

WMST 832 – Politics of Identity in America
Fall 2015 – Anderson Hall 004
M 5:30-8:00pm

Instructor: Dr. K.J. Surkan
Email: ksurkan@temple.edu
Office: 820 Anderson Hall
Office Hours: M 3-5pm and by appointment

NOTE: *This course fulfills the Race & Diversity (GD) requirement for students under GenEd and Studies in Race (RS) for students under Core. Students cannot receive credit for this course if they have successfully completed History 0832, POLS 0832, SOC 0832 or Women's Studies 0932.*

Course Description:

Gay or straight. Black or white. Male or female. What do these different group identities mean to Americans? How do they influence our politics? Should we celebrate or downplay our diversity? This course explores how we think about others and ourselves as members of different groups and what consequences it has for how we treat one another. Our fundamental social identities can be a source of power or of powerlessness, a justification for inequality or for bold social reform. Students learn about the importance of race, class, gender and sexual orientation across a variety of important contexts, such as the family, workplace, schools, and popular culture and the implications these identities have on our daily lives.

Course Texts:

Autobiography of a Face (Lucy Grealy)
Bastard Out of Carolina (Dorothy Allison)
Between the World and Me (Ta-Nahisi Coates)
Redefining Realness (Janet Mock)

Readings on Blackboard - please read them **and bring them to class, in print or electronic format.**

Assignments & Grading

Discussion Board –Critical Discussion Questions & Response	30%
Attendance/Participation	10%
Mid-term Essay Exam	30%
Final Essay	30%

Attendance & In-class Participation

Near-perfect attendance is mandatory for the class. The course is discussion-based and students will play an active part in creating the learning experience of each class session. In-class participation includes responding in writing to my opening questions, which will start many of the class sessions; engaging in dialogue in small groups; and verbally responding to my text-based questions on assigned readings. I will regularly call on students who don't raise their hands so that the discussion doesn't become dominated by the same few always-prepared and always-alert students. You should each strive to be one of these students, but I recognize that some students are not as inclined to offer insights unless called upon.

Critical Discussion (30%)

Students will prepare a short paragraph leading up to one critical discussion question for each session, which will be posted to our Blackboard Discussion Forum by the Friday preceding each class. Before Monday, each student will also be responsible **for reading the discussion questions posed by classmates and responding to at least one other student.**

The discussion question on the assigned weekly readings should be designed to invite discussion, not to address issues of comprehension of the readings (e.g. NOT: “I did not understand what the author meant by ...” or “What is...?”). These types of clarification questions can be verbally posed during our discussion of the readings, but your typed discussion questions for credit should formulate a question that can only be answered by thoroughly engaging and interpreting the text and the author’s intentions. TIP: If anyone could answer your question without having read the text, it probably is not a good, text-specific question.

Before posing your question, provide a **context** (1-2 sentences) for your inquiry. Ask yourself what the common thread and/or what the wider framework of the readings is. If we are addressing more than one author for the week, ask yourself what the authors’ shared concerns are (even if they are arguing different things). This will help you articulate the context within which you will pose your question.

With your one question you should attempt to address more than one reading assigned for that session. You can either pose a question in terms of **comparing/contrasting** points made by the authors (e.g. “Author A defines women’s relation to technology in this way, while author B defines it as that. How are these definitions different from each other and how do you evaluate their usefulness for your thinking about women and technology?”), or base it on **shared arguments** in the texts (e.g. “Both author A and B define women’s relation to technology this way. Considering that both ignore factor X in this debate, how sustainable is their definition?”).

Grading criteria for discussion questions

The question will be graded based on the following criteria:

- Is a context provided?
- Are all readings addressed? Are the authors named?
- Complexity of the question
- Consistency of participation and quality of response to other students

Mid-term Essay Exam (30%) & Final Essay (30%)

The mid-term and final take-home exams will give you a chance to critically assess assigned readings in response to essay questions provided by the instructor. The mid-term essay will total 3-5 pages. Each student will write a final critical essay (5 pages) on a topic they chose from a list of potential topics provided by the instructor. This essay should integrate ideas from the assigned readings, discussion forums, and class discussions.

Classroom Expectations

I expect you to come to class on time and remain in class until dismissed. I expect you to take responsibility for your own attendance and absences. I expect explanations for your absences. Your final grade will reflect your attendance.

I expect you to follow the syllabus carefully to know when reading and written assignments are due.

I expect you to read all of the “required texts” listed below as well as handouts that will be distributed or posted on Blackboard throughout the semester. All readings should be completed PRIOR to the day they appear on the course schedule so that you will be prepared to discuss the reading during class. Your discussion question, paper and exam grades will reflect your ability to keep up with the readings.

I expect you to take notes in class during our discussions. I also expect you to take notes on the films that we watch. In many cases we will not be able to discuss the films until the next class

period following the screening. You will need to take notes so that you can recall your impressions for our discussions. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes from another student (not me). Your grades will reflect your ability to recall the content of class discussions and films.

I expect you to participate **regularly** in class discussions in a manner that is conducive to a RESPECTFUL exchange of ideas. This means all voices should be heard. Listening carefully to ideas with which you may not agree is an important part of the dialog process.

