

**History 227: The History and Practice of Whiteness**  
**Tuesday/Thursday 1:30-2:50, King 127**  
**Spring 2016**

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Wednesdays, 1:30pm-3:00pm



“No one was white before he/she came to America.”  
James Baldwin

This course examines the construction, practices, boundaries, and power of whiteness throughout American history. Moving chronologically through five different eras in American history, we will explore a range of questions about how racial categories and racial hierarchies have operated in America's past and present. Who gets to be white in different historical eras and how has that line been determined? What does being white mean for those defined as such? How have the boundaries of whiteness been policed and how have those on the borders sought whiteness? How has whiteness been privileged in different historical eras and what role have the courts, the government, cultural representations, and personal actions played in establishing and promoting racial prerogatives? How has whiteness historically been understood, criticized and challenged? Since whiteness is an identity that is intersectional and relational, the class will particularly explore how policing sexuality has served to construct and maintain whiteness, as well as how class, gender, and ethnic background shape the experience of being “white.”

We will examine these questions and explore ongoing scholarly debates through readings from a range of fields, including history, American Studies, critical legal studies, sociology, and literary studies. The course will also consider the invention, practice, and privileging of whiteness in a variety of primary sources, from memoirs to films to fiction to political tracts. History 227 is *not* a lecture class. Although I will sometimes offer short lectures and will always try to provide contextual information, the idea and workings of race in the United States is a topic that demands engagement and discussion. Much of our class time will be spent discussing and debating the readings; the quality of class will thus depend on

each student coming to class prepared to talk thoughtfully about the assigned readings. *Note: This course also counts toward the majors in Comparative American Studies and GSFS.*

**Required Texts:**

The following books are available at the bookstore and are on print reserve at Mudd Library. *Wages of Whiteness*, *Racial Fault Lines*, and *White By Law* are also available electronically through Mudd:

- Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*
- Kirsten Fischer, *Suspect Relations: Sex, Race, and Resistance in Colonial North Carolina*
- Ian Haney-Lopez, *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race*
- David Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*
- Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream*
- Shannon Sullivan, *Good White People: The Problem with Middle-Class White Anti-Racism*
- Gregory Williams, *Life On the Color Line: The True Story of a White Boy Who Discovered He Was Black*

All other course readings (those marked with an asterisk (\*) on the syllabus) are available on the course blackboard site under the “Course Readings” heading. Besides the required readings, there are two required films for the course (*Birth of a Nation* and *Soul Man*).

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Grading in History 227 will be based upon the following:

Participation:	20% final grade
Structured Reading Responses:	10% of final grade
Primary Source Paper:	20% of final grade
<i>Life on the Color Line</i> paper:	20% of final grade
Final Syllabus Assignment:	25% of final grade
Group Facilitation of Discussion Session:	5% of final grade

**1) Attendance and Participation (20% of total grade):**

The first and most important requirement of History 227 is that every student attend and participate in every class. Participation can take many forms—a sustained comment, a question, a short interjection—but it is vital that everyone come to class prepared to be engaged with your classmates in a conversation about that day’s topics and readings. Because attendance and participation are so critical to your learning and your success in History 227, if you miss more than **two** classes over the course of the semester, your final grade will be affected. For every absence beyond the second, **three points will be deducted from your final course grade**. Excused absences will not count towards this total; absences will only be excused in cases of serious illness, real personal/family emergencies, or unavoidable conflicts, and you must inform me of your absence **in advance** of class if you do not want it to count as unexcused.

Please come to every class prepared to discuss the readings assigned for that day on the syllabus. Class will always focus on the readings; if you are not prepared, you will not be able to participate. If you have trouble speaking in class, please come see me during my office hours so we can develop strategies to help you become a more active participant in class discussion. As part of your participation grade, you are required to turn in two short positionality reflections (one for our second class and one for our last class). Positionality reflections will not be graded.

## **2) Structured Reading Responses (10% of total grade):**

Six class sessions in History 227 have been set aside for the discussion of specific books. Every student must turn in a short structured reading response for five of these six class sessions. Reading responses must include four elements in approximately one single-spaced page:

- a) A paragraph that explains what you take to be the most important arguments or ideas of the book
- b) A paragraph that lays out what you see as the strengths and limitations of the author's approach (his/her/their framing of the study, choice and use of evidence, theoretical approaches, methodology, etc.)
- c) A paragraph that explores connections between this book and other course readings or conversations or that locates this particular book in the broader context of the class
- d) One substantive question about the book that you think would be good for class discussion

Reading responses will be graded on a 5-point scale (with 1 being "inadequate" and 5 being "truly outstanding"). Taken together, reading responses will count for 10% of your final grade in the class. Responses are due in class on the day the book is being discussed and should be brought with you to class. Late responses will not be accepted.

