

Unteaching Racism

RC Core 100.001 Winter, 2012 M/W 3-5PM 28 Tyler

Dr. Helen Fox hfox@umich.edu

Office hours: By appointment in 120 Tyler, East Quad

Required Reading

- On-line readings/videos (in CTOOLS Resources). Take careful notes on both the readings and on the short, on-line video clips and bring these notes and either your laptop or a print-out of the readings to class.
- Books:
 - Barak Obama: *Dreams From My Father*
 - Malcolm X: *Autobiography of Malcolm X*
 - Mary Crow Dog: *Lakota Woman*

Course Goals:

- to learn some ways that race, ethnicity, country of origin, gender, class, culture, and history have shaped relations between people of color and whites in the United States
- to come to grips with the ways that "blatant" and "subtle" forms of racism have shaped us individually and personally
- to expand our knowledge of how "modern" racism is taught, learned, practiced and perpetuated in societal institutions
- to practice "un-teaching racism" in the local community

Through readings, videos, discussions, and attempts to facilitate conversations in the community, we will look for answers to six broad, deceptively simple questions: What is race? What is racism? How are minority group identities assigned, chosen, and experienced? How significant are racism and stereotyping in the U.S. today? How do we internalize our society's racist assumptions and practices? How does racism get institutionalized in social and economic systems? How can we un-learn and un-teach racism?



Note: This course can be quite a different experience for students of color than it is for students who identify as white. Many of the readings and videos are meant to demonstrate the prevalence of racism today, on campus, in the streets, and in the lives of people of color. Discussion of these

facts, so obvious to most students of color yet so elusive to most well-meaning whites, may lead to tension and exasperation on the part of students of color, and confusion, guilt, shame, silence, and/or anger on the part of whites. Please be reassured, all these

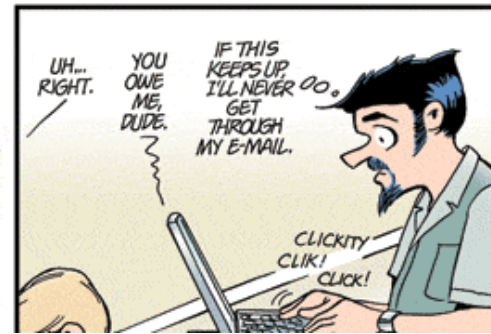
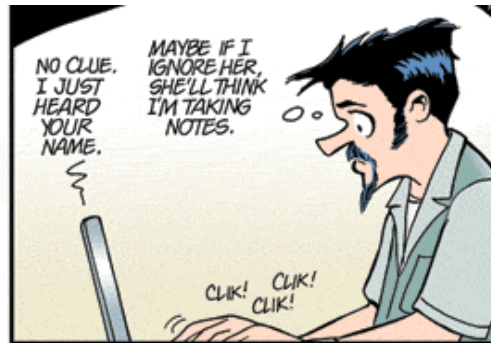
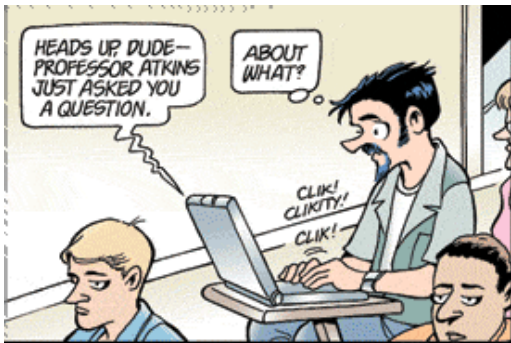
reactions and emotions are normal. Racism is inherently wounding for both people of color and for whites, and attending to the wound will cause a certain amount of pain. Come and talk to me if it hurts too much. Write about your feelings in your journal assignments. But don't give up on your classmates. Everyone is here because they sincerely want to help solve the problem.



Attendance Policy: More than two absences for any reason (except religious holidays) will result in a lower grade/evaluation. If you must be absent, please try to message me beforehand and let me know what's up. Then contact another student for the assignments and to find out what happened in class. *Please do not ask me for this information.* You also must make up any videos you missed. You can check them out from the Askwith Media Library on the second floor of the Shapiro Library (i.e. the

UGLI).

