

Race and Sexuality in American Literature
English 654
Spring 2014
Mondays & Wednesdays 2:30-3:45pm

Professor Christa Olson
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*office hours: Monday 8:30-9:30am &
1:00-2:00pm
& by appointment*

This class examines the intersections of race and sexuality in American literature. Along the way, it calls into question each of its title's main terms (what is race? sexuality? American? literature?). In this class, we will ask what happens when those key, contested subjects interact with one another in fiction, in politics, and in daily life. Because this class focuses, as its description says, "on the nature of literature as advocacy," we will take a rhetorical approach to what we read. We will discuss how our texts intervene in American discussions about race and/or sexuality and analyze the strategies that authors use to make those interventions. Put another way, we will spend the class asking ourselves: "what do these texts (or authors) want?" and "how are they trying to get it?"

Books

Feinberg, Leslie. *Drag King Dreams*. Seal Press, 2006 (ISBN: 978-0786717637)
Hwang, David Henry. *M. Butterfly* Plume Press, 1993 (ISBN: 978-0452272590)
Larsen, Nella. *Quicksand and Passing*. Rutgers UP (ISBN: 0813511704)
Okubo, Miné. *Citizen 13660*. U of Washington P, 1983 (ISBN: 9780295959894)
Ozeki, Ruth. *A Tale for the Time Being* (available for free through Go Big Read)
Wells, Ida B. *Southern Horrors and Other Writings* (ed. Jacqueline Jones Royster).
Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1997 (ISBN: 9780312116958)

Additional readings available online through our Learn@UW page

Assignments

In-class Writing (10%)

These writing activities are designed to help you hone your skills at analyzing the texts we read. The writing prompts will ask you to spend 15-20 minutes studying and writing about a primary text related to the day's topic. Your brief essay (1-2 hand-written pages) should respond to the prompt using specific examples from the text and, ideally, connect the text to its context and to other texts we've discussed. Before the first in-class assignment, I will share an example essay to give you a sense of the kind of writing I'm expecting. Each piece of in-class writing is worth 2 points. If you're in class and do the writing, you get the points. I will give either whole group or individual feedback on each piece of in-class writing.

In the News (5%)

At least once during the semester you will find and briefly analyze a recent news item addressing contemporary questions of race and/or sexuality. Your analysis should link the news item to a topic we've discussed in class and take the form of a brief (2-3 paragraph) written discussion and equally brief (5 minute) presentation of the item to the class. News items may be drawn from any medium (Internet, newspaper, TV, etc.) and source (mainstream media, political organization, 'fake news' program, etc.), and your analysis should take some account of how medium and source shape the effect of the item.

Short Essays (20%)

Twice during the semester you'll submit a 2-3 page typed analysis of an assigned text of your choice. Your essay will examine how the text addresses questions of race and/or sexuality using one or more of the framing concepts we've discussed in class. These essays will be similar to in-class writing assignments but will require more extended analysis and discussion of context.

Inquiry Project (35%)

No semester-long class can possibly address all of the topics that fall under the heading "race and sexuality in American literature." This assignment gives you a chance to explore one that we haven't treated in class or that you wish to understand in more depth. Your task will be to learn as much as possible about the topic you've chosen and then present what you've learned in a thorough and accessible way, framing it for an audience of students like yourselves. This project requires you to use **many** sources (at least 15) in your quest to become an expert on your topic and to synthesize and process those sources for your audience. It is up to you how you present that information (website, annotated bibliography, interactive timeline, etc.), but you will need to submit a project proposal to me and receive approval for both your topic and presentation plan. Project proposals are due on February 23. Final Inquiry Projects are due April 6.

Final Exam (30%)

This exam will ask you to synthesize the topics and readings covered over the course of the semester. The exam will be mostly essay-based, but will also include short answer questions and definitions. The exam will be worth 100 points and most questions will allow partial credit.

OPTIONAL: Discovery Assignment: Race & Sexuality at the University of Wisconsin

If you choose to do this optional research project, it will be worth 20% of your grade, the Inquiry Project will be worth 25%, and the final exam 20%. Students who select this option must meet with me to discuss their plans and receive approval. We will then set up a time to visit the University Archives (425 Steenbock Library, 550 Babcock Dr.) to seek out undigitized images and/or texts illustrating the history of race and/or sexuality on campus. Students interested in doing the Discovery Assignment should meet with me early in the semester to discuss possible topics. The final assignment will include a 5-7 page paper using primary and secondary sources from the University Archives and a brief (≈10 minute) informal presentation in class on May 5. This assignment may be turned in at any time up to or on May 12 (by 9:45am). Students who like working independently and are interested in learning how to do original, archival research should consider this assignment.

