American Whiteness
Soc 295 Sect 1, Weds/Friday 8:30-9:50am, ARH 318, Spring 2015

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“Once we realize that there are few pure victims or oppressors, and that each one of us derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression that frame our lives, then we will be in a position to see the need for new ways of thought and action.” Patricia Hill Collins

“White identity has its roots both in domination and in a desire to avoid confronting one’s own miseries. Whiteness is, among much else, a bad idea. . . . it is quite possible to avoid hating white people as individuals but to criticize forcefully the ‘idea of white people in general.’” David Roediger

Course Description

This course examines whiteness as a specific racial formation with a distinct history, proactive and defensive politics, and institutional and personal investments. To give whiteness a specific content, we will study the historical expansion of the category, the formal and informal advantages that accrue to whiteness, the internal diversity of the category, and the continuous challenges to whiteness, both conceptual and material. We will use historical, economic and sociological studies of racial formation to "capture" whiteness in production and re-creation cycles. The course will make use of empirical and advanced theoretical insights to gain leverage on studying whiteness.

Course Goals

The goal of American Whiteness is to take on the labor of interrogating and attacking racism by making whiteness visible. Racism is still the foremost social problem plaguing our nation. Racism is perpetuated by a system that discourages honestly engaging with what it means to be white in a racist nation. This course is committed to not only peering at whiteness, but rather, scrutinizing it, by breaking down the historical advantages of whiteness and the present day costs of the 'possessive investment in whiteness'. We will work together to move through the silence, fear
and anxiety surrounding discussions of racism, and particularly of what it means to be white.

One of the challenges of addressing racism is the complexity of the concept of race, and a feeling of inadequacy of language. While we inherit notions of race and live in a world structured by racialized ideas, we do not always know how these ideas originated, or recognize the relative fluidity of racial categories across time and place. The first two weeks of the course will be spent examining the history of race formation in the United States, beginning with the ideas about race transported by first colonists, and then immigrants to the United States as the nation grew and began to define itself and negotiate the terms of who would be included in ‘We, the people. . .’ We will track the construction of the white race over time, and the inclusion or marginalization of various groups of Americans over time. Our study will proceed through an examination of the white race in law, literature, families, at work and in popular culture.

This course is an exploration. We will focus particularly on honing our tools of critique: developing our ability to denaturalize racial categories, to identify the historical underpinnings and “logic” of race in the U. S., and to develop and articulate key questions regarding how race, and specifically, whiteness, operates. Our course will conclude with a critical interpretation of the use of whiteness studies as a mode of analysis, and discussions regarding how to develop an antiracist identity.

This is important work: challenging—at times, intimidating—but refreshingly real. I invite you to accompany me on this journey, and I look forward to learning and working with you. Welcome to American Whiteness.

**Course Texts:**
Readings are due on the day they are listed. For our books, the author/editor’s last name is listed first. All other readings are available on our pweb site in the order you will need them. Whether you read electronically or on paper, you need a way to keep track of your impressions, analysis and questions, and you need to have all the readings with you for each class session.

**Attendance and Deadlines:**
I expect you to come to class prepared and ready to discuss. Each class meeting you are expected to have read the assigned reading carefully, and recorded your notes, questions, and insights in preparation for the discussion. The course starts promptly at 8:30am; I take attendance at the start of class, so be on time. If you arrive late, your participation grade for that day will be docked.

Your written work needs to be in on time. I rarely allow late work to be handed in, and only if you contact me in advance of the deadline. All written assignments must be printed out, stapled and handed in at the start of class.
Course Policies:
This class is discussion-based. I need your full attention on our shared work. If you use an electronic device in lieu of paper and pen, please let me know at the beginning of the semester. If I ever find you using that device for anything other than referring to our readings or taking notes, I will ask you to leave the class immediately.

If you have a physical or learning disability that requires you to make some adaptations to this course, please contact me to discuss arrangements. All conversations will be confidential. For help with disability services, contact Joyce Stern (3702).

In any papers written for this course, you must abide by the College’s rules on plagiarism as outlined in the Student Handbook, which require you to "acknowledge explicitly any expressions, ideas, or observations that are not" your own. In addition, I expect that all formal papers will contain a footnote acknowledging assistance of any kind you received in producing the paper. I recommend making use of the talent and assistance of the professionals in the writing lab. If you do go to the writing lab, remember to cite the person who assisted you.

