

University of Vermont
Honors College

HCOL 086 – Spring 2019
Representing Race

Class meetings: 8:30-9:45	Professor David Jenemann (he/him/his) Email: David.Jenemann@uvm.edu
UHN 34	
Plenary lectures (see dates below): Wed. 5:05-6:20 Billings Lecture Hall	Office hours: MW 2:00-3:00 and by appointment

“Representing Race” is a follow-up to the fall semester of the FY Honors College seminar (“The Pursuit of Knowledge”) in which the students read Ta-Nehisi Coates’ *Between the World and Me* followed by the writings of three philosophers—Descartes, Hume, and Aristotle—who gave them three different perspectives on how and what we know: rationalism, empiricism, and a kind of humanistic thinking that we referred to as narrativism. In the reading that followed our exploration of those philosophical texts, we looked, sometimes directly, often indirectly, at the ways in which subjectivity can play a role in the construction of knowledge. Following on that experience, “Representing Race” narrows the focus to consider questions of knowledge (what do we know?), persuasion (how do we know it?) and power (who decides?) in the field of race and race relations, specifically the representation of Black Americans. These are exceedingly vexing questions which play out across disciplinary boundaries. How biologists consider race is likely different than how a legal scholar thinks of the issue and distinct once again from how a poet, a painter, or philosopher thinks about the question. At the turn of the twentieth century, the issue of racial representation was further complicated by the births of cinema and the mass media, which offered spectators images and sounds of race that were at once “authentic” records of reality while at the same time culturally-determined fabrications. Hence in the first half of Representing Race, we will take a broad view of racial representations across a variety of disciplines, (biology, legal theory, visual arts, literature, philosophy, etc.) dating from antiquity to the present-day. In the second half of the semester, we will examine how these various types of knowledge play into representations of African Americans in the mass-media from early silent films to television and radio broadcasts to comic books and popular music, and beyond. In addition to traditional assignments, the course will culminate in the opportunity to work on a creative, collaborative project incorporating materials and ideas from the class.

Please Note: Throughout this class we will be discussing topics, watching films, and looking at images that many people find disturbing. These include depictions and discussions of racism, violence, and sex. Some of the texts we read and movies we watch also include racial slurs and epitaphs. Understanding that these topics, words, and images may be distressing, please do not hesitate to contact me independently if you would like to talk about these depictions privately, or if you would prefer not to participate in a class activity. Also, given the sensitive nature of the material we will be addressing, I ask everyone to be respectful and conscientious during class discussions, Blackboard postings, presentations, etc.

Required Texts:

- Course packet (on Blackboard and linked to syllabus)
- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of The Life of Frederick Douglass* (pdf)
- Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How our Government Segregated America*
- John Lewis, et al. *March* (3 volume set)

Assignments and Grades

Class Participation – 15%

Your attendance (on time) and intellectual engagement is mandatory and will make your experience – and that of your classmates – rewarding. The course texts are at times dense and difficult, and they will demand your attention and your labor. Come to class prepared to question and challenge what you read as well as to vent, rage, or pontificate as the need arises. Showing up to class and participating every time are what's expected, not exceptional, and an "A" in participation will be only be given to people who really raise the bar for the class. Discussion of these texts is a central requirement of the class, and you can't participate if you're not here. Therefore, after three unexcused absences, I will deduct 1/3 of a letter grade for each subsequent non-appearance.

Blackboard Assignments – 15%

Also, each week, we will have Blackboard assignments ranging from discussion boards to movie criticism, to opportunities to upload and discuss images and songs. These will be announced each week.

Short Paper #1—Assess an image (800-1000 words) – 10%

In this paper, you will visit the UVM Fleming museum and perform a semiotic analysis of an artwork you discover in the collection that examines how race is represented visually and rhetorically. More details forthcoming.

Short Paper #2—Assess a space (800-1000 words) – 10%

In this paper you will explore the campus surroundings (physical and virtual) to determine how race is represented in and by the University and/or the City of Burlington. More details forthcoming.

Short Paper #3—Review a film (800-1000 words) – 10%

In this paper you will write a critical essay reviewing a film, which assesses its aesthetic merits as well as situating it in its historical context. We will examine a number of examples of literate, popular film criticism in the days leading up to this assignment. More details forthcoming.

Final Project—40%

This is a multi-part research project, consisting of collaborative and individual assignments the results of which will be presented as a research poster and a research report at the end of the semester. For this assignment, students will be divided into groups of 4 - 5 students and research some aspect of race and racial representation. The topics can be broad and wide-ranging, and should be in dialogue with (if not directly stemming from) the course material. We will spend a lot of time talking about how to generate a topic as well as about how to go about researching the presentation and preparing your poster. Each group will present their posters during a scheduled plenary meeting as well as at an end-of semester research event hosted by the Honors College. Students will also be responsible for an individually written research report (a final capstone paper) describing your research *and* the process of developing and preparing the presentation, the contributions of the research team, the questions raised, and the conclusions drawn. More details on all of this will be forthcoming, but the breakdown of activities is as follows:

Poster and Poster Presentation Project – 25%

10% for Poster and Presentation—Group Grade

15%—individual grade: 5% Research Proposal (~ 800 Words) and Annotated Bibliography;

5% First Draft of Final Paper; 5% Presentation

Final Paper and Research Report – 15%

Please note: Late papers/assignments will not be accepted.