Attendance, Preparation, & Participation

I assume that you will make class attendance a priority. We will use class time to practice the skills you'll need for papers and exams, and your active, prepared participation is essential. Except in extraordinary circumstances, missed in-class work cannot be made up. Should you need to miss class, please be in touch with me as soon as possible. Once you miss five days of class, you can expect your final grade to drop by 5% for each additional missed day.

Late Assignments

I will accept late assignments without grade penalty if you communicate with me by email prior to the deadline for the assignment. That email should include *your name, the assignment name, and a new proposed due date*. You do not have to tell me why your assignment is late. If you can't turn the assignment in on the new due date, it is your responsibility to submit a new note.

Assignments whose new due dates are more than one week after the original due date will receive minimal feedback. Assignments turned in after the final due date for all assignments (9:45am on Monday, May 12) will receive a zero. Unapproved late assignments will receive no feedback and their grade will drop 5% for each day after the deadline.

Academic Integrity and Academic Misconduct

All of us at UW-Madison, students and instructors alike, have a responsibility to pursue our work honestly, acknowledging the sources and people who make it possible. Failures of academic integrity can lead to disciplinary action. The UW Administrative Code defines plagiarism, one common kind of academic misconduct, as “seek[ing] to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation; [or] us[ing] unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise.” See <http://students.wisc.edu/saja/misconduct/UWS14.html>.

Unfortunately, despite the general abhorrence of plagiarism, the rules for source use are far from universal. It should go without saying that submitting an assignment you found online, ‘borrowed’ from a friend, or paid someone else to complete is a gross violation of academic integrity. If I have reason to suspect your assignment is so far out of line, I will follow University policy as outlined in the link above.

On more complicated questions, however, you might find yourself truly confused. Must you cite our class when you adapt material covered in a discussion? How different does language need to be to count as paraphrase? When does a piece of information become common knowledge? (after all, we don't cite Lavoisier when we say that fire needs oxygen to burn). In what genres is it okay to appropriate material, and how much?

Overall, the conventions for academic source use rest on two pillars: the idea that others should be able to trace what you've done (think of one scientist trying to replicate a previous scientist's experiment) and the idea that people should get credit for their ideas. If your work adheres to those two goals, you should be fine. If you are in doubt, over-acknowledgement is the safest approach. When you draw from a source (be it your mother, Wikipedia, or a book), include a reference to it. You can also check out the Writing Center's guide to source use (<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QuotingSources.html>), raise the question during class, or stop by my office hours.

Disability Services

If you have a disability that may have an impact your work in this class, please meet with me early in the semester to arrange accommodations that will allow you to fulfill course requirements. If you are interested in receiving university services and accommodations for your disability, please contact the McBurney Center for Disability Services by phone at 263-2741 or email at FrontDesk@mcb.wisc.edu.

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Course Calendar

Week One

Wednesday, January 22—Reading, Writing, and Talking about Race and Sexuality in America

Week Two Getting Started

Monday, January 27—Yesterday and Today

Read for today:

Christopher Columbus, “The Letter”

Amerigo Vespucci, “Account”

Richard Cohen, “Christie’s tea-party problem”

Jonathan Capehart, “De Blasio’s family isn’t ‘gag’ worthy”

Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Richard Cohen in Context”

Wednesday, January 29—Analysis Basics

Read for today:

Michael Omi & Howard Winant, “On the Theoretical Status of the Concept of Race”

Week Three Commonplaces & Dissociation

Monday, February 3—Introducing Commonplaces

Read for today:

Ralph Cintrón, “Democracy and Its Limitations”

Wednesday, February 5—Undoing the Commonplaces of Lynching

Read for today:

Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors*, Introduction and “Southern Horrors”

Week Four

Monday, February 10—Undoing the Commonplaces of Lynching, continued

Read for today:

Ida B. Well, *Southern Horrors*, “A Red Record” and “Mob Rule in New Orleans”

Wednesday, February 12—Two other 19th Century Examples of Dissociation

Read for today:

