

Course: English 39695-001

ST: Racial Crossings

Professor Martha Cutter

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Offices Hours: Tues., Thurs 12:30-4:30 (**Sign Up Sheet Outside Door**) & By Appointment

This course will examine literary and cultural treatments of individuals, authors, and characters who cross from one race to another, and sometimes also from one gender to another. This crossing may be metaphorical—for example, a white writer may attempt to write from the point of view of an African American character or a Native American character may try to “transcend” his or her race through various means. This crossing may also be actual—someone who is white may “pass” for black, or someone who is black may “pass” for white. We will look at novels, short stories, poems and films as cultural texts that depict racial crossing and passing. We will ask what these texts tell us about the way race is constructed and configured in society, culture, history, and the law. We will also attempt to understand how artists both assist and resist social and cultural constructions of the meaning of “race.” Does racial crossing fundamentally undermine or stabilize the meaning of “race”?

I. Textbooks and Secondary readings:

Books (Available for purchase as the University bookstores)

Sherman Alexie, *Indian Killer* (Warner Books)

William and Ellen Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, the Escape* (Louisiana SUP)

Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (Dover Thrift)

James Weldon Johnson, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (Dover Thrift)

Nella Larsen, *Passing* (Penguin USA)

Philip Roth, *The Human Stain* (Vintage)

Danzy Senna, *Caucasia* (Riverhead Griffin)

George Schuyler, *Black No More* (Random House)

Poetry, Short Stories, Other Readings (to be xeroxed by instructor)

Langston Hughes, “Cross,” “Mulatto”

Sui Sin Far, “Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian”

Kate Chopin, “Desirée’s Baby”

Interview with anthropologist Alan Goodman from “Race, the Power of an Illusion”

Films (to be watched **outside of class**; available for rental at some video stores and on reserve at the library)

John Ford, *The Searchers*

John Stahl, *Imitation of Life*

John Sayles, *Lone Star*

II. Schedule

Unit One: Racial Crossing

Jan. 13: Introduction to the Course; Course Policies and Requirements

Jan. 15: Conventions of the “Cross”

- Reading: Langston Hughes, “Cross,” “Mulatto”; Sui Sin Far (Edith Eaton), “Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian”; Kate Chopin, “Desirée’s Baby”; Interview with anthropologist Alan Goodman from “Race, the Power of an Illusion” (xerox)
- Jan. 20: The meaning of “race” in *The Searchers*
Homework: Watch *The Searchers*
- Jan. 22: Race Reified in *The Searchers*
Homework: Response paper on the ending of *The Searchers*
- Jan. 27: Racial Adaptation and Adoption in Alexie’s *Indian Killer*
Reading: *Indian Killer* (1-165)
- Jan 29: “Real Race”: Racial Essentialism in Alexie’s *Indian Killer*
Reading: *Indian Killer* (166-296)
- Feb. 3: Reading Beyond the Ending: Racial Destruction in *Indian Killer*
Reading: *Indian Killer* (297-420)
- Feb. 5 Racial and Gender Crossing in *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*
Reading: *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* (all)
- Feb. 10: The Meaning of “Passing” in *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*
- Feb. 12: The Meaning of “Passing” in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*
Reading: *Pudd’nhead Wilson* (1-70)
- Feb. 17 “True” Race in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*
Reading: *Pudd’nhead Wilson* (71-122)

Unit Two: Racial Passing

- Feb. 19: “Black” Identity in James Weldon Johnson’s *Autobiography*
Reading: *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1-58)
- Feb. 24: “White” Identity in James Weldon Johnson’s *Autobiography*
Reading: *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (58-100)
- Feb 26: Race, Class, and Gender Interconnections in Nella Larsen’s *Passing*
Reading: Larsen, *Passing* (all)
- March 2: The meaning of Passing in *Passing*
- March 4: The meaning of Passing in *Imitation of Life*
Homework: Watch *Imitation of Life*
- March 9: Racial stability and instability in *Imitation of Life*
- March 11: Passing as Creating “Freedom”? Nineteenth v. Twentieth-Century Views
Short Paper Due in Class
- March 16: “White Passing” in *The Human Stain*
Reading: *The Human Stain* (1-145)
- March 18 Race as a Construct in *The Human Stain*
Reading: *The Human Stain* (145-201)
- March 23: Spring Break!
- March 25: Spring Break!
- March 30: Shedding Race in *The Human Stain*
Reading: *The Human Stain* (201-361)
- April 1: Gender, Race, and Class Constructs in *Caucasia*
Reading: *Caucasia* (5-115)
Introduction and Thesis Statements for Final Papers Due in Class (typed)
- April 6: Racial Masquerade in *Caucasia*
Reading: *Caucasia* (116-238)

