

History 139  
**Comparative Race and Ethnicity in the United States**

Fall 2009 – U.C. Merced  
MW 4:30-5:45 – Classroom Building 267

Instructor: Professor Sean Malloy (smalloy@ucmerced.edu)  
Office Hours: COB 311, Wednesday 3:00-4:30 and by appointment  
Course Website: Available via UCMCROPS

“For this is the main intellectual question . . . . Can one divide human reality, as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly?”

-- Edward Said, *Orientalism*

### **Course Description and Goals**

This course will examine the construction of race and ethnicity in the United States in an historical and comparative context. The foundational concept of this course is that race is a social construction (as opposed to a biological one) that comes into being through both historical and continuing interactions between various groups within U.S. society. Simply put, what it means to be white, African American, Asian American, Latino, Native American, etc. has been defined by the way in which these groups interacted with one another and has changed over time. Of course, these groups have seldom interacted on equal terms and this course will also examine the ways in which some “races” have been privileged over others and how that privilege has been both institutionalized and contested over time.

By the end of this class, you should not only have a better understanding of the history of particular racial and ethnic groups in the United States, but also how the very definition of those groups has been shaped over time by interactions with other groups. We will explore, for example, how it was that the Irish in the United States came to be defined as “white” in large part as result of their interactions with African Americans in the nineteenth century. While we will focus on a handful of groups (whites, African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans), by the end of this course you should have acquired the analytical tools necessary to critically examine not only particular racial classifications, but also the very concepts of race and ethnicity. More generally, this course is designed to encourage critical thinking about our received notions of social reality.

## Course Materials

Required books (in the order in which they are assigned):

- Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*  
George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*  
Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*  
Jeffery O. G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*  
Paul Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*  
George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*  
David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity*  
Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the US Big City*  
Gary Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*  
Vijay Prashad, *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity*  
Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*

Online reader: Some readings have been placed online and are available at our CROPS website in the “Resources” folder grouped by week. Please print out these readings and bring them to your section for easy reference during discussion.

## Course Requirements and Grading

This class is a seminar. That means that much of the learning in this class takes place through the medium of conversation. The classroom is our shared space where we will collectively work through the issues raised by both the readings and our own experiences. The success of the class depends on our ability to facilitate a conversation that is informed, respectful, challenging, and hopefully fun and exciting.

To help make this class work both individually and collectively, you must be prepared to do two things. First, you must come to class having done the assigned reading for that day. Second, I expect you to come prepared to engage in an informed discussion with your classmates about the issues, questions, and challenges raised by the readings. My job is not to give you the answers to the challenging puzzles posed by the history of race and ethnicity in this country (which, sadly, I don't have in any event), but rather to help facilitate our collective exploration of the issues involved. I do not expect you to come to class having mastered the readings, some of which are quite challenging. Coming to class with a question or a puzzle raised by the readings is as good as coming with a well-formed opinion.

To help prepare you for the discussion, I will ask that for every class meeting students arrive having written a response paper of roughly one or two paragraphs (no more than one page double-spaced). A response paper is not a summary of the reading. Nor does it have to be particularly formal. Rather, I want you to give your own personal reflection on an issue or

question raised by the reading for that day. If there is something about the reading that puzzles you, the response paper is a good place to start addressing it. The response paper serves two purposes: it helps prepare you for discussion and it also counts directly toward your participation grade. Response papers must be submitted in person; they will NOT be accepted by email. If you miss a class due to illness or emergency, please bring the response paper for that class to the next class meeting.

To reflect the importance that I place on our conversation to the learning process, 50% of your grade will be based on class participation. This part of your grade will be determined by the degree to which you attend the class and make contributions to the discussion as well as by your response papers. If you do the readings, attend class regularly, participate in our discussions, and submit your response papers then you will receive a good participation grade. Simple, yes? If you have any question about your participation grade at any point in the semester, please come and see me.

Please note you are not permitted to use laptops, cell phones, or other electronic devices in class unless you have a note from the Disability Services Center. In a seminar, being attentive to the discussion and your fellow students is one of the most important components of a successful class.

There are no exams in this class. Instead, every student will write one short essay (5-7 pages) based on the assigned class reading and one longer research paper (10-12 pages) on a topic of your choice. You will have two opportunities to write the short essay. One prompt will be distributed in early October and due October 12. A second prompt will be distributed in early November and due November 16. You must write an essay in response to **one** of these two prompts (but not both). Which prompt you choose to respond to is up to you. Note that although you are only required to answer one of the prompts, if you answer the first prompt and are not happy with your grade, you may choose to answer the second prompt as well. I will give you the higher of the two grades.

For the research paper, I will ask you to pick a recent newspaper article, TV news report, or blog post that deals in some way with issues of race and ethnicity in the United States. You will then do reading and research that will allow you to discuss the historical roots of that particular issue. For example, you might pick an article on the recent confirmation of Sonia Sotomajor to the Supreme Court. From there, you might explore the historical literature dealing with the intersection of race and gender or the history of Puerto Rican immigration to the United States. To help you formulate your question, I will ask you to submit a brief, written prospectus (1-2 pages) on the research topic on November 9. I will then have individual meetings with every student in which we go over your prospectus and map out a strategy for researching and writing your paper. More details on the research paper assignment will be available in a handout to be distributed in class by the end of week three.

