

Race and Racism in US Popular Culture

CES 260, Section 1

Fall 2015, 3 Credit Hours

Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 1:10 – 2:00PM, CUE 119

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Course Description

This course interrogates the historical, political, social and ideological processes and practices that have shaped racialized identities. This course will focus on [re]presentations of racial identities on contemporary media through (1) music, (2) film and (3) television but will also analyze gendered and sexualized identities, while being attentive to the ways in which US society has been affected by the varied portrayals present in today's media-saturated era. This course will also consider the attempt by cultural producers of marginalized groups to destabilize stereotypes and broaden the range of those depictions to reorient these concepts within the American imagination. The goal of this course is to provide students with an *introductory* understanding of how racialized media depictions play a role in the formation of American culture, as well as the problematic ways in which they inform, mediate and legitimize social relations within and across American demographics. ***Please Note: Your continued enrollment beyond the first week of class affirms your willingness to abide by the conditions set forth in this document. Syllabus subject to change with limited notice.***

Student Learning Outcomes

- Recognize, comprehend and successfully apply concepts about how popular culture is a contested space of meaning, organized along axis' of race and cultural ethnicity
- Comprehend and conceptualize how racial difference and Otherness is perpetuated through systems of inequality and oppression with an understanding of power/domination
- Develop critical skills of introspection and analysis in media literacy
- Formulate effective, persuasive writing and presentation skills on these subjects

Required Text(s)

Danesi, Marcel. *Popular Culture, 3rd Edition*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2015

Sternheimer, Karen. *Connecting Social Problems and Popular Culture: Why Media is Not the Answer*, Westview Press, 2013

Various Films, Documentaries and Guest Speakers

Midterm Paper	100 Points
Final Paper	100 Points
Class Discussion & Participation	100 Points
Group Presentation	100 Points
Total:	400 Points

Course Policies

Academic Etiquette: Class will begin promptly at 1:10PM. Arriving late or leaving early is not acceptable. Your participation in this course is predicated on principles of reciprocal respect, tact, courtesy, and professionalism. I require your attention and tolerance for a diversity of voices expressed in class (especially voices espousing unpopular views) likewise, disruptive behavior¹ will not be tolerated. In order for us to learn from each other, we have to allow each other to make mistakes and to offer unpopular positions for debate. However, name-calling and other forms of verbal harassment will not be tolerated and will result in students being asked to leave the class².

Email: I encourage students to be in close contact with me and those who elect to contact me by email, please remember to include the following: (1) a salutation, (2) your class abbreviation and number – issue (e.g. CES 260) in the subject line, (3) a precise description of your concern, issue, etc. Every attempt is made to respond to student emails within 24hrs of receipt, **but emails received on vacation days or Fridays may not** be replied to until Monday.

Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices: Please turn off your cell phones *before* entering the classroom! Do *not* wear headphones, earbuds, etc. in the classroom. If your device goes off more than once during the semester, or I discover you texting in class, I will immediately seize your device. Students who violate this policy will have to turn your phone into me at the beginning of every class, to be returned to you at the end of class, for the duration of the semester. Students are both allowed and encouraged to use laptops and or tablets judiciously – meaning if you're caught doing anything other than assigned work, taking notes, etc. your participation grade suffer. Violations of this policy will result in a **penalty** and with each successive incident these penalties **may increase**, with or without announcement, subject exclusively to my discretion.

Academic Integrity: In all instances, you must do your own work. There is no excuse for plagiarism, or for submitting another's work, ideas, or wording as your own, or for not doing your own work. In simple terms, plagiarism is the act of using another person's words or work without giving them credit for it. You are encouraged to read *WSU's Academic Integrity Policy*. Plagiarism and academic dishonesty, whether intentional or unintentional, may result in a grade of "F" for the assignment in question, or a grade of "F" for the entire course, at my sole discretion. Should there be any suspicion of plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty, I will discuss the situation with you first and then with the Chair of department. I may then alert the Office of Student Conduct, which may result in an academic integrity hearing and university sanctions against you. If you are at any time unclear about what constitutes plagiarism, cheating, or academic dishonesty, contact me and I will clarify it for you.

