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Spring 2021: Remote Asynchronous Course

3 credits

Office Hours: by appointment

01:070:376 - Power and Difference: Race as an Ethnographic Problem

Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? They say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word.

-W.E.B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk

Course Description and Goals

It has been suggested that anthropologists, despite possessing key theoretical insights and methodological tools for interrogating diverse forms of social belonging, have lagged behind other social sciences in contributing to theories of race and racialization. This course focuses primarily on works in the past few decades which have self-consciously attempted to push race to the forefront of anthropological discourse. Through a series of ethnographic and theoretical readings we will explore the constitution of race as an object of analysis for anthropological inquiry. We will not start from the question of “What is race?” but rather we will be animated by the questions: how have anthropologists (and other social scientists) tried to get a hold of race? Where have they found it and how did they get a fix on it? What problems does race provoke for theory and politics?

The course readings open with an exploration of the concept and place of race in anthropological history while moving towards examinations of how race articulates to analytics such as gender, class, and colonialism. Course readings are designed to provoke students to consider why race has proven to be such an effaced, misrecognized, and ephemeral object of analysis and experience.

Department Goals

This course contributes to each of the five learning goals for majors in the Anthropology department (found here: <https://anthro.rutgers.edu/academics/undergraduate/undergraduate-learning-goals>). In particular, by interrogating the concept of race in anthropology, students will become more familiar with fundamental dilemmas in the history of the discipline (goal #1). In understanding race as a contested concept, students will begin to critically parse diverse approaches to studying racialized phenomena (goals #2 and #3). Various assignments will give

students the opportunity to develop their skills for writing and speaking about a central issue in anthropology (goals #4 and #5).

Course Website

A Canvas website (<https://tlt.rutgers.edu/canvas>) accompanies this course; there you will find announcements and discussion boards. If you have trouble accessing the site, please email your professor.

All students are responsible for timely attention to email and Canvas postings for this course and therefore should check the Canvas site and their Rutgers email accounts regularly. Dates and assignments may change; all changes will be announced in class or posted on Canvas or both.

E-mail communication with professor

In the subject line of your email message, begin with "REP"—e.g., a subject line might read: "REP/reading question" or "REP/exam question." (Specifying "REP" in your email subject line will help to ensure timely responses.)

Course Requirements

Critical Analysis Papers (55%, Goals #1, #2, #3, and #4):

You will write a 5-page (Times New Roman, 12pt.) analysis paper on a topic that I will assign on the following date:

Paper 1: Assigned Week 5, Due Week 7

This paper will count for 20% of your overall grade.

You will write a longer, 10-page (Times New Roman, 12pt.) analysis paper during the final weeks of class.

Paper 2: Assigned Week 10, due Finals Week

This paper will count for 35% of your overall grade. It will take the form of a review and feedback essay centered on one of the three full length ethnographies assigned at the end of the course. You will be graded based on how you use other course readings to inform a critical discussion of the book.

Weekly Annotations (30%, Goals #1, #2, #3, and #4)

Rather than weekly individual discussion board posts, we will use the web app Perusall to make shared annotations of the week's texts. You will be required to make at least 5 annotations of the weekly reading in the app. At least 2 annotations should be short comments (2-3 sentences or more) on a particular section or passage and at least 2 annotations should be questions about specific passages. At least one annotation should be a big question about the broader themes of the reading. Annotations can be in response to other students' or the professor's annotations.

While there will be no late penalties in this course, to keep a collective discussion going, I'm asking that you post your annotations by Friday of the week noted for the reading.

These annotations will count for 15% of your grade. You will receive one point for each annotation per class. You will only fail to receive points if you do not post the required number of responses, or if a response is clearly not based on a deep engagement with the reading.

