

ETHN 189 “Race” and Postracial Criticism

Spring Quarter 2005: Wed., 5.00 – 7.50 pm, Room WLH 2111

Instructor: Brett St Louis

Office Hours: Tue. 11.00-1.00; Wed. 2.00 – 3.00

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Course Description

The biological concept of “race” has been largely discredited. Instead it is often seen as a “social construction” that, counter to common-sense, does not exist within nature. However, many critics suggest that even continued usage of “race” in this socially constructed sense unintentionally validates the common-sense biological idea of “race” which helps perpetuate divisive racial thinking, racial stratification, and racism. As a result, some critics adopt what we might call a “postracial” argument and advocate that the term “race” should be abandoned altogether. In addition to these conceptual and analytical concerns, this course discusses some critiques of “race” as a valid category and concept in relation to a range of themes including “mixed-race”, human biodiversity, cosmopolitanism, and whiteness.

Required Texts

Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks

Mike Hill, After Whiteness

Other course readings are available on E-reserve.

Course Requirements

You are expected to complete the required reading for each session, prepare for the set tasks, and participate fully in group discussions and projects. The forms of assessment are listed below and papers *must* be submitted by the required deadline: *late papers will not be accepted*.

Assessment

All assignments constitute *individual tasks*. Submitted papers *must not* include work completed by another person (of course, unless cited and referenced as a published source). All papers *must* include *full* citation, quotation, and bibliographic references. Papers should be double-spaced in 12pt font and checked for spelling and typographical errors prior to submission. Specified page length for papers *must* be adhered to: papers over or under length will be penalized one mark of a grade — e.g. a C will be a C- or an A- will be a B+.

Attendance & Class Participation **10%**

As there are only 10 sessions it is crucial that you attend fully in order to develop a full grasp of the complex themes and arguments covered throughout the course. You will also need to complete the reading for each week in order to follow the debates and contribute usefully to small group and class discussions.

Presentation & Response Paper **20%**

You are required to participate in a group presentation to the class during the course. Presentations should last between 20-30 minutes (depending on numbers of presenters) and fulfill two main criteria: **1**, offer a description of the main points raised in the relevant texts / debates; **2**, offer a commentary / observations on any points you deem contentious or otherwise worthy of note. Please feel free to use other materials — e.g. newspaper articles — to illustrate your points / arguments.

You must submit an individually-written **3 page** Response Paper on the subject of the Presentation on that same day.

Midterm Exam **20%**

There will be a **one-hour midterm examination on 27 April**. The exam will start promptly at 5.15 pm in WLH 2111, please bring a blue book with you. **Non-attendance/non-completion of the exam will result in an “F” grade for the midterm.**

THERE WILL BE NO MAKE-UP EXAM.

Review Paper **20%**

Write a **3 page** review paper of one of the topics addressed in the “Critical Issues” section of the course that must be *different to the subject of your presentation*. Your review should: **1**, identify some key issues (of your choosing) within the given topic; and **2**, offer a critical assessment of the arguments made. This paper is due on the Wednesday following the date that the topic is discussed in class and must be handed in by the end of class.

Final Paper **30%**

Write a 6-8 page paper on **one** of the following questions:

1. Critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of “postracial” arguments.
2. Critically examine the effects of “race” as a biological concept on the understanding of individuals **and/or** social relations and structure.
3. Critically discuss the impact of “racial” categories on individual **and/or** group identity.
4. Critically assess arguments for relinquishing individual and collective “racial” identities.
5. Critically analyze the social implications of continued **and/or** discontinued reference to race.

Write the specific chosen question title on the cover page of your paper; **do not compose your own title**. These are set questions, **one** of which must be completed; they are not “prompts” to develop an alternative paper title.

