

CES 260
Race and Racism in U.S. Popular Culture
Spring 2009

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Introduction and Course Description

This course begins with the assumption that popular culture is more than a playful diversion. Indeed, popular culture not only afford us a unique and important opportunity to think critically about human beliefs and behaviors, but it also directs our attention to the centrality of race to American identities and experiences. Consequently, in this class, we direct our attention to the interplay of difference and power within popular culture as manifested in social structures and institutions, symbols and rituals, language and discourse, as well as media coverage and mundane practices. Specifically, we will examine racial, social, cultural, political, and economic importance of children's/youth culture, thinking about the ways in which youth culture, whether in the form of Sesame Street, video games, or skateboarding constitutes a site or space of identity formation and resistance, as well as one of subjugation, disempowerment, and control. We will attend to the complex relationships between race and children's/youth culture through an examination of the social/cultural/economic significance of both the production and consumption of various types of popular culture directed at American (and increasingly globalized) children and youth, as well as the broader contextual meaning of these images, toys, places of place, etc. At its core, this class to underscore the importance of race within youth culture as a pedagogical tool and space of politics, ideologies, discursive articulations, control and resistance. It reflects on the broader context and significance of something we confront (or have) every day and the often take-for-granted, fostering thought about race and racism, whiteness/blackness/otherness, the American Dream, multiculturalism and difference represents within children's/youth culture. In the end, the class makes clear that within children's/youth culture in all its form, as with broader mediums of television, film, and video games, race and racism exists as a powerful force within American culture.

Key Realities

It is important that everyone arrives in class with an open-mind, a critical gaze (a willingness to go beyond common assumptions) and most importantly a willingness and desire to read and write. Without writing and reading skills (as well as a desire to engage in those elements of learning) this class will be a struggle. For those students who want to improve these skills, this class will facilitate that process. For those who want a class that does not require thinking, that does not mandate completion of the reading, that sees attendance as optional, that is in all ways easy on the mind, you may want to look elsewhere.

Required Readings

- The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence (Culture and Education) (Paperback) by Henry A. Giroux -- Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. (May 25, 2001); ISBN-10: 0847691101
- Kids Rule!: Nickelodeon and Consumer Citizenship (Console-ing Passions) (Paperback) by Sarah Banet-Weiser (Author), Duke University Press (2007); ISBN-10: 0822339935
- Youth Cultures & Sport: Identity, Power, and Politics by Michael D. Giardina (Editor), Michele K. Donnelly (Editor) -- Routledge; 1st edition (October 8, 2007); ISBN-10: 0415955815
- Course reader – Available by week #3 at Cougar Copies

Course Requirements

Attendance

You are expected to attend class every day, arrive on time, and participate in an informed and consistent manner. PLEASE NOTE: IF YOU ARRIVE LATE OR LEAVE CLASS EARLY, OR SIMPLY DECIDE TO TAKE A BREAK DURING CLASS, YOU MAY BE GIVEN A PARTIAL ABSENCE. Anything less will not be tolerated and will result in problems in this class. After two absences, **WHETHER excused and unexcused** (in terms of absences resulting from university-sanctioned activities, please see me), each missed class will lead to a 5% deduction (per day) from your overall grade, up to 15%. IN TOTAL, YOU WILL BE ALLOWED TO ACCUMULATE 5 ABSENCES (**FIRST 2 ARE “FREE,” – WITHOUT CONSEQUENCE; HOWEVER, EACH ADDITIONAL ABSENCE AFTER THAT (3 beyond the initial 2), WILL RESULT IN A 5% DEDUCTION PER ABSENCE).** **YOUR 6TH ABSENCE WILL RESULT IN AN AUTOMATIC “F” FOR THE COURSE.** This may seem punitive but being present, being engaged, and otherwise contributing to the success of the class is in my mind the most important element of this class. Attendance usually will be taken at the beginning of class, so lateness will potentially lead to an absence for that day. If you are absent from class, it is your responsibility to check on announcements made while you were away.

Participation (13%)

In order for this class to be productive you will need to come to class each and every day prepared to discuss the material. This requires more than simply doing the reading (WHICH IS ESSENTIAL), but arriving at class with a readiness to discuss the issues for that day. Recognizing that silence is not always a result of a lack of interest or preparation, I envision participation along many lines. Participating in class not only consists of talking, but also includes **listening** (please do not talk while others are speaking), interacting with your peers, and contributing to our classroom energy (body language, being engaged – no newspapers, no playing “rock, paper scissors,” or cell phones).