The schedule for the six discussion sessions is:

- February 18: Discussion of *Suspect Relations*
- March 1: Discussion of *The Wages of Whiteness*
- March 8: Discussion of *Racial Fault Lines*
- March 29: Discussion of *White By Law*
- April 12: Discussion of *Killers of the Dream*
- April 28: Discussion of *Good White People*

## **3) Primary Source Analysis Paper (20% of final grade)—Due in class on March 15th**

Each student will write a short paper (3-4 pages) analyzing an academic article about race published between 1880 and 1920. The paper will be due at the beginning of our class session on March 15. More details will be posted to the Assignments section of the Blackboard

## **4) Life On the Color Line Paper (20% of final grade)—Due in class on April 19th**

In this paper, you will be asked to analyze Greg William's memoir *Life on the Color Line* using concepts and readings that we have discussed in class. The paper will be due at the beginning of our class session on April 19. More details will be posted to the Assignments section of the Blackboard.

## **5) Group Facilitation of Discussion (5% of final grade)**

For each of the six discussion sessions, a group will be assigned to coordinate and run a supplemental activity or presentation related to that session's readings. These presentations/activities should take up no more than forty minutes of class time. Students will be assigned to groups based upon their interests early in the semester. Groups *must* meet with me in advance of their presentation in order to discuss their plans.

## **6) Final Syllabus Assignment (25% of final grade)—Due by 11:00am on Saturday, May 14th**

For the final paper in the class, each student will propose an additional class for inclusion in the syllabus, including both the proposed topic and course readings. Proposals should make a case for the importance of the topic you have chosen, lay out how and where the material fits within the class overall and how it connects to course themes, and explain how you would teach the material. Guidelines are available on the class blackboard site. The final paper is due at the time of our regularly scheduled final exam (by 11:00 am on Saturday, May 14<sup>th</sup>). A proposal for your topic will be due on Sunday, April 10<sup>th</sup>.

### **COURSE POLICIES**

Late and Incomplete Policy: All work (except for reading responses) will be graded on a 100-point scale. Papers will be marked down 3 points for every day handed in past the deadline. Requests for extensions must take place before the assignment is due. As a general rule, I will approve extensions in the case of illness or emergencies, but not because you have other work due at the same time, so please plan accordingly. Assignments will not be accepted more than five days past the original due date. All assignments must be completed in order for students to receive credit for the class.

Classroom Conduct: Please come to class on time. And once you are in class, please do not leave to go get a drink or use the restroom—it's distracting to me and disrespectful to your classmates when students walk out in the middle of class. Also, since I want everyone to be focused on the classroom conversation and engaged in discussion, no electronic devices of any kind will be allowed in the classroom (except inside your bag!)

Oberlin Honor Code: All work for this course must be done in compliance with the Oberlin Honor Code, which means that it must be your own. Any cases of plagiarism will be dealt with immediately according to the letter of college policy. You must acknowledge when you use the ideas of other people (whether that be other students or published materials from websites, books, the media, etc.).

If you have questions about citations, academic honesty, or the acceptability of collaborations, please see me. You should include the honor code on all the written work you hand in for this class. The Honor Code reads: "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code on this assignment."

Educational Access: I am committed to creating inclusive learning environments and to designing a course in which all students can learn and. If any aspects of the instruction or design of the course result in dis/ability-related barriers to your participation, please let me know. If you receive any specific accommodations, please provide documentation from the Disability Service Office.

Difficult Topics: This class aims to make strange what many Americans are taught to take for granted—that is, to denormalize and denaturalize our understanding of whiteness. As a result, some of the material may be discomforting to some students. Any study of white racial identity must include discussions of violence, racial terrorism, sex, intellectual beliefs we may today find repulsive, and language that is no longer considered socially acceptable. I will attempt to give trigger warnings for the most difficult material, but I may not always give warnings about material that you consider merits one. I am happy to meet with you to discuss any concerns you may have, but please be forewarned that you may find some of the course material disturbing.



Extra Help: My door is open if you need help or just want to discuss the reading or other topics of interest to you. Drop in to my office hours anytime or email to schedule a specific appointment. I am happy to provide feedback on drafts if get draft writings (partial or full) to me at least **four days** before the paper is due so that I have time to give you feedback.

