

WOST 397L **THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF WHITENESS
AND WOMEN**

Spring 2005
TuTh 2:30-3:45

Professor Arlene Avakian

OFFICE HOURS: Th 1:15-2:15, and by appointment, 208 Bartlett
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Designed for students who have some familiarity with the historical, economic and political bases of racism, this course will explore the social construction of whiteness, its interaction with gender, and historical and contemporary political resistance to white privilege. Goals of the course are: 1. to gain an understanding of the historical, economic and political forces responsible for the construction and maintenance of whiteness; 2. to explore the mechanisms which insure that whiteness is experienced as the norm and not as a race; 3. to explore the relationships between the constructions of whiteness and the constructions of gender; 4. to foster students' ability to position themselves on the multiple axes of race, gender and class and to help them gain an understanding of the role they play in maintaining the privileges they have; 5. to help students explore effective action to challenge white privilege.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **CLASS PARTICIPATION:** The work we do in this course will depend on the exchange of ideas that will take place in the class. Attendance is critical, and by attendance I mean coming to class *ready to engage with the material having read it carefully and critically*. Much of the work connecting gender to whiteness has not been done. Much of what we read will not mention women. I expect you to raise questions, and to try to make the connections to gender. Attendance in class, then, means more than being there; it means coming to class ready to be a participant. Class participation accounts for **10%** of the grade.
2. **EXAM:** You will be tested on Theodore Allen's book, *The Invention of the White Race*. This test will be a take home exam, and will account for **30%** of the grade. **It is due: 3/22**. Late exams will be graded down.
3. **ANALYTIC PAPER:** will be expected to write an analytic paper. Topics will be announced later in the semester, and the paper will be due on the last day of class. It will account for **40%** of the grade.
3. **ACTION PROJECTS:** In addition to the strictly academic work of the course, students working in groups will be required to design and implement activist projects, on or off campus, to challenge white supremacy. The projects will be chosen and worked on collectively. The project design should include ways to evaluate success of project. I will devote some class time for sharing of projects -- successes and problems -- and will meet with each group outside of class when necessary. At the end

of the semester each group will make a presentation to the class about the project and will be responsible for a written description and evaluation. The project will be given a group grade and will account for **20%** of the grade.

4. **DISCUSSION GROUPS:** Students are *required* to enroll in WOST 296Q, a one credit mandatory p/f practicum which will provide a space to share emotional responses to the class material in a small group setting on a weekly basis. Groups will consist of approximately 10 students each and be facilitated by students who have taken this course. These facilitators are **NOT RESPONSIBLE** for the discussion. They will be there to help keep the focus on whiteness. It will be up to students in the group to come ready to share their own concerns. Each week students will be required to submit 2 copies of a 1-2 page (double spaced, typed) journal focusing on one aspect of the material for that week. One of these copies should have your name on it and will be for the facilitator and the other should be anonymous and will be for me. They will not be graded but will be commented on by the facilitator and returned to students the next week. These journal entries are opportunities for students to work on some of the issues that come up in response to the class. Grades will be based on attendance and completion of journal entries on time. *More than two unexcused* absences, or *more than two missed journal* entries will result in a "F" for the practicum. The grade for the practicum is completely separate from the grade for the course. Only students who are registered in this class will be enrolled in the practicum.

REQUIRED BOOKS:

Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race: Racial Oppression and Social Control*, V. 1. 1994. London: Verso

Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. 1992. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy*. 2004. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

BOOKS ARE FOR SALE AT: FOOD FOR THOUGHT BOOKS--E. PLEASANT STREET, AMHERST

BOOKS ARE ON RESERVE IN LIBRARY AND AVAILABLE TO READ IN THE WOMEN'S STUDIES OFFICE DURING OUR REGULAR BUSINESS HOURS.

IN ADDITION TO THE BOOKS, I HAVE A NUMBER OF READINGS WHICH ARE ON E-RESERVE. THE PASSWORD IS WOMLIBW. I DECIDED ON E-RESERVE BECAUSE IT IS CHEAPER THAN A XEROXED READER. I EXPECT YOU TO PRINT OUT THE ARTICLES AND BRING THEM TO CLASS AS WE MAY REFER TO THEM IN OUR DISCUSSIONS.

COURSE CALENDAR

1/27- INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE--RACIAL IDENTITIES

2/1 **VIDEO SHOWING:** *The Color of Fear*

READING:

Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy*, “Introducing the White Democracy”
and Chapter 1, “A Political Theory of Race”

2/3 RACIAL DEMOCRACY

READING:

Olson, Chapter 2, “The Problem of the White Citizen”

2/8 WHO IS WHITE? WHO IS “OF COLOR?” RACIAL CONUNDRUMS AND THE “WEAKNESS” OF “WHITE BLOOD”

READING:

Ian F. Haney Lopez, “A Note on Whiteness,” “White Lines,” & “Appendix A, The
Racial Prerequisite Cases” & “Appendix B, Excerpts . . .” E-Reserve (ER)

2/10 WHAT IS RACE I: SCIENCE AND RACIAL DEFINITIONS

GUEST LECTURER: Banu Subramaniam

READING:

Anne Fausto-Sterling, “Refashioning Race: DNA and the Politics of Health Care” ER

David Moore, “Dependent Genes” ER

Nancy Leys Stepan, “Race & Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science” ER

2/15 WHAT IS RACE II: HAIR, SKIN, AND BONE

VIDEO SHOWING: *Race: The Floating Signifier*, Stuart Hall

READING: Troy Duster, “The ‘Morphing Properties of Whiteness’” ER

2/17 RACE MATTERS

Slide Showing: *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*

READING:

Leon F. Litwack, “Hellhounds” **ER**

Note: the slides we will be seeing today include graphic images of torture. While difficult to see, we need to know about this violent history.

