

Phil 490/500: Race and Social Identity

Syllabus

Instructor: Dr. Audrey Yap (ayap@uvic.ca)

Office/Phone: CLE B307 (721-7510)

Office Hours: TWF: 10:00-11:00, and by appointment

Class Information: TWF 1:30-2:20 in CLE B315

Course Website: Through CourseSpaces.

Textbooks: *The Future of Whiteness*, Linda Martín Alcoff

Red Skin, White Masks, Glen Sean Coulthard

Other readings available online.

Accessibility: I do my best to make this course as accessible as possible for students, whether or not you are registered with the RCSD. If you notice any barriers to accessibility in the course, please let me know.

Course Content:

The social identities we occupy can be complex and varied. Though activist groups often organize around individual aspects of social identity, such as Black Lives Matter or Idle No More, many such groups also recognize explicitly that work against oppression must be consciously intersectional. In this course, we will look at various writings on the nature of social identity, with a particular focus on racial identity. The most significant portion of the class will be spent considering a particular racial identity, namely whiteness. What it means to be identified as white has been fluid over time, just as many other aspects of social identity have, at least in part because of the significant portion of the population that identifies as multiracial. In that case, given this complex empirical situation, how do racial identities work, and particularly, how do we make sense of white racial identity?

You might at various points find some of the course material challenging — not just intellectually, but also emotionally, since we will be doing our best to talk about the realities of injustice in our society. I encourage all of you to be mindful of the variety of experiences and backgrounds of other students in the class, and to let me know if you have any concerns.

Coursework:

60% of the grade for this course will be determined by a final research paper (12-14 pages for undergrads, 14-16 for grads), due after the end of classes. This will be written on a topic of your choice, double-spaced, with page numbers, using any standard citation format (see <http://library.uvic.ca/instruction/cite/> for help). A proposal, in the form of an extended outline (1-2 pages) for this paper will be due on the last day of classes, two weeks prior to the due date for the paper itself. This proposal will be worth 4% of your grade, and I encourage you to discuss paper topics with me before the proposal is due. I expect the final paper to engage with the topic of race and social identity and at least two

of the works on it that we will have read throughout the term. You are welcome to bring in other readings on the subject as well. This paper will not necessarily have to argue for one philosopher's view over another, but could, for example, talk about ways in which the concepts under discussion could be fruitfully extended or applied in various domains. You are also encouraged to think about ameliorative strategies, and ways that we could find structural solutions for the problems raised by the authors we are reading.

You will also write 4 short critical response papers (2-4 pages), each worth 8%. At least 6 sets of topics for these courses will be posted, but it will be up to you which 4 you choose. You may write no more than 5 short papers, with the best 4 being counted. The main criterion for these short papers will be clarity and accuracy. I will be looking at how clearly and carefully you represent the main arguments and how well you identify which aspects of them are important for the points you are trying to make. Staying close to the assigned word counts will also be taken into consideration when grading. The following corresponds to a rough guide for the grading scale I will use for these papers:

7 - 8: Excellent explanations and discussion that focusses on the most relevant concepts, within the allotted space. Treatment of the arguments is thorough, but concise.

6 - 7: Good explanations and discussion that address the relevant concepts, giving a good idea of the paper's subject matter. Gives the basic outline of the arguments. May not be within the allotted space.

5 - 6: Relevant concepts and arguments are addressed and outlined. Work is appropriate and acceptable, but lacking in clarity, precision, focus, or use of space.

4 - 5: Some, but not all, of the relevant concepts and arguments are addressed and outlined. Work is lacking in more than one area, but addresses several of the basic required points.

Below 4: Work is not acceptable.

The remaining 4% of your grade will be for a journal that you will keep throughout the semester. It must have eight entries over the twelve weeks of the course, with two entries written every three weeks. Entries only need to be a page long; they can discuss your thoughts on some of the readings, or they can talk about ways in which you have thought about the concept of epistemic injustice in relation to ordinary life. I will suggest prompts for these entries during class discussions about the material. 1% will be assessed every three weeks on a pass/fail basis. Journal entries should touch on the discussions we have about the material in class. Although I will not formally take attendance, the journal will serve the function of an attendance mark by ensuring that you are keeping up with the readings and paying attention to class discussions.

Please note that all work handed in will be subject to the University of Victoria's policy on Academic Integrity, which can be accessed at this link: <http://web.uvic.ca/calendar/undergrad/info/regulations/academic-integrity.html> Please consult this resource if you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism or the unauthorized use of an editor.