- April 8: The Elemenos as Passers in *Caucasia*
Annotated Bibliography for Final Papers Due in Class (3-5 sources; typed)
 Reading: *Caucasia* (238-315)
- April 13 Unit Conclusion
Outlines for Final Papers Due in Class (typed)
 Reading: *Caucasia* (316-413)

Unit Three: Racial Fading

- April 15: Race is Gone: What Next?
 Reading: *Black No More* (all)
- April 20: Scientific Discourses of Race in *Black No More*
First Drafts of Final Papers due in class (typed)
- April 22: *Lone Star* and the Burden of Racial History
 Homework: Watch *Lone Star*
- April 27: Beyond Race? Discussion of *Lone Star* (Con't)
- April 29 Class Conclusion
- May 6: **Final Drafts of Paper Due by 5:00**

III. Course Policies and Requirements:

A) Class Participation (20%)

This is a seminar; therefore, class will be centered on discussion of texts by students. **Class participation is a requirement for successful completion of this course.** I will call on members of the class who don't seem to be getting the chance to state their point of view. Also, I will insist that you bring to class the book(s) we are discussing. I will also frequently ask for volunteers to lead class discussion, and you can enhance your class participation grade by taking advantage of these opportunities. Please keep in mind that there is such a thing as negative class participation, which includes rude or hostile remarks to the instructor or other students, disruptive behavior, interrupting someone, not paying attention to what the instructor or another student has said, etc. Such behavior can harm your grade in this course significantly. **Finally, there is a lot of work for this course. I expect students who enroll in the class to do all the reading/movie watching by the assigned date and to be able to discuss the work. Failure to complete the work and/or engage in discussion will adversely affect your grade.**

B) Short Response Papers (20%).

About once a week or once every other week, I will ask you to hand in a short writing assignment on a topic I have assigned, or a topic of your choice. These assignments must be typed and brought to class. They will form the basis of our class discussion, and should each be 2-3 paragraphs (approximately one page, 250 words, will be considered the appropriate amount of writing). I will not be looking for a finished argument in these short response papers, as I would in a formal paper. But I will be looking for a) ideas about the topic and b) a theory about what the particular text is saying about this topic. Since these response papers will count as the basis for our class discussion, you must hand them in during class to receive credit. However, I will allow you to skip writing one of these papers during the semester without any harm to your final grade. You may use ideas from these

papers in your final paper, if you choose.

C) Short Paper (4-6 pages; 20%).

I will assign the topic of this paper, and it will be due in class on March 11. Failure to hand in the paper on time will result in a 5% point deduction for each class day the paper is late.

D) Final paper (40%; 10-15 pages); due May 6

Students are required to write a 10-15 page final paper. The final version is due **by 5:00 on May 6**, but steps in the writing of this paper are embedded into the syllabus. Failure to complete any of these steps will result in an automatic 5% point deduction on the final grade. This paper will involve primary as well as secondary sources (research). The topic will be open, although I may ask you to use something we have read as a starting point for your thinking. Late papers will only be accepted under extremely unusual circumstances.

E) Quizzes

In order to ensure that students are completing the reading and film watching and understanding the assignments, I may decide to conduct unannounced or announced reading quizzes. Should you fail more than two of these quizzes, your GPA will drop three points; it will continue to drop three points thereafter for each failed quiz. Failure to take a quiz will also count as an "F." These quizzes will also help me assess your overall class participation grade.

F) Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism is taking another person's ideas, words, or thoughts and not properly acknowledging the source. If you quote from someone, or you paraphrase them, or you just take a few of their ideas, **you must include full citation information or this will be considered plagiarism, and you will fail my class.** Keep in mind that it is very easy when doing research on the internet or elsewhere to get confused about which of your ideas are original and which are borrowed; keep very careful notes, therefore, when you do research and be sure to properly and carefully acknowledge **all** of your sources. Plagiarism can be intentional or unintentional, but it is a grave violation of academic honesty and will **always result in failure in my course.**

G) University Policy on Students with Disabilities

In accordance with University policy, if you have a documented disability and require accommodations to obtain equal access in this course, please contact me at the beginning of the semester or when given an assignment for which an accommodation is required. Students with disabilities must verify their eligibility through the Office of Student Disability Services (SDS) in the Michael Schwartz Student Service Center (181 MSC) (672-3391).