Media Policy: Most of our readings are on C-Tools. You will need to bring each day's readings to class, either as print-outs or on your laptop. I encourage you to search the web during class for anything that will help us learn more about our topic, and to share that information with your peers. Any other electronic distractions (e-mail, Facebook,



etc.) are considered unprofessional.

Cultural Event



At some point during the semester you are required to attend two cultural events of ethnic or ethno-religious groups other than your own, preferably those that require you to step outside your comfort zone. The purpose of this exercise, besides to have fun and broaden your horizons, is to immerse yourself for a few hours in cultures about which you may have stereotypes, misconceptions, or incomplete understanding. Examples of such events are: a Native American Powwow, the NOIR Fashion Show, a trip to the Arab American National museum in Dearborn, a visit to a synagogue or mosque (with a friend who is a member) a visit to an Asian student cultural nights, etc. You can search for these events on the U-M web, hear about them from friends, or choose from among my e-mailed announcements throughout the semester. A 2-3 page write up of each of the events and your reactions to them is required.

MLK Event



Martin Luther King Day activities actually go on for several weeks in January. On the day itself (Jan. 16), the UM campus is completely devoted to outstanding events: lectures, discussions, media presentations, music, and community activities. You can find the schedule at <http://mlksymposium.umich.edu/> If you have planned to go home for the holiday, you might find an event in your local community. Please attend one of these events and write a 2-3 page reaction to it.

Community Anti-Racism Project

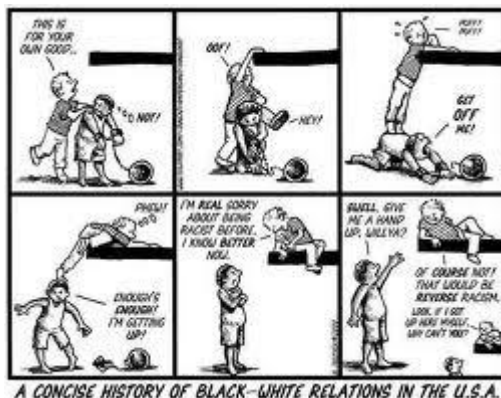


Working in small groups, you will plan and carry out a significant effort to "un-teach" racism in the community. This might take the form of facilitating conversations about racism on campus or in a local high school classroom. You might create some kind of art exhibit or live performance on campus and start up a conversation about it with an audience. You could create a publication for distribution around the RC or on campus. You could promote discussions about white privilege or coalition-building, or set up a public debate about new ways to promote equal access to higher education. You could show some particularly interesting films or put on a public reading of some of your "Dialogue" papers and facilitate discussion afterwards. Whatever you choose to do, it should involve an active educational effort and be carried out over the latter two-thirds of the semester. You will prepare a report of your community project for your final writing assignment, below.

Writing Assignments

Essays. (2-3 typed pages) Topics for these essays might be an in-depth reflection on a course reading, an analysis of a video, or a consideration of a question that I suggest or that you pose for yourself. For each of these assignments I expect you to write 2-3 typed, double-spaced pages -- more if you like. The style I'm looking for is personal and engaged. Please consider what the reader (me) needs to know, and edit your work carefully.

Major Papers



Paper #1 White Privilege at Michigan: A Plan for Change. (4-5 pages)

Ideas for this paper will come from our readings and discussions on white

privilege in general, and the ways it is enacted at U-M. Start by describing your understanding of what white privilege is and how it shows up on campus. Then, describe your plan for addressing the problem. The plan should be detailed enough that someone with a working knowledge of white privilege could understand and respond to it. It doesn't need to be completely practical, but should not be so idealistic that it would be impossible to carry out.

Paper #2 Analysis: Barack Obama/Malcolm X (5-7 pages) For this paper I'd like you to decide on a question or thesis that you'd like to address that uncovers something interesting about these two famous black men. We'll brainstorm some approaches in class before you start on this assignment. You might begin your paper with a conventional thesis which you support in the rest of the paper, or start with an interesting question, explain why this question is relevant to you, and then, using examples and quotes from the text and your own analysis, follow the question where it leads you.