There are three additional ways to enhance your participation grade and contribution to class:

- You can e-mail me comments or questions prior to class

- You can hand me a note at the beginning of class that asks specific questions (or relays comments) about readings, a previous lecture or film – I will do my best to incorporate into that day's class
- You can also enhance participation grade by reading the daily newspapers in print or online and bringing the class's attention to relevant articles/developments

Participation Portion of grades based on following:

11-13 Points: Active participant in class in all regards; enhances and invigorates the class

8-10 Points: Participates and contributes regularly; does not push class conversations in new directions but often contributes

5-7 Points: Contributes on occasions but does so at basic level; engaged, but not active

3-4 Points: Rarely contributes, but present; shows limited effort and interest in class

1-2 Points: Does not contribute, but physically present for most part; brings little energy and generally demonstrates little interest or effort within class

0 Points: Detracts from overall success of class because of disinterest, disengagement, negative attitude, rudeness (USING CELL PHONE DURING CLASS/READING NEWSPAPER DURING CLA, non or disruptive/destructive participation, etc.

Quizzes (12%)

Throughout the semester, there will be short quizzes at the beginning of class. While there will likely be one every 1-2 week, there is a possibility of quizzes for frequently. We will have roughly 8 quizzes throughout the semester. Each will be worth 2%, meaning that you will be able to drop your two lowest scores. Quizzes will consist of 5 multiple choice/fill-in/objective type questions as well as short answer questions, all of which will derived from the reading. If you miss class or are merely late for class (they will be given at the beginning of class), unless certain VERY SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, you will receive a zero for the quiz.

Exams (50% -- Each will be worth 25%)

Each will be a take-home exam and may consist of both short answer question(s) and essay question(s). These exams will ask you to reflect on and analyze readings, and class materials. For example, a short answers question may ask you to talk about examples of racism, sexism, and xenophobia within a particular video game as discussed in a reading. There may also be some reading comprehension questions as well. An essay question might ask you to analyze a particular instance/site/example of children's/youth culture, so that you may be asked to pick a commercial or television show directed at youth and analyze for racial meaning; you may also be

asked to analyze the racial meaning of a particular toy, etc. WITH EACH ESSAY YOU WILL NEED TO INTEGRATE SPECIFICS FROM COURSE READINGS, FILMS, AND DISCUSSIONS

Final Project (25%)

This assignment represents the backbone of the class and is imagined as a semester long endeavor. While I will provide more details, the emphasis of this project resides with your ability to apply the theories, issues, readings and course materials at a local, global or comparative level in terms of youth culture and contexts. Specifically, we are looking for you to create a project that looks at the cultural politics of children's/youth culture – race, gender, sexuality, and nationality (intersections) of popular culture geared toward children/youth in a historic or more contemporary context. Additionally, and more importantly we strongly encourage that you approach this project through an alternative (creative methodology) whether documentary film, website, PowerPoint, or art. MORE DETAILS FORTHCOMING!

- Power Point
- Web site
- Documentary film
- Art (own piece)
- Research paper

Assignment Schedule

Due Date**	Assignment	Grade Value
February 23, 2009	Exam #1	25 points
April 6, 2009	Exam #2	25 Points
May 6, 2009	Final Project	25 Points
ALL TERM (TBA)	Quizzes	12 points
Everyday	Participation	13 points

**We hold right to make adjustments to class and assignment schedule as needed by class needs

Grading Scale

100-93: A
 92-90: A-
 89-87: B+
 86-83: B
 82-80: B-
 79-77: C+
 76-73: C
 72-70: C-
 69-67: D+
 60-67: D
 59 and Below: F

COURSE SCHEDULE

January 12 -- Introduction

January 14 – Giroux, pp. 1-15; Giardina and Donnelly, forward (By Denzin) and introduction

January 19 – No class

January 21 – Banet-Weiser, #1

January 26 – Banet-Weiser, #3

January 28 and Feb 2 -- Banet-Weiser, #4

February 4 & 9 – Banet-Weiser, #5

February 11 – Guidotta-Hernandez, “Dora the Explorer, Constructing ‘Latinisades’ and the politics of global citizenship” (reader)

