

Politics of Identity: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture  
310-14500-01  
Fall 2007

Asma Barlas  
CHS 101; 4-3557  
Office hours: TR 2:30-4:00  
Email: [abarlas@ithaca.edu](mailto:abarlas@ithaca.edu)  
Website: <http://faculty.ithaca.edu/abarlas/>

Course description

In this course we will explore how race shapes individual identities as well as the life opportunities afforded to different racial groups in the U.S. To this end, we will engage a series of open-ended questions such as: What is race? Would the U.S. be a more "united" state if we were all the same? What are the social and psychological effects of thinking in terms of Self/ Other, similarity/ difference? Do we consume/cannibalize racial Others? Is there a relationship between sex /gender and attitudes towards race and racism? If you're color-blind are you anti-racist? And why should you even care about any of these issues? To these questions you are free to add any others that you think are appropriate.

A note on pedagogy

My classes are primarily discussion based and I focus on helping to create a learning environment in which students can speak freely and openly. Since many of the issues we will be discussing are both controversial and personal, I want you to know at the outset that you will not be required to agree with one another or with me. In fact, I discourage conformity and a rush to agreement, specially when they become ways to avoid thinking about difficult issues.

Readings

Buchanan, Patrick. *The Death of the West*, St. Martin's Press, 2002.  
Belford, F. "Thinking about Difference Differently," photocopy.  
Finnegan, William. *Cold New World*, Random House, 1999.  
Frankenberg, Ruth. *White Women, Race Matters*, Minnesota, 1997.  
hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, South End, 1992.  
Mejias, Ulises. "Unempathic Nation?" (will email this to you).

## Requirements\*

Class presentations	10%
Journals	20%
Concept paper (mid-term)	30%
Concept paper (final)	40%

\*All assignments must be turned in on time; I do NOT accept late papers!

Class attendance/discussions/presentations:

Please attend class regularly; more than three unexcused absences may lead me to drop you from the course at **\*\*any point during the semester\*\*** (I am happy to explain this disciplinary approach to anyone who's interested).

For your class presentations, please write up your comments (3 pages min.) and turn these in to me after you've made your presentation. I encourage you to use these opportunities to critique the materials you're reading as well as class discussions.

Journals:

A journal is your space for writing about our class and it can be as informal (and long) as you want. I will not assign individual journals a letter grade and if you turn them all in, you will get all the points (20). However, if a journal strikes me as trivial or insubstantial, I will give it no points at all. Three pages minimum; no hand-written journals please! J

Concept Paper:

A concept paper is a critical essay that should:

- (a) directly engage the authors/ texts we are reading;
- (b) be analytical rather than merely, or only, anecdotal;
- (c) make a clear argument and also say why you think about something in a certain way (in other words, ask yourself why you are writing the paper and what you hope to get out of it);
- (d) be well organized; e.g., you should state at the outset what you will be writing about and why, and also give some indication of how the paper is structured;
- (e) be spell-checked, paginated, and properly cited (I mark down sloppy work).  
7-8 pages, typed, and double-spaced.

Schedule of Readings  
To be done before coming to class on the assigned day

August

R 30: Syllabus

September

A (white) conservative perspective on racial politics

T 4: Buchanan, Introduction and chapters 1-3

R 6: Buchanan, chapters 4-6

T 11: Buchanan, chapter 7-10

R 13: Student presentations  
Journal due

Race and class in the U.S.

T 18: Finnegan, Part I (half)

R 20: Finnegan, conclude

T 25: Finnegan, Part II (half)

R 27: Finnegan, conclude  
Journal due

October

T 2: Finnegan, Part III (half)

R 4: Finnegan, conclude part III

T 9: Student presentations

R 11: Concept paper due

Fall Break!

A (black) feminist perspective on racial politics

T 23: Open: video/ film

R 25: bell hooks, essays 2, 4, 10

T 30: bell hooks, essays 3, 5, 11  
Student presentations

November

R1: bell hooks, essays 1,6

T6: bell hooks, 7, 9,12

Journal due

Constructing whiteness: white women and race

R8: Frankenberg, Introduction and Chapter 2

T13: Frankenberg, Chs. 3 and 4

R15: Frankenberg, Chs. 5-6

Student presentations

Thanksgiving Break!

Self, Other, Difference, Empathy

T 27: Belford, F. "Thinking about Difference Differently."

R 29: Belford, conclude

Journal due

December

T4: Mejias, "Unempathic Nation?"

R6: Mejias, conclude

T11: Student presentations

R13: Conclude

FINAL PAPER: DECEMBER 18<sup>th</sup>; BY 4:00 PM IN MY OFFICE.