¹ Arriving late, leaving early, talking during lecture, reading the newspaper, etc.

² Such request will also necessarily count as an absence

Disability Accommodation: Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please visit the Access Center (Washington Building 217) to schedule an appointment with an Access Advisor. All accommodations MUST be approved through the Access Center.

Campus Safety Plan/Emergency Information: In the interest of campus safety and emergency procedures, please become familiar with the information available on the following websites: (1) <http://safetyplan.wsu.edu> (Campus Safety Plan); <http://oem.wsu.edu/emergencies> (Emergency Management Plan); and (3) <http://alert.wsu.edu> (WSU Alert Site).

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation: Attendance is mandatory and will be checked. Students demonstrating a consistent pattern of habitual absence will find that their participation grade will be *penalized* subject exclusively to my discretion. You can't obviously participate if you're not present so it is to your benefit to be in class and on time. You should also note that I construe "present" to mean both physical and active mental engagement, so no zoning out! *Because you have enrolled in this course I assume that you are interested in the material and want to be here. You are expected to come to class having completed all of the readings assigned for that day.* It is also to your advantage to listen closely to lecture material and to take notes during lectures and films. This course asks you to read texts closely and responsively. This means that if you want to do well you will actively engage with your books by writing questions in the margins, circling key terms, looking up words you do not know, and underlining themes or issues you find intriguing. Responsive readers think of themselves as having a dialogue with the author and use reading as the basis for formulating their own interesting ideas, questions, and arguments.

Coursework Expectations: There are *two exams which shall comprise 25% each* of your total grade; *class discussion and participation constitutes 25%* and the remaining *25%* of your final grade will come from your *group project*. As such, this course asks you to read texts closely and responsively. Generally, material covered in the readings will be also covered in lecture, which shall be the primary source of content found on exams. Students, who by virtue of their absence have missed an exam, must reschedule *no later than the next* normally scheduled class meeting. If you fail to schedule your make up exam within this window and/or fail to take your make up exam on the rescheduled date, you will receive *zero* on that exam.

Course Performance: As you can gather from the detailed syllabus I have provided for you, the only thing you can do to get a passing grade in the class is complete the work assigned in the syllabus on time and without excuses; essentially perform well on both exams which is the primary mechanism by which your class performance is assessed. What does this mean? Essentially, I am warning you that the level of effort you put into the class, *may not correspond to the results* you produce (which is what ultimately matters in obtaining a grade).

That is, sometimes a person's best effort may only earn them a "C". Therefore, please know that I will tolerate no drama at the end of the semester about how you "wanted an A in this class" and are actually getting a C- and can I do something to help you "improve your grade." My standard response to that kind of request will always be: "sorry, but you had an entire semester to work on improving your grade."

1. Be respectful of others, in terms of engaging and listening to lectures, peer comments, and other course materials.
2. Acknowledge that racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and other institutionalized forms of oppression exist.
3. Acknowledge that one mechanism by which institutionalized inequalities happens is because we are all systematically taught misinformation about our own group and about members of other groups. This is true for members of both privileged and oppressed groups alike.
4. Read in an engaged way, recognizing the ideology and politics imbedded in every text. Ask yourself: what is significant in this piece, what elicits anger/sadness/laughter, but *go beyond emotional responses* to be prepared to make specific statements about the reading!
5. Be aware of your own subject position, ideologies, privileges and prejudices. Recognize your own relationship to institutions of power and structures of domination. This can help you make specific connections to the reading, class discussions and other forms of feedback. Rather than proclaiming, "This article sucks," or "You are wrong," you can get more specific about the basis and origins of your reaction.
6. Remember that discussion in this class *isn't about* proving, embarrassing, showing off, winning, losing, convincing, holding one's argument to the bitter end – it's about dialogue, debate and self-reflections. *Listen to others!*
7. Take Risks: I want this class to be a place where everyone should feel comfortable enough to disagree with each other.
8. Speak with evidence and "facts" on your side. Despite the popular pronouncements that there are no wrong answers, there are incomplete, problematic, superficial, surfaced, and unsubstantiated answers. Reflect on your own answers and the basis of your conclusions
9. Go beyond an either/or dichotomy. Incorporate a both/and approach rather than an "either/or."