February 16 – No class

February 18 – Banet-Weiser, #6

February 23 -- Mandel, “The production of a beloved community” (reader)

Film: *The World According to Sesame Street*

February 25 – Kraidy, “Sunny Days on Sesame Street” (reader)

March 2 – Giroux, #1

Film: *Mickey Mouse Monopoly*

March 4 – Giroux, #2

March 9 – Giroux, #3

March 11 – Giroux, #4

March 16 – TBA (reader)

Film: TBA

March 18 – TBA (reader)

Film: TBA

March 23 – No class

March 25 – No class

March 30 – Giroux, #5

April 1 – Giroux, #6; Williams, “Inequality in the Toy Store” (reader)

April 6 – Giardina and Donnelly (eds.), #1

April 8 – Giardina and Donnelly (eds.), #3

April 13 and 15 -- Giardina and Donnelly (eds.), #2

FILM: *He Got Game*

April 20 -- Giardina and Donnelly (eds.), #5; Leonard, “Not a Hater, Just Keepin’ it Real” (reader)

April 22 –Higgin, Blackless Fantasy: The Disappearance of Race in Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games” (reader); Kafai, Cook, and Fields, “Blacks Deserve Bodies Too” (reader)
FILM: *Game Over*

April 27 – Giardina and Donnelly (eds.), # 8 & 9

April 29 – Giardina and Donnelly (eds.), #10

This syllabus and schedule are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances and shifts in class needs. If you are absent from class, it is your responsibility to check on announcements made in your absence.

Course Policies

Although I hope to redefine the classroom as a space of discussion, debate and intellectual transformation, thereby unsettling your ideas of a student-teacher relationship, there are specific key guidelines that should guide your experience within the classroom. We can certainly expand on these, but the following represents rules/guidelines for our class, ones that are in part based on experiences in previous classes:

- 1 READ, READ, READ
- 2 **Turn cell phones off upon arrival to class – Please note that if I see your cell phone/other handheld device (not if it rings) whether because you’ve decided to text message, check scores, show friend a picture or listen to messages, you will be asked to place that phone in a box before every class for the rest of the semester. YOU WILL ALSO BE MARKED AS ABSENT FOR THAT DAY’S CLASS**
- 3 YOU ARE ASKED NOT TO GET UP DURING CLASS BECAUSE YOU FEEL THIRTY OR HUNGRY
- 4 Arrive to class on time (and that doesn’t mean put down your stuff before class begins and then leave for 25 minutes)– **THAT MEANS YOU NEED TO ARRIVE IN CLASS AND BE READY TO ENGAGE AT 9:10**
- 5 Sleeping or otherwise “tuning out” is not acceptable; class requires engagement and participation from all members of the community. You should not come to class with the sole intent of sucking up the classroom oxygen while you sleep. **If you fall asleep in class, you will be woken up once (in front of the entire class), and upon a second “offense” you will receive an absence for that day**
- 6 If you use class time to read the newspaper or do work for other classes, you will receive an absence for that day
- 7 Be respectful of others, in terms of engaging and listening to other’s analysis, commentaries, points of discussion
- 8 Reflect on social location
- 9 Respect and understand rage
- 10 Don’t be rude (egs – Offer a comment and then while someone is responding walk out of the room to get something to eat; walking out of the room to get something to eat CONSTANTLY; doing other work or engaging in rock-paper-scissors while in class; disrespect the privacy of the class by gossiping about issues or discussions of class)

Cheating

DON'T CHEAT! IT IS PATHETIC, UNNACEPTABLE, AND DISRESPECTFUL TO YOUR COLLEAGUES, THE MATERIAL, HISTORY, YOURSELF, ME, AND THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION. DON'T DO IT! What constitutes cheating: Turning in any work that is not yours, whether that means copying and pasting from a website, using someone else papers,

copying a friend's work, etc. If someone else said it, wrote it, thought it, etc. give them credit – **DON'T STEAL THE INTELLECTUAL WORK OF OTHERS.** What you turn in should be your work, with your analysis, your prose, and your voice, spirit, soul, and effort. Your failure to follow these basic instructions, to respect the classroom, each other, history; in choosing to cheat, to take the easy route, to be in the business of pretending to learn, think, analyze, and otherwise be a student, is not acceptable in any regard. What this means is that if you cheat, and I conclude that it is intentional, you will receive a “0” for that assignment and you will be reported to student conduct. While I am not in the business of policing any decision to violate the sanctity and purpose of the classroom leaves me with little choice in this regard. If you are unfamiliar with WSU policy regarding cheating and confused as to what constitutes cheating (plagiarism), please consult with WSU Student handbook.

