American Studies 503
Contemporary Theories of Race and Ethnicity
Spring 2003

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Hours: Tuesday 3 – 4
Wednesday 11 –12 and 1 – 2 and by appointment
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Required texts
Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s, by Michael Omi and Howard Winant.  2d ed.
Racism and Cultural Studies: Critiques of Multiculturalist Ideology and the Politics of Difference, by E. San Juan,
Unsettling Settler Societies: Articulations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class, edited by Daiva K. Stasiulis and

During the course we will also read various essays and chapters or excerpts of books; these will be made available in
advance.  We may also read passages from a few Web sites.

Supplementary text (see attached assignment for third paper)

Two helpful books
Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations, edited by Ellis Cashmore.  4th ed.  1997.  This is an indispensable
reference tool, whose entries start with “Aboriginal Australians” and end with “Zionism.”  Each entry is a
short essay by a scholar in the subject, and so of course the essays vary in quality.  But, for quick reviews
of subjects such as “Caucasian,” “Pluralism,” and “Underachievement,” you will find nothing better.
Racial Theories, by Michael Banton.  Rev. ed.  1998.  This promises to be an enormously helpful overview of the
evolution of theories of race whose biases toward Anglicisms and the social sciences are obvious but not
insufferable, even to those of us who usually scorn sociology and anthropology.

Prerequisite  According to the WSU catalog, the prerequisite for this course is graduate standing.

Course description  The WSU catalog says, “Major theoretical readings and key recent texts in U.S. and
transnational ethnic studies scholarship.”  Such a description raises more questions than it answers.  It casts a wider
net than any fifteen-week course can cover, but it also suggests an array of options, and so each of us will explore
one space, or multiple spaces, along that net.  The extent of our explorations—and we will share our discoveries—
will determine just how closely our collective work will resemble a survey of contemporary theories.  We can expect
gaps.  Do you discover more by digging one inch across but one mile deep, or by digging a mile across and an inch
down?  Survey courses adopt this second method, but ideas demand depth.  More than most surveys, then, we will
sacrifice some gaps for some depth.  Our driving principle will be contextualization—understanding relations
between and within ideas and events, policies and practices.  Contextualization cannot fill in all gaps, but it can
suggest preconditions and ingredients for suturing.

The success of the course will depend on our exchange of ideas and information.  The success of our
exchange will depend on our assumptions about our discourse.  The course is not designed to make you suffer
unspeakable agonies just because you are no “theory-head.”  We will try to make no assumptions about our
familiarity with current ideas of race and ethnicity.  And so we will not promote the expression of the rarefied jargon
of High Theory and the strategic dropping of the names of High Theorists, exercises in self-aggrandizement but not
in education.  This is not to say that we will “dummy down” and transform the course into “A Complete Idiot’s
Guide to Race,” nor is it to say even that we will seek the language of a least common denominator (LCD), though
in math an LCD is not a “dummying down” but a shortcut toward a resolution that recognizes relationships among
disparate entities, and the process of achieving it is a process of contextualization.  Besides, ideas are fluid and
evolving; and, despite the poet’s insistence on “no ideas but in things,” they refuse to be grounded entirely in
material embodiment—though they also refuse to be trapped in the fuzzy realm of discourse and culture. The idea that race is a social construction clashes and converges with the lived physical realities of slavery, genocide, imperialism, coerced labor, and forced migration.

**Course objective** As you will note in Assignments and Schedule below, this course adheres to the standard Read/Write/Research mode of learning and sharing. Tenth-year doctoral students still hope that a pharmaceutical company will invent a Research Patch that, when worn on the forehead, will eliminate the need for scouring the internet, trolling the library, and hiking to Sri Lanka to collect oral histories; but, until such a patch appears and becomes widely and equitably available, we go on suffering footwork and eyestrain. While obvious objectives of this course are the honing of our research and writing skills—the crafts of our scholarship—a loftier objective is to discover our own best ways of applying our knowledge and experience to the work of social justice. Vijay Prashad writes in *The Karma of Brown Folk* that activism without theory is meaningless. If the world of ideas about race and ethnicity seems often to be an impenetrable morass, we will try to open a few spaces, to admit some light and heat, and maybe to expel a fine steam of clarity and insight.

Though graduate work allows at least a possibility of community, differences in personality and schedules too often militate against forming or sustaining study groups. Courses and faculty can, however, facilitate sharing. The most constant and obvious form of our sharing this term will be our ongoing comments, through an e-mail listserv, on our readings and research. Other possibilities exist. Ideally, this course will become a sort of workshop on race—not feel-good therapy and certainly not “tough love” assimilationism but rather an exchange of ideas.

**Assignments** *Note: There are no quizzes or exams in this course.*

**Papers:** You will write four papers. The first two, due at the ends of the third and sixth weeks, will respond to the texts. These should be three to five pages each and require no outside research. The third paper, also three to five pages and due at the end of the ninth week, will review a “major” text of your choosing. The final paper, a research paper of fifteen pages, is due during finals week, though you should provisionally determine your subject by the end of the fourth week. Note in the Schedule below that the meeting of February 20 is devoted to our discussion of your research topics. Note also, in the assignment for this final project, that I encourage you to consider alternatives to the standard paper, such as collaboration or alternative format.