While you are highly encouraged to discuss your work with other students, and give each other constructive feedback, editing of other student's work is in violation of university policy.

Numbers will be converted to a letter grade in accordance with the following scale:

90-100 = A+; 85-89 = A; 80-84 = A-; 77-79 = B+; 73-76 = B; 70-72 = B-; 65-69 = C+; 60-64 = C; 50-59 = D; 0-49 = F.

Communication: Office hours are held on a drop-in basis. If you want to schedule an appointment outside my office hours, try emailing me with a few suggestions for times that would work for you. If you ask me a question over email, you can expect a reply within about 1 working day. If you don't hear back from me after that time frame, feel free to try again in case your message went astray. Email is the best way to get in touch with me. If you do email me, please make sure that I can tell from the email what your name is.

Schedule of Readings

A note about content: The readings in this class cover issues of racism, as well as oppression along other lines. As such, you can expect some of the readings to discuss situations of violence in a variety of ways. Some of them will contain racist slurs, descriptions of historical and present atrocities, and other potentially upsetting material. I hope that you will be able to engage with the material productively nevertheless. If you find this material affecting you adversely, you are more than welcome to speak to me privately about your concerns, and if I am not the best person to help you with them, I will do my best to help you find a more appropriate source of support, such as our mental health resources on campus (<http://www.uvic.ca/services/counselling/home/contact/index.php>).

- Week One: Sept 6, 8

Readings: Linda Alcoff: Introduction: The Unbearable Whiteness of Being
Shirley Green, “Looking Back, Looking Forward” (in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*)

- Week Two: Sep 12, 13, 15

Readings: Alcoff: Chap 1: An Analytic of Whiteness
Emily Lee, “The Ambiguous Practices of the Inauthentic Asian American Woman”
Optional: Alcoff, “Real Identities” (in *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*)

- Week Three: Sep 19, 20, 22

Readings: WEB Du Bois, “The Conservation of Races”
Chike Jeffers, “The Cultural Theory of Race”
Optional: Kwame Anthony Appiah, “The Uncompleted Argument”

- Week Four: Sep 26, 27, 29

Readings: Alcoff: Chap 2: White Exceptionalism
George Yancy, “Looking at Whiteness: Tarrying with the Embedded and Opaque White Racist Self” (in *Look, a White!*)
Optional: Charles Mills, “White Ignorance”

- Week Five: Oct 3, 4, 6

Readings: Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” (in *The Souls of Black Folk*)
Alcoff: Chap 3: Double Consciousness

- Week Six: Oct 10, 11, 13

Readings: Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*: Chap 1
Sara Ahmed, “Recognizing Strangers” (in *Strange Encounters*)

- Week Seven: Oct 17, 18, 20
 Readings: Alcoff: Conclusion
 Chris Bell, “Introducing White Disability Studies”
 Optional: Maria Lugones, “Playfulness, ‘World’-Travelling, and Loving Perception”
- Week Eight: Oct 24, 25, 27
 Readings: Glen Coulthard: Chap 1: The Politics of Recognition in Colonial Contexts
 Makere Stewart-Harawira, “Practicing Indigenous Feminism: Resistance to Imperialism” (in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*)
 Optional: Fanon, Chap 5
- Week Nine: Oct 31, Nov 1, 3
 Readings: Coulthard: Chap 3: Essentialism and the Gendered Politics of Aboriginal Self-Government
 Bonita Lawrence, “Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States: An Overview”
- Week Ten: Nov 7, 8, 10
 Readings: Coulthard: Chap 4: Seeing Red
 Audre Lorde, “The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism” (in *Sister Outsider*)
- Week Eleven: Nov 17
 Readings: Coulthard: Chap 5: The Plunge Into the Chasm of the Past
 Coulthard: Conclusion
- Week Twelve: Nov 21, 22, 24
 Readings: Marilyn Frye, “On Being White”
 Alison Bailey, “White Talk as a Barrier to Understanding Whiteness”
 Optional: Alcoff, “What Should White People Do?”
- Week Thirteen: Nov 28, 29, Dec 1
 Readings: The Class, Your Paper Proposal Drafts.
 Paper Proposals due Dec 1st.
 Final Papers Due Dec 11th.

Note: This syllabus is tentative, and should only be used to give a rough guide to the course schedule. Additional readings may be assigned, and dates may be changed if necessary.