Students with Disabilities

I am committed to providing assistance to help you be successful in this course. Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. Please go to the Disability Resource Center (DRC) during the first two weeks of every semester to seek information or to qualify for accommodations. All accommodations **MUST** be approved through the DRC, located in the Administration Annex Bldg, Room 205. To make an appointment with a disability counselor, please call 335-3417.

Critical Pedagogy

Unlike many classes at the university level, which embrace the classroom in traditional terms (professor lectures, you listen, write down as much as possible and then spit all back during exams), as a place where professors teach to unknowing students, this class works from a critical pedagogical approach. While I will certainly lecture (hopefully in a manner that is interactive and engaging), it is my hope that we embrace a critical pedagogical approach. It is my hope to follow in this tradition, wanting to use the classroom space to not only learn, but as a place to transgress to critically think, to debate, and otherwise challenge self and others. A critical pedagogical approach, however, requires preparation and effort – to make it work you cannot passively use the class and wait for others to inform you. Take initiative and accept this responsibility as the failure to accept this role will negatively impact the classroom and invariably lead to increased lecturing. The following definition, from Henry Giroux, establishes some additional points of departure:

“The critical question here is whose future, story, and interests do the school represent. . . Critical pedagogy argues that school practices need to be informed by a public philosophy that addresses how to construct ideological and institutional conditions in which the lived experience of empowerment for the vast majority of student becomes the defining feature of schooling. Critical pedagogy attempts to:

1. “Create new forms of knowledge through its emphasis on breaking down disciplines and creating interdisciplinary knowledge.
2. Raise questions about the relationships between the margins and centers of power in schools and is concerned about how to provide a way of reading

history as part of a larger project of reclaiming power and identity, particularly as these are shaped around the categories of race, gender, class, and ethnicity.

3. Reject the distinction between high and popular culture so as to make curriculum knowledge responsive to the everyday knowledge that constitutes peoples' lived histories differently.
4. Illuminate the primacy of the ethical in defining the language that teachers and others use to produce particular cultural practices.”¹

Guiding Principles²

The classroom is a unique environment where we can come together to promote learning and growth in each other; it is a space that has the potential to be transformative along a number of lines. In order to make the best use of the classroom space it is important that we have some guidelines to frame our conversations. These are not rules or demands (as opposed to the above), but guidelines/suggestions that should ground each and every discussion, as well as your own reading, fostering a respectful and safe learning environment, that challenges all of us to reflect on our own analysis, positionality, privileges and racial/gender/class/nation/sexual ethos.

1. Acknowledge that racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and other institutionalized forms of oppression exist.
2. Acknowledge that one mechanism of institutionalized racism, classism, sexist, heterosexism, etc. is that we are **all systematically taught misinformation** about our own group and about members of other groups. This is true for members of privileged and oppressed groups.
3. **Read in an engaged way**, recognizing the ideology and politics imbedded in every text. Make notes in the margins – **“dialogue” with the text**, using exclamation points, questions or issue complete statements, questions or critiques. Ask yourself: what is significant in this piece, what elicits anger/sadness/laughter, but go beyond emotional responses to be prepared to make specific statements about the reading!
4. **Be aware of your own subject position, ideologies, privileges and prejudices.** Recognize your own relationship to institutions of power and structures of domination. This can help you make specific connections to the reading, class discussions and other forms of feedback. Rather than proclaiming, “This article sucks,” or “You are wrong,” you can get more specific about the basis and origins of your reaction. For example, rather than engaging in a discussion about homosexuality with statements of disgust and contempt, it might be better to state: “From my position as a white male, who was raised with the teachings of the Bible, I find homosexuality a bit troubling, especially in the context of the arguments made by _____ on page ____.”
5. Agree to **combat actively the myths and stereotypes** about your own “group” and other groups so that we can break down the walls that prohibit group cooperation and group gain. Read and listen with recognition of other people’s subject position and ideologies.
LISTEN TO OTHERS!