Mary Ann McClintock, Lucretia Coffin Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, & Martha Coffin Wright, “Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, 1848”

Frederick Douglass, address to the International Council of Women, April 1888

Week Five Identification Two Ways

Monday, February 17—“Identifying with” and “Identified as”

Read for today:

Kenneth Burke excerpts from *A Rhetoric of Motives*

Ellen Samuels, “Introduction: The Crisis of Identification”

Wednesday, February 19—Identifying Race & Citizenship

Read for today:

Mine Okubo, *Citizen 13660*

Inquiry Project Proposals Due Sunday, February 23 by 11:59pm

Week Six

Monday, February 24—Circulating Identifications

Read for today:

Excerpts from *Fortune*, April 1944

Wednesday, February 26—Perspective by Incongruity

Read for today:

Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I a Woman?”

Frederick Douglass, “What to a Slave is the 4th of July?”

Sui Sin Far, “In the Land of the Free”

Short Essay #1 Due Sunday, March 2 by 11:59pm

Week Seven
Passing

Monday, March 3—Introduction to Passing

Read for today:

Piper, Adrian, “Passing for White, Passing for Black”

Wednesday, March 5—Passing as Social Negotiation

Read for today:

Nella Larsen, *Passing* Part 1

Week Eight

Monday, March 10—Passing as Social Threat

Read for today:

Nella Larsen, *Passing* Part 2

Wednesday, March 12—Race, Sexuality, and Passing

Watch for today:

Paris is Burning

Week Nine

March 15 – 23

Spring Break

Week Ten
Orientalism

Monday, March 24—Introduction to Orientalism

Read for today:

Edward Said, introduction to *Orientalism*

Wednesday, March 26—Performing Orientalism

Read for today:

David Hwang, *M. Butterfly*, Act I

Week Eleven

Monday, March 31—Performing Orientalism, continued

Read for today:

David Hwang, *M. Butterfly*, Acts II & III

Wednesday, April 2—Playing with Orientalism

Read for today:

Timothy Yu, selected poems from the series “Chinese Silences”

<http://www.shampoopoetry.com/shampooforty/yu.htm>

<http://cordite.org.au/poetry/three-chinese-silences/>

http://www.lanternreview.com/issue4/41_42.html

View for today:

Margaret Cho, “Asian Adjacent” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8MxFYpIubeU>)

Inquiry Projects Due Sunday, April 6 by 11:59pm

Week Twelve Memory

Monday, April 7—Introduction to Memory

Read for today:

Kendall Phillips, introduction to *Framing Public Memory*

“What Was the 1964 Freedom Summer Project?”

(<http://preview.wisconsinhistory.org/Content.aspx?dsNav=N:4294963828-4294963805&dsRecordDetails=R:CS3707>)

Review:

Wisconsin Historical Society Freedom Summer Project Website:

<http://preview.wisconsinhistory.org/Content.aspx?dsNav=N:1474>

Wednesday, April 9—Remembering Freedom Summer

Read for today:

Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being*, Part I (1-108)

In Class: Visit with Michael Edmonds, organizer of the Freedom Summer Project

Week Thirteen

Monday, April 14—Private Memories, Public Memories

Read for today:

Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being*, Part II (109-258)

Wednesday, April 16—Memory & Agency

Read for today:

Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being*, Parts III & IV (259-403)

Week Fourteen Coalition

Monday, April 21—Coalition Politics

Read for today:

Eli Clare, “Preface,” “A Note,” and “Freaks & Queers”

Wednesday, April 23—Freaks, Queers, and Solidarity

Read for today:

Leslie Feinberg, *Drag King Dreams* chapters 1-10

<p>Short Essay #2 Due Sunday, April 17 by 11:59pm</p>
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Week Fifteen

Monday, April 28—The Aggressives

Read for today:

Leslie Feinberg, *Drag King Dreams* chapters 11-22

In-class:

Watch *The Aggressives*

Wednesday, April 30—Identity’s Complexities

Read for today:

Finish Leslie Feinberg, *Drag King Dreams*

Rachel Aviv, “Netherland”

Week Sixteen

Monday, May 5—Presentations on Research / Catch Up

Wednesday, May 7—Exam Review

Final Exam

Monday, May 12 7:45-9:45am

All Late Work Due

Monday, May 12 9:45am