Last, But Not Least is the “How Is That My Problem” Clause: I am a very busy person, and as an instructor, my role in this class is to teach you about effects of intersecting social markers and to generally prepare you for the professional world. I feel the need to warn you, then, that often times I will have a standard response to many of your “problems” or “conflicts.” The response will usually be a variation of “*How is that my problem?*” **Before** you raise any issue with me, understand that your personal matters should bear **no effect** on me or on how this class is conducted. It is ultimately up to you to make your own decisions, but decisions, even in college, have consequences attached to them. Please keep that in mind. It is your responsibility to be aware of the policies on this syllabus and follow them appropriately. If you miss class it is your responsibility to check with your classmates to find out what you have missed. And though you are always welcome to follow up with me if you are absent, **do not** ask me if you “missed anything important.”

Grading Procedures: I will try to remain as faithful as possible to this syllabus. However, I reserve the right to amend any and all readings, assignments, presentations, exams, etc. which are subject to change with limited notice. Incompletes will only be awarded upon convincing proof of a serious emergency, subject to my discretion.

Course Assignments

Midterm Paper (100pts): Student will write a **complete 5 page** paper that will critically analyze the intersectionality of race, racism, ethnicity, whiteness and/or other identity-based social inequalities on a subject of their choice, germane to the areas of film, television, radio, and multimedia (construed broadly) from **no earlier than 2010**. The purpose of this writing assignment is to exercise your research skills and critical thinking. After you have selected the genre and subject of your research, students are required to use a minimum of **four academic** sources (i.e., books and/or scholarly journal articles) also, you must cite **at least two** sources from the readings assigned for class. Your task then is to write a coherent, analytical, and critical paper about the ways in which social constructions of ethnicity and race intersect in the subjects you have selected (taking into consideration that absence is a form of representation).

Final Paper (100pts): Student will write a **complete 5 page** paper that will critically analyze the intersectionality of race, racism, ethnicity, whiteness and/or other identity-based social inequalities on a subject of their choice, germane to the areas of film, television, radio, and multimedia (construed broadly) from **no earlier than 2010**. The purpose of this writing assignment is to exercise your research skills and critical thinking. After you have selected the genre and subject of your research, students are required to use a minimum of **four academic** sources (i.e., books and/or scholarly journal articles) also, you must cite **at least two** sources from the readings assigned for class. Your task then is to write a coherent, analytical, and critical paper about the ways in which social constructions of ethnicity and race intersect in the subjects you have selected (taking into consideration that absence is a form of representation).

Participation (100pts): Students should arrive prepared to engage with the material assigned for that day in class. Your contributions to class discussion are assessed based *not on quantity but quality*; e.g. moving the discussion forward in new directions while linking theoretical concepts to tangible examples. This grade may also include small group discussion(s). Student participation grade is generally comprised of my critical assessment of your contributions to the course's progress. This determination is based on two objective criteria; *first* the frequency (e.g. regularity) of your comments and *second*, (and more importantly) the quality of those comments. Of these two criteria, more weight will be assigned to the second than the first.

Student Projects (100pts): Students will, in collaboration with their instructor, devise a student project that elaborates on a single concept covered over the duration of the course. This project can take many different forms, ranging from a traditional research paper to a video documentary. More details will be provided as we progress closer to the deadline.

