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21W.742J / SP.575J / WGS.575J Writing About Race: Narratives of Multiraciality  
Fall 2008

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# Syllabus

**Instructor:** Dr. Sarah E. King

**Session:** Spring 2008

## Writing About Race

Race matters. In fact, it can be argued as does Cornell West in his 1994 book of that title, that racial identity is at the core of how we view ourselves and others. Yet the very notion of what constitutes race remains a complex and evolving question. In this course we will engage this question head-on, reading and writing about issues involving the construction of race and racial identity as reflected from a number of vantage points and via a rich array of voices and genres. Readings will include canonical works by such writers as Toni Morrison and Sherman Alexie, as well as more recent, global perspectives found in writers like Zadie Smith.

**Course Objectives:** This course is designed to provide students with the opportunity to think and write critically and to communicate more effectively about issues involving racial identity formation and how race and ethnicity are constructed and represented in contemporary culture.

**Readings and Screenings:** In addition to reading assignments, this course requires outside independent viewing of assigned films. A close reading of written assigned materials, including peers' writing, as well as a fresh viewing of required films by the due date are indispensable to class discussions and to successfully completing the course.

**Class participation and presentations:** Informed participation in class discussions and workshops is required of each student for successful completion of the course. Each student is required to select a topic of interest for ongoing individual research, which will form the basis of the final written project as well as the oral presentation.

**Written Assignments:** Each week students will write a 2-page response to the films, readings, and accompanying discussions. You should bring your writing to class, as it is the basis of in-class discussions. In addition, these responses are collected and handed in as a journal at the end of semester. Longer, ongoing projects consist of a two-page descriptive essay; a three-page analytical essay; a five-page exploratory essay; and a ten-page researched essay on an approved topic of the student's choice.

**Attendance:** Class attendance, including active participation in discussions and workshops, is mandatory. Missing three classes may result in a grade deduction; five unexcused absences will result in a withdrawal from the course.

**Plagiarism:** Using someone else's language or ideas without proper attribution is academically dishonest. As members of this class and the larger scholarly community, you are expected to abide by the norms of academic honesty. While

collaboration is encouraged in and out of class, failing to acknowledge sources or willfully misrepresenting the work of others as your own will not be tolerated. Everything you submit must be your own work, written specifically for this class.

**Grading:** As with many writing courses, this course is graded portfolio style. The portfolio collects all of the writing you have accumulated for the course over the entire semester, including journal responses, first versions, corrected versions, revisions and final versions. While your grade for this course depends primarily on your portfolio, which must be complete and handed in on time, there are other components to satisfactorily completing this course. The major components of the course grade are:

- I. Written Assignments (mandated minimum of 20 revised pages: Four essays -- 2, 3, 5 & 10 pages in length)
- II. Readings/Screenings (with the response journal serving as a written document)
- III. Attendance and Active Participation
- IV. Oral Presentation

### **Calendar**

#### **WEEK 1      INTRODUCTION : HOW DOES RACE MATTER?**

- Feb.    5      Readings: Poetry selections (Chin, Hughes, Villanueva, Rushkin, et al.)
- 7      Due: Essay #1: Family/Childhood recollection (Personal reflection)

#### **WEEK 2**

- 12      Reading: Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*
- 14      Due: Journal response on *TBE*

#### **WEEK 3**

- 21      Film: *To Kill A Mockingbird* (Individual Screening)
- Due: Journal Response to *TKAM*;  
                 Revision of Essay #1

#### **WEEK 4**

- 26      Due: Essay #2 on *TBE* and *TKAM* (*Race Seen through a Child's Eyes-Analytical Essay*)
- 28      Writing Workshop

### **WEEK 5**

- March 4 Reading: Sandra Cisneros, *Caramelo* (selection) & *My Wicked Wicked Ways*
- Due: Journal response to Cisneros;  
Revised Essay #2
- Clips: *Giant*; *The Bronze Screen*
- 6 Due: Preliminary writing for Essay #3: Stereotypes or Archetypes? –  
Exploratory Essay

### **WEEK 6**

- 11 Film: *Real Women Have Curves* (Individual Screening)
- Due: Journal Response to *RWHC*
- 13 Writing Workshop (Juxtaposing films/cultures/eras)

### **WEEK 7**

- 18 Reading: Sherman Alexie, *Ten Little Indians* (selection)
- Due: Essay #3 on Stereotypes
- Clips: *The Searchers*; *The Lone Ranger*
- 20 Film: *Smoke Signals* (In-class Screening)

### **WEEK 9**

- April 1 Due: Review of film on race/ideology of the so-called “melting pot”  
(Student selected—practice student presentations)
- 3 Film: *Crash*
- Due: Journal response to *Crash* and selected “melting pot” film;  
Revision of Essay#3

### **WEEK 10**

- 8 Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (Chaps. 1-5)
- 10 Roy, *TGOST* (Chaps. 6-11)
- Due: Preliminary writing for Essay #4: Race in a Global Context;  
Proposal for researched essay

### **WEEK 11**

15 Workshop on Essay #4 – Proposal

17 Reading: Zadie Smith, *On Beauty* (pp. 1-220)

Due: Bibliography for Essay #4: working title, primary and secondary sources

Clips: *Jungle Fever*, *Secrets and Lies*

### **WEEK 12**

24 Reading: Zadie Smith, *On Beauty* (first half of the novel - through page 220)

Due: Journal response

### **WEEK 13**

29 Reading: Zadie Smith, *On Beauty* (second half of the novel - 220 to end)

May 1 Workshop on Essay #4

### **WEEK 14**

6 Independent Screening of Student selected film (title TBA)

Due: Essay #4 – Self-revised, edited version

8 Student Presentations

### **WEEK 15**

13 Student presentations

Due: Complete Portfolio with Table of Contents

15 Student presentations