Statement on Interaction

It is crucial that we develop a mutually respectful classroom environment in order to explore the sensitive issues that we will encounter on the course. I suggest that you read the statement of UCSD Principles of Community that can be found at:

<http://www.ucsd.edu/principles/>

COURSE SCHEDULE

30 March. Introductory Session

This session will introduce the structure of the course and its formal and participatory requirements. It will also present the key issues and themes to be explored in the course:

- the analytical and practical status of the concept of “race”
- the analytical and social implications of reference to “race”
- the basis of objections to “race”
- the alternatives to “race” and their justification

HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES

6 April

Historical Background: From “Race” to “Ethnicity”

Reservations about the descriptive and explanatory validity of “race” have existed for almost as long as the idea itself. However, these reservations, tentative and isolated in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, became more coherent and forceful during the 20th century. In this session we will consider the scientific critique of “race” that emerged largely after World War II as a response to the Holocaust and the genocidal horrors of Anti-Semitism and the “Final Solution”. We will explore a number of statements on the futility of the concept of “race” and its suggested replacement with “ethnicity” while also considering some of the flaws and contradictions of this project.

Required Reading

Barzun, Race: A Study in Superstition (Chap 1 & 11)

Locke, Race Contacts and Interracial Relations (Chap 1)

Montagu, Man’s Most Dangerous Myth (Chap 1)

Montagu, Statement on Race (pp. 60-68; 70-73; 104-106; 116-124; 126-137)

UNESCO, Race, Science and Society (Appendix).

13 April

Analytical Issues: “Race”, Racialization, and Racism

Some social scientists argue that “race” cannot be used as a reliable concept. A major concern is that if “race” does not exist in an objective sense, then reference to “race” distorts the effects of social *processes* (such as economic exploitation) as “racial” *facts*. Therefore, it has been suggested that we should instead focus on the concept of *racialization* as a *process* by which “races” are *symbolically invented* and *materially made* that allows us to focus clearly on their social construction and effects. We will consider arguments that such an analytical practice enables a better understanding of racism and clearer political strategies able to address the causes of racism instead of the ideological effect of “race”.

Required Reading

Bhatt, “Contemporary geopolitics and ‘alterity’ research”

Blum, I'm Not a Racist, But... (Chap 8)
Darder & Torres, After Race (Chap 1)
Guillaumin, Racism, Sexism, Power and Ideology (Chap 2 & 6)
Miles, Racism After "Race" Relations (pp. 27-52)

CRITICAL ISSUES

20 April **The Natural and the Social: Understanding "Special Populations"**

Even though the biological concept of "race" has been largely (although not completely) rejected within the natural and human sciences, it remains a common-sense concept with a great deal of social currency. Part of the reason for this lies in the folk myths of "race" as relating to the distinctive traits of particular groups — usually, but not solely, understood in terms of physical, intellectual, and moral capacities — that remain enduring as familiar stereotypes. Although some of these associations between biological "races" and group attributes such as intelligence are obviously controversial, others such as the existence of "racially-specific" diseases that prove the existence of "race" appear less problematic. This session will consider two main facets of this issue: 1, the veracity of these claims; and 2, their social implications and the critical attention that they warrant.

Required Reading

Alland, Race in Mind (Chap 3)
Duster, Backdoor to Eugenics (pp. 3-20 & 39-59)
Graves, The Race Myth (Chap 1 & 5)
St Louis, "Racialization in the "Zone of Ambiguity"
Wade, Race, Nature and Culture (Chap 4)
27 April **Midterm Exam & Film Screening**

4 May **Ontology and Alienation: Frantz Fanon and Racial (Non)Existence**

In this session we will consider the work of the Martinican psychiatrist and radical intellectual, Frantz Fanon and in particular his classic book, Black Skin, White Masks. We will explore various aspects of Fanon's work including: his theorization of racism and the workings of racialization as producing physical "racial" subjects; the internalization of "racial" attitudes, beliefs, and feelings; his assessment of the idea of "race" as producing the racial identities and existential realities of race; and role of "race" in the alienation of human beings and the possibilities of postracial human "disalienation".