Paper #3 Dialogue on Racism (5-7 pages)

For this paper I would like you to create a character to dialogue with on paper about a thorny racial issue that we have discussed in class or that you have encountered in your family or neighborhood. Write as if it were a skit or a play, naming your characters and using realistic conversational language and tone. The object is to show you can listen fairly to your character, no matter how obnoxious s/he is, and keep that person listening while you help move the conversation toward a more accurate and compassionate understanding of the racial situation. The more you listen to and participate in conversations about race outside of class, the easier this paper will be. However, you should go further than simply reporting a conversation that actually took place. Try to stretch yourself by addressing a subject that you've not felt confident to take on in the past, or that has often ended in frustration for you.

Paper #4 Community Project Report (4-5 pages)

Your report should describe exactly what you did, from your first meetings to the final group evaluation of your project. It should analyze what went well, what could have gone better, and why. It should detail your personal contributions to the project and evaluate your own effectiveness. It should suggest future directions: from your experience doing this project, what other kinds of learning (or un-learning) is needed in the community that you saw as your audience?

Required Video Viewing We will watch these videos together in class. If you happen to be absent, I expect you to check the video out from the Askwith Film and Video Library and watch it on your own.

Blacking Up (Jan. 18)

Reel Bad Arabs (Feb. 20)

In Sickness and In Wealth (Mar. 5)

Our Spirits Don't Speak English (Mar. 14)

Slaying the Dragon (Mar. 21)

Made in LA (April 2)

Place Matters (April 9)

Individual Conferences

You are REQUIRED to schedule two individual writing conferences with me at points in the semester when talking about your writing and ideas will be the most helpful to you. The first conference should happen before the Winter Recess, and the second should come after it. You are very welcome to schedule additional conferences with me any time you like. *Remember to bring the piece/s of writing you want to work on.*

Assessment

- 1. Papers:** I will respond to your papers as follows: ++ for excellent work (I find it interesting, well written, and well thought through) + for acceptable work (it's okay, but it could be deeper or more interesting, or written with more care), and RW (mandatory rewrite) for entries that need more depth of reflection, more specific details, coherence, and/or attention to sentence level issues (grammar, sentence structure, word choice, clarity of ideas). You will have the opportunity to re-write your RW and + papers as many times as you can stand it – or until you are satisfied with them.

Please understand that these marks only loosely correspond to letter grades. You might write a perfectly good paper and get a “++” yet someone else might turn in a truly original, beautifully written paper that also gets a “++” Someone might write a “+” paper that has really outstanding ideas but is somewhat confusingly written. An “RW” paper might be very well written but off the point of the assignment. Or it might have great ideas and lousy grammar. It might have perfect grammar and style, but a serious misunderstanding of the reading. Et cetera. My comments on your papers and in conference should help you figure this all out.

Why No Letter Grades? Because of my philosophy of teaching and learning, I generally do not letter-grade writing, as it seems to pit students against each other, inhibit intellectual risk-taking, and make both students and teacher forget any higher purpose of education. I'll be glad to tell you how you're doing on a paper or in the course overall if you ask me in conference.

2. Course Grade/RC Evaluation.



Your grade/evaluation in this course will be determined by ***your attendance, the quality and quantity of your written work, your contributions to class discussion, and your engagement in group projects and community activities.*** Discussion is an important feature of this course; you are expected to contribute to it

frequently. Since this is a first year writing course, it will be very important to improve your writing throughout the semester. I expect you to write several drafts of your longer papers and I will give you endless opportunities for feedback and rewriting of each assignment. BE PRO-ACTIVE in making appointments with me for individual feedback and help with your writing. I'll make plenty of time for each of you.

3. PORTFOLIOS On the last day of class you should bring your portfolio (a cardboard or three-ring binder) which contains *all* your drafts of all your writing, including your essays, your longer papers, **and a 2-3 page introduction to your portfolio that describes your personal growth in the course.** These pages should be arranged sequentially and fastened securely in your portfolio.