## **COURSE AND READING SCHEDULE**

### **2/2: Introduction**

### **2/4: Personal Location, Positionality and Constructing Knowledge: Locating Ourselves on the U.S. Racial Landscape (First positionality reflection due)**

David Takacs, "Positionality, Epistemology, and Social Justice in the Classroom," *Social Justice* 29:4 (2002): 168-181\*

For class: write a short reflection (500-750 words) about how you view America's racial landscape and where you place yourself in it. What experiences have shaped your sense of your own racial identity? In what ways has your gender, sexual, or class identity shaped your perspective or experience of race? Please note, we will discuss these in class and I will collect them, but they will not be graded.

### **2/9: Studying Whiteness/Studying Race**

Matthew Jacobson, "Introduction: The Fabrication of Race" in *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 1-14\*

Harlon Dalton, "Failing to See," in Rothenberg, ed., *White Privilege*, 9-12\*

Joe Feagin, "The White Racial Frame: Why a New Concept?" in *The White Racial Frame*, 1-21\*

James Baldwin, "On Being 'White' ...and Other Lies" in *Essence*, April 1984\*

### **2/9: Talk by Professor Jason Sokol (University of New Hampshire), "America's Long History of Racial Hypocrisy," Afrikan Heritage House, 7 pm**

## **Part I: Inventing Race in the Colonial Era**

### **2/11: The Ideas They Brought With Them: Thinking about Difference in Colonial America**

Winthrop Jordan, "First Impressions: Initial English Confrontations with Africans," in *The White Man's Burden*, 3-25\*

Audrey Smedley, "Growth of the English Ideology of Race In America," in *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*, 72-91\*

David Hume, "Of National Characters" (1748) and James Beattie, "A Response to Hume" (1770)\*

## 2/16: Slavery and Servitude: Power, Labor, and Categories in Colonial America

Barbara Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review* 181 (May/June 1990): 95-118\*

Edmund Morgan, "Slavery and Freedom: The American Paradox," *The Journal of American History* (June 1972): 99-108\*

*Virginia Slave Laws, 1660s\**

## 2/18: DISCUSSION SESSION #1

Kirsten Fischer, *Suspect Relations* (entire)

## Part II: Whiteness in the New Nation, 1790-1860

### 2/23: The State of Racial Thinking in the Early United States

Matthew Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 13-38\*

Melissa Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics*, 25-48\*

Thomas Jefferson, excerpt from *Notes on the State of Virginia\**

### 2/25: The Practice of Whiteness in Antebellum America

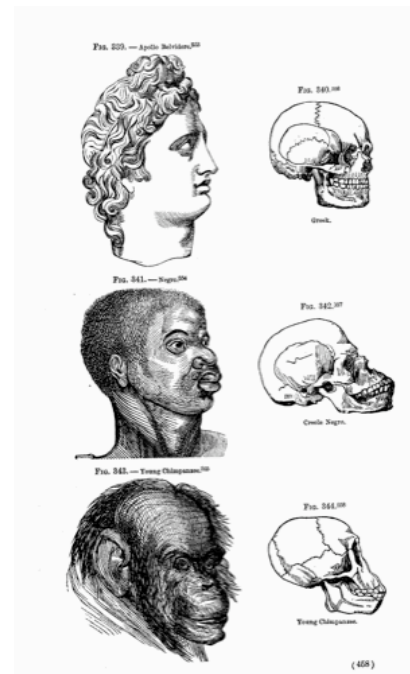
Ariella Gross, "Performing Whiteness" in *What Blood Don't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America* (2008), 48-72\*

Bridget Heneghan, "White Goods and the Construction of Race"\* in *Whitewashing America*, 3-43\*

## 3/1: DISCUSSION SESSION #2

David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (entire)

Dana Frank, "White Working-Class Women and the Race Question," in *International Labor and Working-Class History* 54 (Fall 1998): 80-102\*



## **Part III: Conquest, Expansion, and Whiteness**

### **3/3: Cowboys and Indians: Westward Expansion and New Theories of Race**

Reginald Horsman, "Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism," 139-144\*

Andrew Jackson's Case for Removal of the Indians (1829)\*

"Ethiop" (William J. Wilson), "What Shall We Do With the White People?" (1860)\*

### **3/8: DISCUSSION SESSION #3**

Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines* (entire)