Grading Scale

100 – 94 = A
93 – 90 = A –

Suggests that a student's work is outstanding to excellent; the student's work reflects an engaged comprehension of the course content and shows thoughtful insight into the complexities of the course. Student shows an attentive engagement with the course.

89 – 87 = B+
86 – 83 = B
82 – 80 = B–

Suggests that a student's work is very good to good; the student's work reflects a very strong, engaged, and solid understanding of course material. Occasionally, the student's work doesn't go the extra step in critical analysis.

79 – 77 = C+
76 – 73 = C
72 – 70 = C–

Suggests that a student's work is adequate; the student's work reflects a fair, but essentially disengaged, grasp of the course material and doesn't go very far in comprehension, or reflects a lack of understanding of the issues represented in the material. Student's work is un- or underconsidered and unclearly written.

69-67=D+
66-63=D
62-60=D-
59-0=F

Suggests that a student's work shows some, but very little effort; the student's work does not reflect a comprehension of the course material, is disengaged, or reveals a lack of reading, attention, and/or attendance.

Course Schedule

8/24	Introduction & Syllabus Review
8/26	<i>Popular Culture</i> , Ch.1 What Is Pop Culture?
8/28	<i>Popular Culture</i> , Ch.1 Continued
8/31	<i>Popular Culture</i> , Ch.2 Explaining Pop Culture
9/2	<i>Popular Culture</i> , Ch.2 Continued
9/4	<i>Popular Culture</i> , Ch.3 The Business of Pop Culture
9/9	<i>Popular Culture</i> , Ch.3 Continued
9/11	<i>Popular Culture</i> , Ch.4 Popular Print Culture
9/14	<i>Popular Culture</i> , Ch.4 Continued
9/16	<i>Popular Culture</i> , Ch.5 Radio Culture & Ch.6 Pop Music
9/18	<i>Popular Culture</i> , Ch.5 & Ch. 6 Continued
9/21	<i>Popular Culture</i> , Ch.7 Cinema and Video
9/23	<i>Popular Culture</i> , Ch.7 Continued
9/25	<i>Popular Culture</i> , Ch.8 Television
9/28	<i>Popular Culture</i> , Ch.8 Continued
9/30	<i>Popular Culture</i> , Ch.9 Advertising and Branding
10/5	<i>Popular Culture</i> , Ch.9 Continued
10/7	<i>Popular Culture</i> , Ch.10 Pop Language
10/9	Midterm Paper Due – No Class
10/12	<i>Popular Culture</i> , Ch.11 Online Pop Culture
10/14	<i>Popular Culture</i> , Ch.11 Continued
10/16	<i>Why Media is Not the Answer</i> , Ch. 1 Media Phobia
10/19	<i>Why Media is Not the Answer</i> , Ch. 1 Continued
10/21	<i>Why Media is Not the Answer</i> , Ch. 3 Does Social Networking Kill?
10/23	<i>Why Media is Not the Answer</i> , Ch. 3 Continued
10/26	<i>Why Media is Not the Answer</i> , Ch. 4 What's Dumbing Down America?
10/28	<i>Why Media is Not the Answer</i> , Ch. 4 Continued
10/30	<i>Why Media is Not the Answer</i> , Ch. 5 From Screen to Crime
11/2	Student Project Preparation – No Class
11/4	<i>Why Media is Not the Answer</i> , Ch. 5 Continued
11/11	<i>Why Media is Not the Answer</i> , Ch. 6 Pop Culture Promiscuity
11/13	<i>Why Media is Not the Answer</i> , Ch. 6 Continued
11/16	<i>Why Media is Not the Answer</i> , Ch. 10 Consumption and Materialism
11/18	Student Project Presentations
11/20	Student Project Presentations
11/30	Student Project Presentations
12/2	Student Project Presentations
12/4	Student Project Presentations
12/7	Student Project Presentations
12/9	Final Paper Due – No Class