Reading Guide (15%, Goals #1, #2, #3, and #5)

You will each be responsible for facilitating (perhaps with a partner, depending on course enrollment) an in-depth discussion of the readings for one class session in the form of a written and audio or video recorded reading guide. You will have ten minutes to present key ideas and tensions from the readings. You will then have ten minutes to pose critical reading and discussion questions to the class based on the reading. Presentations are to be analytical, not summarizations, and your ability to explain why your questions are important for the reading and the broader themes of the course are important. Finally, you are required to post a one-page handout of key points and questions from your presentation on the course website.

Your reading guide assignment will be worth 15% of your grade. Points will be based on your preparation, relevant examples, and presentation.

Accessibility Services

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

Course Materials

We will be reading three full length ethnographies in the second half of the course. They will be available online on the library website. Other books and articles listed in the syllabus will be selections from the source material and posted as .pdf files for download.

Laurence Ralph (2014), *Renegade Dreams: Living Through Injury in Gangland Chicago*

Aimee Meredith Cox (2015), *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship*

Savannah Shange (2019), *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Antiracism, and Schooling in San Francisco*

Course Schedule

I will post notes and a reading guide on each week's readings by the Tuesday before the date listed below. Where books are listed, you will be required to read selected chapters posted as PDF files on Canvas, save for the final three ethnographies.

Week 1 (Problems) 01-22

How has race been constituted as a problem for anthropology?

- Leith Mullings (2005): "Interrogating Racism: Towards an Antiracist Anthropology."
- Ryan Jobson (2020): "The Case for Letting Anthropology Burn"

Week 2 (Dueling Legacies) 01-29

How did early anthropologists and social scientists conceptualize race and racism? To what dilemmas were these formulations responding?

- Faye Harrison (1992): "The DuBoisian Legacy in Anthropology"
- Lee D. Baker (1998): *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954*
- Jafari Allen and Ryan Jobson (2015): "The Decolonizing Generation: (Race and) Theory in Anthropology since the Eighties"

Week 3 (The Urban) 02-05

How have anthropologists conceptualized the articulations of race and the urban?

- De Genova, Nicholas (2005): *Working the Boundaries: Race, Space, and "illegality" in Mexican Chicago*

Week 4 (Class) 02-12

How has race worked through political economy and social class?

- John L. Jackson (2000): *Harlemworld: Doing Race and Class in Contemporary Black America*

Week 5 (Intersectionality and Gender) 02-19

How do we think race with gender and other categories of difference?

- Irma McClaurin (2001): "Introduction: Forging a Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics of Black Feminist Anthropology" in *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics*
- Leith Mullings (1997): "Gender and the Application of Anthropological Knowledge to Public Policy in the United States" in *On Our Own Terms: Race, Class, and Gender in the Lives of African American Women*.

Week 6 (The West and The Rest) 02-26

How has imperialism shaped anthropological conceptions of race?

- Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1991): "Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness"

Week 7 (Whiteness) 03-05

What unique challenges does whiteness pose for the study of race?

- Setha Low (2003): *Behind the Gates: Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America*
- Orisanmi Burton (2015): "To Protect and Serve Whiteness"

Week 8 (Ontologies of Race in the 21st Century) 03-12

How do we make race today? To what objects and narratives do we fix it?

- Barbara Fields and Karen Fields (2013): *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*
- Stephan Palmié (2007): "Genomics, Divination, "Racecraft"

Week 9 (Injury) 03-26

How do we write race in ways legible to our subjects?

- Laurence Ralph (2014): *Renegade Dreams*

Week 10 (Injury, continued) 04-02

finish Ralph book

Week 11 (Choreography) 04-09

How can anthropologists write in ways that disrupt marginalizing narratives?

- Start Aimee Meredith Cox (2015): *Shapeshifters* over Thanksgiving break

Week 12 (Choreography, continued) 04-16

- Finish Cox

Week 13 (Anti-Blackness) 04-23

How does the concept of anti-blackness challenge progressive notions of race?

- Savannah Shange, *Progressive Dystopia*

Week 14 (Anti-Blackness, continued) 04-30

- Finish Shange