¹ <http://www.perfectfit.org/CT/giroux2.html>

² Adopted from guidelines used by Dr. Lynn Weber and Dr. Patti Verstrat

6. Reflect on our **choice of language in and outside of class**, striving to rid our vocabulary of racist, sexist, homophobic words, phrases. Recognize that your choice of words reflect your own ideological position and may bother others (think about how others may react to your words – not just content, but the way we chose to express those thoughts)
7. **Create a safe atmosphere for open discussion.** If members of the class may wish to make comments that they do not want repeated outside the classroom, they can preface their remarks with a request that the class agree not to repeat the remarks. Also, think about your language (including body language), posture, etc. contributes to safe/empowering or disempowering/unsafe learning environment.
8. **Take Risks:** I want this class to be a space where everyone should feel comfortable enough to disagree with each other. This needs to be a safe space so reflect on the ways you engage others with your own pronouncements and how you react (with words, body language) to their statements – react privilege and positionality
9. **Read and dialogue in a politically engaged way.** Racial dynamics, for our purposes here, reflects **power**, and relationship to systems/sources of power. Power dynamics are contextual (situational) and relational. You may have power in some spaces and lack it in others, all depending on social location. Ask yourself these questions while reading and discussing within the classroom space: Is the analysis leaving anyone relevant out? For what reasons? Where is this analysis coming from? Whose knowledge base is being explored or forwarded?
10. **Speak with evidence** and “facts” on your side. Despite the popular pronouncements that there are no wrong answers, there are incomplete, problematic, superficial, surfaced, and unsubstantiated answers. Reflect on your own answers and the basis of your conclusions
11. **Go beyond an either/or dichotomy. Incorporate a both/and approach** rather than an “either/or.”
12. **Recognize the knowledge base of your peers.** It's ok – recommended and great, in fact – to respond to a counterpoint with “hey, I’ve never thought of it that way,” or “well, you do make a good point – I’ll have to think about that for a while.” Discussion in this class isn’t about proving, embarrassing, showing off, winning, losing, convincing, holding one’s argument to the bitter end – it's about dialogue, debate and self-reflections.

Primary Learning Outcomes

- Recognize the production and consumption of children’s/youth popular culture as a contested space of meaning, whether along racial, gendered, national, class, ideological, political and sexual axis (or their interconnections)
- Understand the dialectical relationship between race/gender-based ideologies, children’s/youth popular culture production, capitalism and other forms of popular culture
- Think about the ways in which racial difference and Otherness is perpetuated and taught through children’s/youth culture; analyze the ways in which systems of inequality are perpetuated, rationalized, and justified within children’s/youth culture
- Ability to think through continuities of systems of oppression; understand systems of power and domination within and beyond the context of children’s/youth popular culture

- Identify the ways in which whiteness and racial otherness is imagined through youth culture; understand the ways in which children's/youth popular culture reifies and/or challenges dominant voices, narratives, and theories of racialized difference
- Recognize and understand the ways in which race, masculinity, femininity, "the other," America, white supremacy, resistance, cultural products and capitalism affect one another
- Recognize and understand the ways in which race, blackness, masculinity, femininity, America, white supremacy, resistance, etc. are dealt with within children's/youth popular culture
- Ability to analyze and deconstruct the racial and gendered meanings within various films, toys, video games, films, television shows, commercials etc.
- Conceptualize the ways in which films, toys, video games, films, television shows, commercials etc. marketed toward youth imagine/construct the relationship between blacks and whites, Latinos, Native Americans, Asians, etc.
- Ability and willingness to enjoy popular culture while maintaining a critical gaze – critical introspection and analysis (media literacy) can be part of the experiences of consuming and observing contemporary popular culture
- Articulate the ways in which artists and cultural activists resist assimilation, demonization, and racism through the production of children's/youth culture, critical interventions and oppositional gaze
- Understand the ways in which injustice and inequality operate within a context of cultural production; how does consumption and the privileges afforded to each of us (in different ways) contribute to or undermine such injustice
- Relate notion of personal being political to concepts discussed in class – how are we complicit with the reactionary and oppressive realities that connect with histories discussed within the class