Required Reading

Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks
Bhabha, "Foreword: Remembering Fanon"
Kruks, "Fanon, Sartre, and Identity Politics"

11 May **Identity and the Politics of Difference: From Mixed-Race to Anti-Race**

A main problem with the concept of “race” is that it has divided the human species into “racial” groups on an arbitrary basis. In addition to the categorical problem this creates there is a practical issue: those falling “between” and “outside” the traditional “racial” categories have tended to be either ignored or dismissed as having “no [racial] identity”. This session considers the emergence of categories such as “mixed-race”, “biracial” and “multiracial” that attest to the existence and valid experiences of those historically marginalized by the enforcement of “traditional racial groups”. However, we will also examine how some authors engaging the issue of “mixed-race” identity draw attention to an inherent contradiction and dilemma: the very category of “race” as “mixed”, “bifurcated”, or “multiplied” accepts that discrete “races” exist prior to mixing and, as such, reinforces the intrinsic value of “race” as a biological category and its “racial” politics.

Required Reading

Alcoff, “Mestizo Identity”

Brunsma & Rockquemore, “What Does ‘Black’ Mean?”

Lawrence, “Racelessness”

Zack, Race and Mixed-Race (Chap 14 & 15)

Zack, “Life After Race”

18 May **Politics and Ethics: Humanism and Cosmopolitanism**

As we have already seen at the beginning of the course, it is suggested that “race” is a problematic analytical concept and should not be used because of its inaccuracy. Recent debates have expanded this analytical objection into a moral critique of “race”. In this session we will consider the work of various thinkers who explicate the various moral and ethical problems that “race” produces including the “scripted racial identities” that restrict individuality and the inability of “race” to do anything other than reinforce embittered distinctions between “racial” groups. We will also evaluate the support advanced here for a cosmopolitan form of identity and society that refers to cultural differences and connections within a common humanity.

Required Reading

Appiah, “Race, Culture, Identity” (Part 2)

Blum, I’m Not a Racist, But... (Chap 9)

Eze, Achieving Our Humanity (Chap 6 & Postscript)

Gilroy, “Race ends here” & Against Race (Chap 1)

Hill, Becoming a Cosmopolitan (Chap 1)

25 May **“Race Traitors”: The Critique and Rejection of Whiteness**

The history of the academic study of “race relations” is largely a study of the “racial problems” that emergence when “racial groups” engage with a “majority”

society. More recent research has demonstrated the implicit lines of racialization and non-racialization at work within this paradigm: the “racial groups” are, usually, peoples “of color” while the “majority” group is not presented as “racial”, they just are, simply, themselves; as such “whiteness” has become normative and eluded apprehension and scrutiny. While “Whiteness Studies” has carefully drawn attention to this history of normative whiteness, this session will focus on a particular recent trend. Opting instead for “the study of whiteness” over “whiteness studies”, many scholars seek to de-stabilize the salience of whiteness as a coherent category. We will also consider the most strident of these critiques, the self-styled “race traitors”, who advocate the “abolition of the white race” under the slogan “treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity”.

Required Reading

Hill, After Whiteness

Sleeter, “White Silence, White Solidarity”

Ignatiev & Garvey, “Abolish the White Race By Any Means Necessary” & “When Does the Unreasonable Act Make Sense?”

Field, “Whiteness, Racism, and Identity”

Dyer, White (Chap 1)

“Symposium: Whither Whiteness?” in Souls

1 June

Final Debate & Final Paper Workshop / Course Summary

This final session will feature a class debate on the key issues raised within the course. It will also provide a summary of the main themes and arguments engaged throughout the course as well as an opportunity for students to raise questions and observations as well as queries regarding the final paper.

Majoring or Minor in Ethnic Studies at UCSD

Many students take an ethnic studies course because the topic is of great interest or because of a need to fulfill a social science, non-contiguous, or other college requirement. Often students have taken three or four classes out of “interest” yet have no information about the major or minor and don’t realize how close they are to a major, a minor, or even a double major. An ethnic studies major is excellent preparation for a career in law, public policy, government and politics, journalism, education, public health, social work, international relations, and many other careers. If you would like information about the ethnic studies major or minor at UCSD, please contact Theresa Aitchison, Ethnic Studies Department Undergraduate Advisor, at 858-534-6040 or taitchis@ucsd.edu