudices and how that influences one’s behavior and interactions with others. Articulate your own path to racial consciousness and identify steps for becoming more racially aware.

- **Develop a racial justice advocate identity:** Describe the ways in which you can be a critical racial justice advocate in your everyday life. Conduct a mini-sociological research project on how whiteness, privilege, and racism operate in everyday life. Describe and develop specific strategies designed to challenge racism on both the individual and institutional levels through an action project focused on racial justice.

Seminar Requirements

**Class participation (25% of your grade)**
Class participation is required, as much of the learning will take place in the classroom through participation in class discussions. It is expected that when you are in class you will participate, come to each class session having completed the assigned readings, and prepared to discuss the material. The quality of your participation as well as absences and lateness will be noted as this has an effect on group discussion.

**Four (4) Reflection Papers (15% of your grade)**
You will be asked to submit a reflection paper to Prof. Piatelli at the end of each week as noted on the syllabus (for a total of 4 reflection papers). Note that the frequency of these papers will decrease as you begin to write your thematic papers (see below for a description of those papers). These papers should be a maximum of three (3), double-spaced pages and emailed to Prof. Piatelli no later than Thursday at 4:00 p.m. for the week they are due. See Handout/Blackboard for a further description of these papers.
Three (3) Thematic Papers (40% of your grade)
You will be asked to complete three (3) short papers on a particular theme discussed in class. These papers are more formal than the reflection papers and MUST draw on the readings from the course syllabus in a more detailed manner. See Handout/Blackboard for further descriptions on these assignments including approximate page length requirements.

Thematic paper #1 Historical Memories of Race (10%)  Due: Tuesday, February 18
Thematic paper #2 Racial Identity Development (10%)  Due: Tuesday, March 18
Thematic paper #3 Observing and Analyzing Racetalk (20%)  Due: Tuesday, April 1

Action Project and Presentation (20% of your grade)
We will discuss possible ideas for action projects and expectations on the content and format of your presentation to the class. See Handout/Blackboard for further guidelines on this assignment.

Required Texts (available in bookstore and on reserve)

Seminar Policies

Late work. As the assignments build upon your knowledge throughout the course, it is important that you complete your assignments on time so that you are able to receive feedback to improve your learning and I can assess my effectiveness in the classroom. If you have extenuating circumstances that will prevent you from completing your assignments on time, 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
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 or questions of what constitutes plagiarism please see me. For more information on Boston College’s academic integrity policy, please visit: www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy/#integrity.
Seminar Schedule

Tuesday, 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)

I: THEORIZING RACE AND WHITENESS

Tuesday, January 21
Why study race and whiteness?
The social construction of race

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

Tuesday, January 28
Researching race
Historical constructions of whiteness

**Film in class:** Race: The Power of an Illusion, Episode 2: The Story We Tell

**Reading:**
Methodology, edited by Tukufu Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. LIBRARY RESERVE


* Rothenberg, Chapter 7 in Part Two (Charles Mills, Global White Supremacy)

Tuesday, February 4
Historical constructions of whiteness (continued)
Fluidity of whiteness

Readings:


Monday, February 11
Prejudice, racism and privilege

Film in class: Tim Wise on White Privilege: Racism, White Denial & the Costs of Inequality

Readings:


* Tatum, Chapter 1 (Defining Racism)

* Trepagnier, Chapter 1 (Rethinking Racism) and Chapter 4 (The Production of Institutional Racism)
II. RACISM AND PRIVILEGE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Tuesday, February 18
Exploring identity development and racial awareness

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)

Additional Suggested Readings:

Tuesday, February 25
Exploring identity development and racial awareness (continued)

Readings:
* Wise, Tim. Entire book
SPRING BREAK- NO CLASS MARCH 4

Tuesday, March 11
White talk/Race talk

Readings:
* Rothenberg, 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 2 (Silent Racism) and Chapter 6 (Antiracist Practice)

Tuesday, March 18
Thematic Paper #2 Due
Whiteness on the college campus

Readings:
Tuesday, March 25
Whiteness and affirmative action

**Action Project Update Due**

**Readings:**
* Tatum, Part III (Understanding Whiteness in a White Context, Chapter 7)

Tuesday, April 1
Whiteness and the criminal justice system

**Thematic Paper #3 Due**

**Readings:**

Tuesday, April 8
Whiteness and the educational system

**Readings:**

Tuesday, April 15
Presentations

Tuesday, April 22
Presentations

Tuesday, April 29
Presentations