Required Texts

*Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Matthew Frye Jacobson
*Black on White: Black Writers on What it Means to Be White*, David Roediger, Ed.
*Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness*, Jane Lazarre
*The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, Patricia J. Williams
*Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Toni Morrison

Assignments:

This course is guided by the notion that we often do not know what we know until we write. With that thought in mind, students will be expected to aggressively journal each day, keeping track of questions, insights, instances in which you change your mind, resources, and analysis throughout the term. Your journal will form the basis for your participation in each day’s discussion, your leadership of one day’s discussion, two essays, and preparation of your midterm and final exams. Grading for the course is divided between writing and doing. I expect and invite students to play a very active role in this course.

The second foundation of this course is question formation. Our readings and discussions will likely produce as many questions as answers. Students will be evaluated on their commitment to honest inquiry and self-critique, as well as your ability to formulate and articulate quality questions, as established in class.
participation and written work. This course is meant to facilitate a personal journey towards a better understanding of how whiteness functions in a racist nation, therefore sincere attempts at working through whiteness will be rewarded. In other words, none of us presume to have all the answers at the end of the term, but we will possess many more tools for understanding the historical and contemporary meanings of race. In keeping with these goals, you will be asked to formally contribute an insight or a question five times throughout the semester. We will sign up for the dates you are responsible in the first week of class.

**Grading**

Participation, including questions and insights 20%
Leader for a day 10%
White Paper 15%
  Draft 1 - 5% - Feb 13
  Draft 2 – 10% - Mar 4
Midsem Exam Mar 13 15%
Small Group Popular Culture Presentations April 3 10%
Changed My Mind Assignment 15%
  Paper – 10% - May 1
  Presentation – 5% - May 6/8
Final Exam May 12 15%

**Introduction to the Course**

**Week 1**

W Jan 21 “White Privilege and Male Privilege”, by Peggy McIntosh from Privilege: A Reader edited by Michael Kimmel and Abby Ferber, 15-27 pweb
“Race Today” from Contexts 15pgs

F Jan 23 “Introduction: Toward a Sociology of the Superordinate” by Michael Kimmel from Privilege: A Reader edited by Michael Kimmel and Abby Ferber, 1-12 pweb
“The Transparency Phenomenon, Race-Neutral Decision-making, and Discriminatory Intent”, by Barbara Flagg, 220-226 pweb
Roediger, “White Superiority in America” by Derrick Bell, 38-50
UNIT 1: WHITENESS IS HISTORICAL AND LEGAL

Week 2

W Jan 28 “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness” by George Lipsitz in White Privilege reader 61-84 pweb
Jacobson, “Epilogue” and “Introduction” 274-282 and 1-12 62
Group 1 Q, Group 2 I

F Jan 30 Jacobson, “Free White Persons” and “Anglo-Saxons and Others”, 13-90
“Dysconscious Racism: Ideology, Identity, and Miseducation”, by Joyce King CWS 128-132 pweb
Group 3 Q, Group 4 I

Week 3

W Feb 4 Jacobson, “Becoming Caucasian” 91-135
Williams, “Excluding Voices”, 3-51 93
Group 5 Q, Group 6 I

F Feb 6 Jacobson, “History, Race, and Perception”, 137-200 (and images)
Williams, “Trial by Text”, 55-97 103
Group 1 Leader for a Day

Week 4

W Feb 11 Jacobson, “Naturalization and the Courts” and “The Dawning Civil Rights Era” 223-273
Williams, end of “The Obliging Shell” and start of “Ladder to the Light”, 98-30, 146-165 100
Group 2 Q, Group 1 I

F Feb 13 Williams, end of “Ladders to the Light”, and “The Pain of Word Bondage” 166-215 49
Group 4 Q, Group 3 I
White Paper Draft 1 DUE
UNIT 2: WHITENESS IS INTIMATE

Week 5

W Feb 18 Lazarre, “Prologue”, “The Richmond Museum of the Confederacy” Xiii-20
“Brown-Skinned White Girls: Class, Culture, and the Construction of White Identity in
Surburban Communities”, by France Winddance Twine in Displacing Whiteness: Essays
in Social and Cultural Criticism Edited by Ruth Frankenberg, 214-243 pweb 58
Group 6 Q, Group 5 I

F Feb 20 Lazarre, “Color Blind: The Whiteness of Whiteness” 21-51
“The Making of a White Female Citizenry” by Louise Michelle Newman in White
Women’s Rights, 56-85 pweb 49
Group 2 Leader for a Day