## **Part IV: Whiteness after Emancipation**

### **3/10: Whiteness and Race After Emancipation (Film reflection due in class)**

Linda Faye Williams, "America's First Undeserving and Deserving Poor," in *The Constraint of Race*, 25-68\*

*Birth of a Nation* (1915) [screening time and place TBD]

### **3/15: Theories of Race, 1880-1920 (Primary Source Paper Due at start of class)**

### **3/17: Immigrants and the Borders of Whiteness**

Matthew Jacobson, "Anglo Saxons and Others, 1840-1924" in *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 39-90\*

Thomas Guglielmo, "Rethinking Whiteness Historiography: The Case of Italians in Chicago, 1890-1945" in *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*, 49-61\*

Madison Grant on New Immigrants as the Survival of the Unfit (1918)\*

Speech by Senator Ellison DuRant Smith on Immigration Quotas, April 9, 1924\*

Speech by Congressman Robert Clancy on Immigration Quotas, April 8, 1924\*

### **3/22 and 3/24: SPRING BREAK**

### **3/29: DISCUSSION SESSION #4**

Ian Haney Lopez, *White By Law* (entire)

## **Part IV: Expanding and Investing in Whiteness, 1924-1965**

### **3/31: Becoming Caucasian: Consolidating Whiteness after 1924**

Matthew Jacobson, "Becoming Caucasian, 1924-1965," in *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 91-135\*

David Roediger, "Finding Homes in an Era of Restriction," in *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White*, 157-198\*

Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940*, 114-129, 217-230\*

### **4/5: Expanding the State and Institutionalizing White Privilege**

David Roediger, "A New Deal, an Industrial Union, and a White House: What the New Immigrant Got Into," in *Working Toward Whiteness*, 199-234\*

Ira Katznelson, "White Veterans Only," in *When Affirmative Action was White*, 113-141\*

### **4/7: NO CLASS MEETING**

### **4/12: DISCUSSION SESSION #5**

Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream* (entire)

James Baldwin, "Going to Meet the Man" (1965), 229-249\*

### **4/14: Museum Visit—meet at the Allen Museum**

Martin Berger, "Genre Painting and the Foundation of Modern Race" in *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture*, 11-40\*

Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, 8-17\*

Nina Simon, "On White Privilege and Museums," [museumtwo.blogspot.com](http://museumtwo.blogspot.com), March 6, 2013\*

### **4/19: Paper Due—Analysis of Gregory Williams, *Life on the Color Line***

### **4/21: Privileging and Policing Whiteness in the Age of Civil Rights**

George Lipsitz, "Civil Rights Laws and White Privilege" in *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, 24-46\*

Charles Gallagher, "Color-Blind Egalitarianism as the New Racial Norm," in Murji and Solomos, ed., *Theories of Race and Ethnicity*, 40-56\*

Renee Romano, "'Immoral Conduct': White Women, Racial Transgressions and Custody Disputes," in *"Bad" Mothers: The Politics of Blame in 20th-century America*, 230-251\*



**4/26: Identity and Whiteness since the 1970s**

Matt Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America*, 1-71\*

Michael Kimmel, "Introduction: America, the Angry," in *Angry White Men*, 1-27\*

*Soul Man* (1986) (screening time and place to TBD)

**4/28: DISCUSSION SESSION #6**

Shannon Sullivan, *Good White People* (entire)

**5/3: Whiteness on College Campuses**

Amanda Lewis, Mark Chesler, and Tyrone Foreman, "The Impact of 'Colorblind' Ideologies on Students of Color: Intergroup Relations at a Predominately White University," *Journal of Negro Education* 69: 1 (2000): 74-91\*

Anthony Carnevale and Jeff Strohl, "Separate and Unequal: How Higher Education Reinforces the Intergenerational Reproduction of White Racial Privilege"\*

ABUSUA Demands, Oberlin College, December 2015\*

**5/5: Moving Forward: Personal Reflections (Second Positionality Reflection Due)**

Brenda Juárez, "Learning to Take the Bullet and More: Anti-Racism Requirements For White Allies and Other Friends of the Race, So-Called and Otherwise," in *Unhooking from Whiteness*, 31-51\*

*For class, please reread your original positionality essay and reflect on whether how taking this class has or has not changed your perspective or understanding of your own position on the American racial landscape. Like before, these reflections should be approximately 500 words. They will be collected, but not graded.*

**5/14: Final Paper Due by 11:00 am on Saturday, May 14th**

*\*Please note that full citation information for each reading is available on the blackboard site.*