SC303.01: The Social Construction of Whiteness
Spring 2012, McGuinn 400
Mondays 3:00-5:30 p.m.

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McGuinn 425

Course 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 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. 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. Therefore classroom participation is a mandatory requirement for this course.

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 a mini-sociological research project on how whiteness operates in everyday discourse.
* Develop specific strategies designed to challenge racism on individual and structural levels through an action project focused on racial justice.
Course 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. Students are expected to come to each class session having completed the assigned readings and prepared to discuss the material. I will take note of the frequency of your participation as well as absences and lateness as this has an effect on group discussion.

Four (4) Reflection Papers (15% of your grade)
I am asking that you submit a reflection paper to me 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 me no later than Thursday at 4:00 p.m. for the week they are due. See Blackboard for a further description of these papers.

Three (3) Thematic Papers (40% of your grade)
I am asking you 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 Blackboard for further descriptions on these assignments including approximate page length requirements.

Thematic paper #1 Historical Memories of Race (10%)
Due Monday, February 27

Thematic paper #2 Racial Identity Development (10%)
Due Monday, March 26

Thematic paper #3 Observing and Analyzing Racetalk (20%)
Due Monday, April 9

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 Blackboard for further guidelines on this assignment.

Required Texts (available in bookstore and on reserve)

Course Policies

Late work. If you have extenuating circumstances, you must come see me BEFORE the due date to discuss a possible extension. With appropriate documentation, late papers without penalties will be accepted. 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.
Course Schedule

Monday, January 23
How do we talk constructively about race?

Reflection Due Thursday

Readings:
* Tatum, Chapter 2 (The complexity of identity)
* Tatum, Chapter 10 (Embracing a cross-racial dialogue)

I: THEORIZING RACE AND WHITENESS

Monday, January 30
Why study race and whiteness?
The social construction of race

Reflection Due Thursday

Readings:
* Rothenberg, Introduction; Chapter 1 in Part one (Richard Dyer, The matter of whiteness)
Monday, February 6
Researching race
Historical constructions of whiteness

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

Reading:
* Rothenberg, Chapter 7 in Part two (Charles Mills, Global white supremacy)

Monday, February 13
Historical constructions of whiteness (continued)
Fluidity of whiteness

Readings:

Monday, February 20
Prejudice, racism and privilege

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

Readings:
* Rothenberg, Chapter 3 in Part three (Peggy McIntosh, White privilege)
* Tatum, Chapter 1 (Defining racism)
* Trepagnier, Chapter 1 (Rethinking racism) and Chapter 4 (The production of institutional racism)
Monday, February 27
Heterogeneity of whiteness

Readings: CHOOSE TWINE OR WING
* Ignatiev, Noel. (1997). “The point is not to interpret whiteness, but to abolish it.” BLACKBOARD
* Wise, Tim. Entire book

SPRING BREAK- NO CLASS MARCH 5

II. RACISM AND PRIVILEGE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Monday, March 12
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)

Additional Suggested Readings:
* Renn, Kristen. (2000). “Patterns of situational identity among biracial and multiracial college students.” The review of higher education, 23, 4, 399-420. LIBRARY RESERVE
Monday, March 19
White talk/Race talk
Whiteness, interracial relationships and the family

Readings:
* Trepagnier, Chapter 2 (Silent racism)

Monday, March 26
Thematic Paper #2 Due
Whiteness on the college campus

Film in class: Some Place I Call Home: Racism on the Trinity College Campus

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 6 (Antiracist practice)
Monday, April 2  
**Action Project Update Due**

Whiteness and racial profiling

*Readings:*
* Lehr, Dick. Entire book

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Monday, April 9  
**Thematic Paper #3 Due**

Whiteness and affirmative action
Whiteness and the educational system

*Readings:*
* Tatum, Part III (Understanding whiteness in a white context, Chapter 7)

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**MARATHON MONDAY – NO CLASS APRIL 16**

Monday, April 23
Presentations

Monday, April 30
Presentations