Week 6

W Feb 25 Lazarre, “Passing Over”, 53-97
“From Practice to Theory, or What Is a White Woman Anyway?”, by Catharine
MacKinnon in CWS 300-304 pweb 48
Group 1 Q, Group 2 I

F Feb 27 Lazarre, “Reunions, Retellings, Refrains” and “A Color with No Precise Name”
98-135
“Are Asian Americans Becoming White?” from Contexts 29-37, pweb
“What Does a White Woman Look Like? Racing and Erasing in Law”, by Katherine M.
Franke in CWS 467-470 pweb 40
Group 3 Leader for a Day

Week 7

W Mar 4 “Introduction” and “A Beautiful Affair”, by Angela Onwuachi-Willig, in
According to our Hearts: Rhinelander vs. Rhinelander and the Law of the Multiracial
Family, 1-35 pweb 35
Group 3 Q, Group 4 I
White Paper Draft 2 DUE

F Mar 6 “Soft-Soaping Empire”, by Anne McClintock in Imperial Leather: Race, Gender,
and Sexuality in the Colonial Context 207-231 pweb
“White Innocence, Black Abstraction”, by Thomas Ross in CWS 263-266 pweb 27
Group 5 Q, Group 6 I
UNIT 3: WHITENESS IS IMAGINED AND REPRESENTED

Week 8

W Mar 11 Morrison, “Preface” and “Black Matters” v-28
Roediger, “Introduction” 1-26
Group 1 I, Group 2 Q

F Mar 13 Exam

Spring Break

Week 9

W Apr 1 “Eating the Other” by bell hooks 366-380 pweb
Roediger, “Madonna: Plantation Mistress or Soul Sister” by bell hooks, 307-316
“Recatif” A short story by Toni Morrison 1-20 pweb
Group 3 I, Group 4 Q
Bring in Popular Culture Artifact

F Apr 3 Morrison “Romancing the Shadow” and “Disturbing Nurses and the Kindness of Sharks” 29-91
Group 5 I, Group 6 Q

UNIT 4: WHITENESS IS STRUCTURAL AND RESILIENT

Week 10

W Apr 8 The Central Frames of Color-Blind Racism Edwardo Bonilla-Silva from Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States 25-52 pweb
“Hiring Quotas for White Males Only” by Eric Foner in CWS 24-26 pweb
“Soulmaning”: Using Race for Political and Economic Gain” by Luther Wright, Jr. in CWS 24-26 pweb
Group 4 Leaders for a Day
F Apr 10 Group Presentations on Popular Culture

Week 11

W Apr 15 “The Link Between: Emmett Till, Trayvon Martin, and the Protection of Whiteness”, by Angela Onwuachi-Willig, unpublished draft 1-130 pweb 130
Group 5 Leaders for a Day

F Apr 17
“The Changing Faces of White Supremacy”, by Loretta J. Ross and Mary Ann Mauney in CWS 552-557 pweb
“Whiteness as Property” by Cheryl Harris 103-118 pweb
“A Story of Two Nations: Race and Wealth” by Oliver and Shapiro 93-125 pweb
“Measuring Vital Capacity” by Lundy Braun from Breathing Race in to the Machine: The Surprising Career of the Spirometer from Plantation to Genetics xiii-xxix pweb 76
Group 1 Q, Group 2 I

Week 12

W Apr 22 “The Case for Reparations”, by Ta-Nehisi Coates The Atlantic 1-47 47
Group 3 Q, Group 4 I

F Apr 24 Bring in one article about Ferguson
Group 5 Q, Group 6 I (continued questions about Coates/Ferguson)

UNIT 5: WHITENESS IS SITUATIONAL AND PERSONAL

Week 13

W Apr 29 The Structures of Racialization by Steve Martinon from The Machinery of Whiteness: Studies in the Structure of Racialization 171-186
Interview with Noel Ignatiev in CWS 608-612
Group 6 Leaders for a Day

F May 1 Roediger, Read Part VI “White Terrors” 320-349
Changed My Mind Paper DUE

Week 14

W May 6 Student Presentations

F May 8 Student Presentations, Wrap Up and Celebration
Finals Week

Tuesday May 12 9am Final Exam

Congratulations! You have graduated from American Whiteness

Enormous thanks to Jocelyn Acosta for all her work and insights into this syllabus. The mistakes are mine, the strengths are hers. And to Jim Farrell, my dear mentor, who first allowed me to teach this course and left the world too soon.