Grading breakdown:

Participation (including response papers)	50%	
Short essay (5-7 pages)	20%	October 12 or November 16
Prospectus	5%	November 9
Final paper	25%	December 14

For general guidelines with respect to grading criteria (*e. g.* “What is an A paper?”), please consult the following reference:

[www.newhum.com/for\\_teachers/grading\\_criteria/suggested\\_grading\\_criteria.html](http://www.newhum.com/for_teachers/grading_criteria/suggested_grading_criteria.html)

Written assignments (prospectus, short essay, and final paper) turned in up to 24 hours late will receive a 1/3 grade reduction (*e.g.* an A would become an A-) except in cases of serious illness or emergency. Work turned in between 24-72 hours late will be lowered a full grade. Any work turned in after 72 hours late will not be accepted and will count as an F.

### **Academic Integrity**

Each student in this course is expected to abide by the University of California, Merced’s Academic Honesty Policy. Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the student’s own work.

You are encouraged to study together and to discuss information and concepts covered in lecture and the sections with other students. You can give "consulting" help to or receive "consulting" help from such students. However, this permissible cooperation should never involve one student having possession of a copy of all or part of work done by someone else, in the form of an e mail, an e mail attachment file, a diskette, or a hard copy. Should copying occur, both the student who copied work from another student and the student who gave material to be copied will both automatically receive a zero for the assignment. Penalty for violation of this Policy can also be extended to include failure of the course and University disciplinary action.

During examinations, you must do your own work. Talking or discussion is not permitted during the examinations, nor may you compare papers, copy from others, or collaborate in any way. Any collaborative behavior during the examinations will result in failure of the exam, and may lead to failure of the course and University disciplinary action.

### **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

The University of California Merced is committed to ensuring equal academic opportunities and inclusion for students with disabilities based on the principles of independent living, accessible universal design and diversity. I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for student with disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made during the first three weeks of the semester, except for unusual circumstances. Students are encouraged to register with Disability Services Center to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.

## Tentative Course Schedule

### Week 1: Introduction

**August 26:** Introduction

### Week 2: Thinking about Comparative Race and Ethnicity

**August 31:** Historical Perspectives on Race and Ethnicity

CROPS:

Barbara J. Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review* (1990), 95-118.

Michael Omi and Howard Winant, "Racial Formations."

E. P. Thompson, excerpt from *The Making of the English Working Class*.

**September 2:** Some Theoretical Perspectives

CROPS:

Joe R. Feagin and Clairece Booher Feagin, "Theoretical Perspectives in Race and Ethnic Relations."

Mary C. Waters, "Optional Ethnicities: For Whites Only?"

Adalberto Aguirre Jr. and Jonathan Turner "Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations"

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva "Color-Blind Racism"

### Week 3: How Your Professor Became White

**September 7:** Labor Day holiday – NO CLASS

**September 9:** *How The Irish Became White*

Books:

Ignatiev, entire.

## **Week 4: Institutionalizing Whiteness**

**September 14:** *Race: The House We Live In* (film)

Books:

Lipsitz, pp. vii-117

**September 16:** *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*

Books:

Lipsitz, finish the book.

## **Week 5: Black is a Country?**

**September 21:** *Black is a Country* (I)

Books:

Singh, 1-100

**September 23:** *Black is a Country* (II)

Books:

Singh, finish the book

## **Week 6: Black Power**

**September 28:** *Black Power* (I)

Books:

Ogbar, vii-122

**September 30:** *Black Power* (II)

Books:

Ogbar, finish the book

## **Week 7: The White Boy Shuffle**

**October 5:** Instructor away at conference – NO CLASS

**October 7:** *The White Boy Shuffle*

Books:

Beatty, entire book

## **Week 8: Becoming Mexican American**

**October 12:** *Becoming Mexican American* (I)

*Due Date for Essay #1*

Books:

Sanchez, 3-150

**October 14:** *Becoming Mexican American* (II)

Books:

Sanchez, finish the book.

## **Week 9: Walls and Mirrors**

**October 19:** *Walls and Mirrors* (I)

Books:

Gutiérrez, 1-151

**October 21:** *Walls and Mirrors* (II)

Books:

Gutiérrez, finish the book

## **Week 10: Magical Urbanism**

**October 26:** *Made in LA* (film)

Books:

Davis, xi-108

**October 28:** *Magical Urbanism*

Book:

Davis, finish the book

## **Week 11: Margins and Mainstreams**

**November 2:** *Party* (film)

Books:

Okimoto, ix-92

**November: 4:** *Margins and Mainstreams*

Books:

Okiihiro, 93-176

## **Week 12: Defining Asian American(s)**

**November 9:** Immigrant Acts

CROPS:

Taro Iwata, "Rethinking Asian American Agency"

Cynthia L. Nakashima, "Asian American Studies Through (Somewhat) Asian Eyes"

Excerpts from Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*.

**November 11:** Veterans Day holiday – NO CLASS

## **Week 13: Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting**

**November 16:** *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting*

*Due Date for Essay #2*

Books,

Prashad, entire.

**November 18:** No Class – Individual Meetings to discuss prospectus/research project

## **Week 14: Individual Meetings**

**November 23:** No Class – Individual Meetings to discuss prospectus/research project

**November 25:** No Class – Individual Meetings to discuss prospectus/research project

## **Week 15: Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left**

**November 30:** *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left (I)*

Books:

Pulido, 1-152

**December 2:** *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left* (II)

Books:

Pulido, finish the book

## **Week 16: Looking Forward**

**December 7:** The Multiracial Past and the Multiracial Future

CROPS:

Frank Wu, "The Changing Face of America: Intermarriage and the Mixed Race Movement."

Charles A. Gallagher, "Color-Blind Privilege"

Herbert J. Gans, "The Possibility of a New Racial Hierarchy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century United States."

Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, "Getting Along, Renewing America's Commitment to Racial Justice."

Charles A. Gallagher, "Ten Simple Things You Can Do to Improve Race Relations."

**December 9:** Conclusion; Evaluations

*Final Essay Due December 14 by 5 PM*