2/22 WHAT IS RACIAL OPPRESSION?

READING:

Allen, Chapter 1

Donncha O Corrain, “Women in Early Irish Society” **ER**

**2/24 THE CREATION OF WHITENESS: I
THE IRISH, RELIGION & CLASS**

READING:

Allen, Chapter 2

3/1 THE CREATION OF WHITENESS: II

Reading:

Allen, Chapter 3

**3/3 THE SLAVE TRADE, DEVELOPING CAPITALISM, & SHIFTING GENDER
CONSTRUCTIONS**

Reading:

Ronald Bailey, “‘Out of Sight, Out of Mind’: The Struggle of African American
Intellectuals Against the Invisibility of the Slave[ry] Trade . . .” **ER**

Merry E. Weisner, “Spinning Out Capital: Women’s Work . . .” **ER**

**3/8 WHITE SUPREMACY, NATIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY:
BRITAIN AND IRELAND**

Reading:

Allen, Chapters 4 & 5

3/10 ANTI-IRISH RACISM: BRITAIN AND THE US

Guest Lecture: Amy Martin, Mount Holyoke College

Reading:

Allen, Chapter 6

David Roediger, “Irish American Workers & White Racial Formation” **ER**

Luke Gibbons, “Race Against Time” (**Handout**)

March 12-22 Spring Break

3/22 MAINTAINING WHITE SUPREMACY--LITERATURE

Reading:

Toni Morrison, "Preface" & Chapter 1, *Playing in the Dark*

TAKE HOME EXAM DUE

3/24 CONTINUE MORRISON

Reading:

Chapter 2, *Playing in the Dark*

3/29 WHITE SUPREMACY AND FEMINISM

Reading:

Adrienne Rich, "Disloyal to Civilization" **ER**

"The Distance Between Language and Violence" (**Handout**)

3/31 WHITE SUPREMACY AND WOMEN'S "NATURE"

READING:

Claudia Koonz, "Love and Order in the Third Reich," **ER**

Kathleen Blee, "Womanhood and the Klan Fraternity" **ER**

Abby L. Ferber, "Introduction," *Home Grown Hate: Gender and Organized Racism* **ER**

4/5 WHITE WOMEN AND THE MAINTENANCE OF PRIVILEGE

READING:

Tim Wise, "Is Sisterhood Conditional? White Women & the Rollback . . ." **ER**

Herbert Aptheker, "Introduction" and "Abolitionism and Racism" **ER**

4/7 PUBLIC POLICY, WHITE SUPREMACY AND "RACE NEUTRALITY"

READING:

Jill Quadagno, "The Politics of Welfare Reform," **ER**

Rickie Solinger, "The Stick and The Carrot . . ." **ER**

4/12 SHADES OF WHITENESS I – CLASS

READING:

Doug Henwood, "Trash-O-Nomics" **ER**

Georg Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness . . ." **ER**

4/14 SHADES OF WHITENESS II – ETHNICITY

READING:

James Baldwin, "On Being White and Other Lies" **ER**

Karen Sacks, "How Jews Became White Folks" **ER**

Thomas A. Guglielmo, "'No Color Barrier': Italians, Race, and Power in the United States"

ER

4/19 KEEPING RACE/RACISM "INVISIBLE"

READING:

Brown *et.al.*, "Introduction" **ER**

Thomas Rose, "Innocence and Affirmative Action" **ER**

4/21 MONDAY AT UMASS–NO CLASS

4/26- WHITE SOCIAL PRACTICES

4/28 READING:

Trina Grillo & Stephanie Wildman, "Obscuring the Importance of Race . . ." **ER**

Wildman with Davis, "Language and Silence . . ." **ER**

Melainie E. L. Bush, "Cracks in the Walls of Whiteness: Desperately Seeking Agency and Optimism" **ER**

5/3 BECOMING RACE TRAITORS I – ALLIES OR APPROPRIATORS?

Video Showing: Yellow Apparel or Plastic Medicine Man

Reading:

Wimsatt, "We Use Words Like Mackadocious..." & "Aren't You in the Wrong Neighborhood?" **ER**

James Baldwin, "White Man's Guilt" **ER**

5/5 BECOMING RACE TRAITORS II-- ISSUES AND ACTION

Reading:

Brown *et.al.*, "Conclusion" (**Handout**)

Olson, Chapter 5, "The Abolition Democracy"

5/10-12 PRESENTATION OF STUDENT PROJECTS & COURSE SUMMARY

FINAL PAPER AND EVALUATION OF ACTION PROJECTS DUE