I expect you to TURN OFF your cell phones before class begins unless you are waiting for an emergency call, in which case you should notify me before class begins. Texting or emailing in class is rude. I will ask you to leave class if you are texting. Laptop use is discouraged during class sessions.

I expect you to challenge my ideas and arguments. This is guaranteed to benefit all of us!

Other Miscellaneous Important Information

I do not grant **INCOMPLETES** unless you are hospitalized or physically unable to complete the work.

Email/Phone: I check email regularly, but please allow me 24 hours to respond to you. If you do not hear from me, you should call or talk with me in class rather than assuming that I received your email.

Plagiarism or cheating in any form will not be tolerated and will be dealt with swiftly and according to university policy. You will receive an F on the paper and likely for the entire class. Also, the incident will go on record with the department and the Dean of Students.

Plagiarism is taking the work and ideas of another person and imply that they are your own. This applies equally to information gathered from the internet, through journals, books, magazines, friends, acquaintances, strangers, etc. It pertains to sentences, paragraphs or full essays. When in doubt regarding the necessity for a citation, ask instructors. Please note that when you use the Internet to obtain information—even if you have reworded it—you must provide a full citation of the source. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism.

Disability: Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me immediately to discuss the specific situation. The University has helpful resources and services that you will benefit from accessing as soon as possible.
<http://www.temple.edu/disability/index.html>

Statement on Academic Freedom: Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. The University has adopted a policy on Student and Faculty Academic Rights and Responsibilities (Policy # 03.70.02) which can be accessed through the following link:
http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy_no=03.70.02.

Course Schedule

8/24 – Introduction to Course

Anna Deveare Smith, *Fires in the Mirror*

8/31 – Class & Gendered Labor Identities

Barbara Ehrenreich, excerpt from *Nickel & Dimed*

bell hooks, “Class Dismissed”

Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack”

Friday, 9/4 – Last Day to Add/Drop

9/7 – Labor Day, no class

9/14 – Intersectionality and the Politics of Class

Dorothy Allison, *Bastard Out of Carolina*

Emily Drew, “Whiteness as Currency: Rethinking the Exchange Rate”

9/21 – Intersectionality and the Politics of Class

Dorothy Allison, *Bastard Out of Carolina*

Julie Bettie, “Women Without Class”

Michael Zweig, excerpt from *The Working Class Majority*

9/28 – Race as Culturally Constructed Identity

F. James Davis, “Who Is Black? One Nation’s Definition”

Audrey Smedley, “‘Race’ and the Construction of Human Identity”

Case Study: Rachel Dolezal [links to press coverage in *Ms.*, *New York Times*, *Ebony*, *The Economist*, *NY Magazine*, *People*]

10/5 – Theorizing Difference, Theorizing Technologies of Identity

FemTechNet Video Dialogue on “Difference” with Shu Lea Cheang and Kim Sawchuk, moderated by Sara Diamond & Open Office Hour

- M’charek, A. (2010). “Fragile differences, relational effects: Stories about the materiality of race and sex.” *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 17(4), 307-322.
- Annamma, S., Connor, D. J., & Ferri, B. A. (2013). “Dis/ability critical race studies (DisCrit): Theorizing at the intersections of race and dis/ability.” *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 16(1), 1-31.

Midterm Essay Due

10/12 – Race and Cyberidentities

FemTechNet Video Dialogue on “Race” with Lisa Nakamura and Maria Fernandez, moderated by Anne Balsamo & Open Office Hour

- Lisa Nakamura, “Queer Female of Color: The Highest Difficulty Setting There Is? Gaming Rhetoric as Gender Capital,” *Ada: a Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, No. 1. 2012.
- Lisa Nakamura, “Cyber-race,” *PMLA: Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*, Special issue on Comparative Racialization, 200
- María Fernandez, “Cyberfeminism, Racism, Embodiment,” *Domain Errors: Cyberfeminist Practices!*, Maria Fernandez, Faith Wilding, Michelle M. Wright, eds (New York: Autonomedia 2002).

YouTube videos:

chescaleigh, “Just Stop Talking About Race!!”

Jay Smooth, “How To Tell Someone They Sound Racist”

Aamer Rahman (Fear of a Brown Planet) – Reverse Racism

10/19 – *Between the World & Me* (Coates)

Tuesday, 10/20 – Last day to withdraw

10/26 - #BlackLivesMatter

Lee and Bean, “Reinventing the Color Line”

Links to online readings about #BlackLivesMatter

11/2 – Coming of Age & Identities of Dis/ability

Lucy Grealy, *Autobiography of a Face*

Lennard Davis, “The End of Identity Politics and the Beginning of Dismodernism”

Brenda Brueggeman, “Interlude 1: On (Almost) Passing”

11/9 – Coming of Age & Identities of Dis/ability

Lucy Grealy, *Autobiography of a Face*

Susan Wendell, “Toward a Feminist Theory of Disability”

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory”

11/16 – Transgender Identity and the Interrogation of Womanhood

Janet Mock, *Redefining Realness*

Michelle Goldberg, “What Is a Woman?”

Julia Serano, excerpts

11/23 – Fall Break, no class

11/30 – The Politics of Gender

Janet Mock, *Redefining Realness*

#WeJustNeedtoPee political action

12/7 – Situating Self: Place and Identity in a Global Age

FemTechNet *Situated Knowledges Map*

FemTechNet Roadshow blog

Final Essay Due