**Presentations of readings, research, and papers:** Each of you will lead the discussion of a required reading. For example, for January 23 someone will lead a discussion of Guillaumin’s sixth chapter and someone else will lead the seventh. In the three weeks leading up to spring break, you will report on your “major” text paper. Following the break, you will present your research paper before the class. Of course, as the final paper itself is not due till the end of the term, your report will be of work in progress—work for which you may ask for advice, suggestions, or new sources.

**Electronic participation:** Each week, beginning with the second week, you should send at least one response to the list. Throughout the course, respond to the required readings. What do you think of the text? Why? What, if anything, is unclear? What questions does the text raise? Ideally, this exchange will become a discussion, in which you will also respond to each other’s readings of the assigned texts. For weeks 7 through 9, share with the class your reading of the “major” text or author. You may even want to share, as an attached file, a draft of your “major” text paper. For the last six weeks of the course, keep us posted on your research on the final paper. Again, you may wish to share a draft. The minimum required is one posting each week.

**Attendance and participation:** These are of course mandatory and non-negotiable. For absences, let me know as soon as possible—preferably in advance—about illness, emergency, or jury duty.

**Conference and cancelled classes:** Each of you will be required to meet with me privately—in my office, with the door open and endless pedestrian traffic in the hallways—to discuss the course, your work in the course, issues of race and ethnicity, problems or questions, etc. To facilitate these meetings, I will cancel class on March 27 and on one other date, yet to be determined.

**Format for written assignments:** Because American Studies is an interdisciplinary “discipline,” I will not enforce adherence to a particular style. You should, however, let me know sometime early in the course whether you will use the MLA, the APA, the AMA, the AP, the CBE, or another style for your graded papers. (I hope you will use the MLA or the APA, with which I am familiar. I am also familiar with the AMA—American Medical Association—style, as I edited and proofread in it for twelve years; but I doubt that you will be using it.)

**Academic dishonesty:** Those who hold teaching assistantships know the guidelines and penalties involved in academic dishonesty. For those who do not, the basic rule is that academic dishonesty happens whenever you fail adequately to cite sources of information or ideas that appear in your work, and the basic penalty is failure in the course. The basic guideline for avoiding academic dishonesty is confidently to trust that your reader, for every idea
and tidbit of information in your paper, knows whether that idea or tidbit derives from you or from a source. For more precise guidance, consult the manual for the style you will use. The MLA stylebook, for example, offers much help in this area.

Accommodating disabilities: Let me know during the first week of class whether you will need an adjustment or accommodation, and we will work toward making it happen.

Grades Your attendance and participation, including electronic participation, count toward 15 percent of your course grade; your presentations toward 15 percent (5 percent each); your first two short papers toward 20 percent (10 percent each); your third short paper, the “major” text paper, toward 15 percent; and your final paper toward 35 percent.

Course outline
Weeks 1-6: Introductions; read and discuss Guillaumin, San Juan, and Rodney; write short papers on texts; determine topic for “major” text paper; determine topic for final paper.
Weeks 7-9: Read and discuss Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis; research, write, and present “major” text paper; clarify research for final paper.
Weeks 10-15: Read and discuss Omi and Winant; research, write, and present final paper; read last-day assignment from San Juan and Rodney.
Week 16: Final paper due on Willie Mays’ birthday.

Schedule Please note that all assignments are negotiable and subject to change. You are responsible for keeping up with all changes. As noted above, various readings will be made available and discussed, especially from the seventh week onward. Books are identified below by their (first) authors: ie, Guillaumin, San Juan, Rodney, Stasiulis, Omi.

1/14: Introduction to the course and the class.
1/21: Guillaumin: Chapters 1, 2, and 3.
1/23: Guillaumin: Chapters 6 and 7.
1/28: Guillaumin: Chapters 9, 10, and 11.
1/30: San Juan, Introduction. FIRST PAPER DUE.
2/4: San Juan: Chapters 1 and 2.
2/6: San Juan: Chapter 4.
2/13: Rodney: Chapter 4.
2/18: Rodney: Chapters 5 and 6.
2/20: Discuss possible research paper topics. SECOND PAPER DUE.
2/25: Stasiulis: Chapter 1. PRESENTATION OF READING TOWARD THIRD PAPER.
2/27: Film TBA. PRESENTATION OF READING TOWARD THIRD PAPER.
3/4: Stasiulis: Chapters 6 and 7. PRESENTATION OF READING TOWARD THIRD PAPER.
3/6: PRESENTATION OF READING TOWARD THIRD PAPER.
3/11: Stasiulis: Chapters 4 and 5. PRESENTATION OF READING TOWARD THIRD PAPER.
3/13: THIRD PAPER DUE.
3/25: Read and discuss handout (distributed before spring break). Discuss final paper.
3/27: NO CLASS.
4/1: San Juan: Chapter 7. PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH TOWARD FINAL PAPER.
4/3: PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH TOWARD FINAL PAPER.
4/8: Omi: pp 1-35. PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH TOWARD FINAL PAPER.
4/10: PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH TOWARD FINAL PAPER.

4/15: Omi: pp 36-50. PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH TOWARD FINAL PAPER.
4/17: Omi: Chapter 4. PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH TOWARD FINAL PAPER.

4/22: San Juan: handout. PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH TOWARD FINAL PAPER.
4/24: PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH TOWARD FINAL PAPER.

4/29: Read and discuss handout; discuss final paper.
5/1: Rodney: Postscript by A. M. Babu; San Juan, Afterword.

5/6: FINAL PAPER DUE by 4:00 PM.