My Expectations

- * Be there! Attendance counts.
- * Be involved! Speak up in class, come see me in conference, show responsible leadership in group work and your community project.
- * Do significant work on your writing. Be attentive to feedback, come to me for help at any stage in the writing process, edit your final products carefully.
- * Be honest and pro-active. If I say or do something that hurts or offends you, I will be a better teacher if you let me know about it. If the group process is driving you crazy, use your skills in listening and dialogue to help improve the situation. If your group project isn't getting off the ground, come and talk to me about it.

To get an A in the class, your writing and attention to feedback must be outstanding; your frequent additions to class discussion must be inclusive of your peers and helpful in moving the conversation forward; your attendance in class and at two mandatory individual conferences must be stellar, and your pro-active engagement in your group project must be substantial. Remember, as in all U-M classes, you are judged in relation to the performance of your peers. Simply doing all the required work does not result in an automatic "A."

Plagiarism



This unusual “sin” is taken very seriously at U-M. In the grand scheme of things (racism, environmental collapse, World War III) it is minor, but in fact, plagiarism can cause you to fail a class or, in the worst case scenario, result in your dismissal from the University. Please don't be tempted to cut and paste paragraphs from the Internet, copy stuff from books, or accept your mom's re-write of your pieces – for any class. Plagiarism is surprisingly easy to detect without any special software. I'd rather see poor writing than suspicious passages. For details about

plagiarism and how to avoid it, please see the Shapiro Undergraduate website:

www.lib.umich.edu/ugl/guides/plagiarism/html

CALENDAR (subject to change according to your needs)

Weds. Jan. 4	Introductions, team building
Mon. Jan 9	How real is “race”? Guidelines for discussion.
Weds. Jan. 11	Race and racism in “post-racial” America
Mon. Jan. 16	MLK Day – NO CLASS
Weds. Jan. 18	<i>Blackin Up</i> . Discussion: Hip-hop’s remix of race and identity.
Mon. Jan. 23	Book discussion: <i>Obama: Dreams from my Father</i> (part 1)
Weds. Jan. 25	Book discussion: <i>Obama: Dreams from my Father</i> (part 2)
Mon. Jan. 30	White privilege
Weds. Feb. 1	White privilege, cont.
Mon. Feb. 6	Racial identity development
Weds. Feb. 8	Due: First Draft of Paper #1: “White privilege at Michigan: A plan for change.” Peer review.
Mon. Feb. 13	Book discussion: <i>Autobiography of Malcolm X</i> (part 1)
Weds. Feb. 15	Book discussion: <i>Autobiography of Malcolm X</i> (part 2)
Mon. Feb. 20	Video: <i>Reel Bad Arabs</i> . Discussion: Arabs in the media.
Weds. Feb. 22	Discussion: Islam, 9/11, and Arab stereotypes. Start community projects
WINTER RECESS	
Mon. Mar. 5	Video: <i>In Sickness and in Wealth</i> . Discussion: Class and race
Weds. Mar. 7	Due: First Draft of Paper #2: Analysis: Malcolm X/Barack Obama. Peer Feedback
Mon. Mar. 12	Book discussion: <i>Lakota Woman</i>
Weds. Mar. 14	Video: <i>Our Spirits Don’t Speak English</i> . Discussion: Native American Boarding Schools
Mon. Mar. 19	Discussion: Asian Americans as “perpetual foreigners”
Weds. Mar. 21	Video: <i>Slaying the Dragon</i> Discussion: Asian women in film
Mon. Mar. 26	Due: First Draft of Paper #3: Dialogue on Racism. Peer Feedback
Weds. Mar. 28	Discussion: Construction of race: Latino/as in the USA
Mon. Apr. 2	Video: <i>Made in L.A.</i> Discussion: Activism by groups of color
Weds. April 4	Discussion: Race and the criminal justice system
Mon. April 9	Video: <i>Place Matters</i> . Discussion: Racism and housing
	Due: Paper #4 Analysis of Community Project
Weds. April 11	Discussion: Being an ally. Next steps.
Mon. April 16	LAST CLASS: PORTFOLIOS DUE Food and sharing of community projects.