Course Objectives:

- to examine the role of race in various disciplines and cultural arenas.
- to explore some of the complex historical/political and social issues surrounding race and racial representations, particularly in the context of the United States.

- to examine, by reading essays, autobiography, and fiction the way race figures into education and self-discovery.
- to learn the history and formal techniques of motion pictures and their analysis as the touch upon the theme of representing race.
- to foster a more active learning style in relation to the required readings for the class.
- to encourage and model good critical thinking skills.
- to assess and improve your writing skills through practice and feedback.
- to foster confidence and respect in class discussions
- to create an enriching intellectual community

Schedule:

Note: this syllabus attempts to be complete, but the instructor reserves the right throughout the course to make appropriate changes in a timely way.

Week	Date	Topic	Readings/Film	Plenary/Lecture	Watch
1	Jan 15	Introductions; Course Business	"The United States Constitution"		<i>*If Beale St. Could Talk (2018)</i>
	Jan 17	Background, Images and Theories	Dorothy Roberts, "The Invention of Race" Vitruvius, <i>Architecture</i> , Book VI, Chapter 1		
2	Jan 22		Anne Fausto-Sterling "Gender, Race, and Nation: The Comparative Anatomy of 'Hottentot' Women in Europe 1815-1817" Physiognomic Images on Blackboard		<i>Black KKKlansman (2018)</i>
	Jan 24		Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, Query XIV (1781-1782) James McPherson, "What Did [Lincoln] Really Think About Race?" Theodor Roosevelt, "Lincoln and the Race Problem"		
3	Jan 29		Cornel West, "A Genealogy of Modern Racism" Recommended: Michel Foucault, "State Racism"		No Screening— Visit the Fleming Museum for first paper assignment

	Jan. 31		Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image" Recommended: Louis P. Masur, "Reading Watson and the Shark" Albert Boime, "Blacks in Shark-infested Waters"		
4	Feb 5		Frederick Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave</i>		<i>12 Years a Slave</i> (2013)
	Feb 7		Douglass, cont. W.E.B. Du Bois, " Of the Training of Black Men "		
5	Feb 12		Henry Louis Gates, "The Trope of the New Negro"		Short Paper #1 due
	Feb 14		Rothstein, <i>The Color of Law</i>		<i>Moonlight</i> (2016)
6	Feb 19		Rothstein, cont.		
	Feb 21		Rothstein, concluded		
7	Feb 26		Lewis, et al., <i>March vol. 1</i>		<i>Selma</i> (2016)
	Feb. 28		Lewis, et al., <i>March vol. 2</i> Martin Luther King, Jr. " Letter from a Birmingham Jail "		
8	Mar 5		<i>NO CLASS—Town Meeting Day</i>		Selections from <i>Eyes on the Prize</i> (1987)
	Mar 7		Lewis, et al., <i>March vol. 3</i> Ta-Nehisi Coates, " Civil Rights Protests Have Never Been Popular "		Short Paper # 2 due
9	Mar 12	NO CLASS	SPRING BREAK		<i>Unforgivable Blackness</i> (2005) <i>Birth of a Nation</i> (1915) <i>Within Our Gates</i> (1920)

	Mar 14	NO CLASS	SPRING BREAK		
10	Mar 19	Cinema and the Mass Media	Grievson, "Fighting Films" Lynskey, "A Public Menace" Lang, " <i>The Birth of a Nation: History, Ideology, Narrative Form</i> "		
	Mar 21		Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions" Jane Gaines, "Fire and Desire"	Wednesday, March 20 Poster Plenary	
11	Mar. 26		Michele Hilmes, "Invisible men: <i>Amos 'n' Andy</i> and the roots of broadcast discourse"		<i>Amos and Andy</i> (radio broadcasts)
	Mar 28		Poster Development	Wednesday, March 27 Actors from the London Stage	

12	Apr 2		Ed Guerrero, "From <i>Birth</i> to Blaxploitation"	Wednesday, April 3 Plenary: Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst	<i>Shaft</i> (1971)
	Apr 4		Eithne Quinn, "Tryin' to Get Over": <i>Super Fly</i> , Black Politics, and Post—Civil Rights Film Enterprise	Sunday, April 7 Posters due	
13	Apr 9		Presentation Practice		<i>Do the Right Thing</i> (1989)
	Apr 11		"The First Black President" "Black Jeopardy" "President Obama's Anger Translator" (and other clips)	Wednesday, April 10, Research Presentations	
14	Apr 16	Contemporary Discourses	Christina Sharpe, " Kara Walker's Monstrous Intimacies "	Short Paper # 3 due	<i>Get Out</i> (2017)
	Apr. 18		"Race" Music: Blues, Gospel, and R&B	Wednesday, April 17, Research Presentations	

15	Apr. 23		Essays on Childish Gambino's "This is America" and Janelle Monae's <i>Dirty Computer</i>		<i>Black Panther</i> (2018)
	Apr 25		Christopher Lebron, " Black Panther is not the Movie We Deserve " Clint Smith, " What Would W. E. B. Du Bois Make of Black Panther? " Recommended: The excellent series of critical essays on "The World of the <i>Black Panther</i> at Black Perspectives	Wednesday, April 24, First Year Research Symposium, UVM Alumni House	
16	Apr 30		Ta-Nehisi Coates, " The First White President "		
	May 2		LAST CLASS		