

MIXED RACE THEORY

Course #: PHIL 3990, HONR 3700
Time: W, 3:3- 6:15 p.m.
Location: Fretwell 418
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Office Hours: M & W, 12:30 to 1:30 by appointment (email first please)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Mixed Race Theory is inquiry into the experiences of persons who have had the mixed race experience within what Ron Sundstrom and others have called the “black white binary” or the common twofold conception in American society, culture, and institutional structures that (1) there are things called human races, and that (2) there are primarily only two. Historically, this experience has been painted in terms of tragedy, resulting, arguably in a reification of the concept of the positive value of monoracial identity and monoracial experiences. But the actual experiences of mixed race persons in the United States -- when examined through a philosophical lens -- can be understood to reveal far more nuanced and complex lessons about the human experience, personal identity, and the nature of existence, knowledge, and reality than the tragedy paradigm can contain. Some of these more concrete lessons are the heavily cultural character of human racial identity, the absurdity of the concept of human racial categories, and the hypocrisy of racial discrimination. Other lessons are more ethereal. The mixed race experience in America calls us to revisit afresh more traditional philosophical questions such as the question of being, the concept of the person, appearance versus reality, and the relationship between the individual and society. It also raises and offers an opportunity examine anew more contemporary philosophical issues such as whether objective knowledge claims can be made or understood, the role of the knower in knowledge claims, the degree to which reality can be understood to exist outside of ourselves and our perceptions, and the scope and degree of our ethical obligations to others. In this course, students will read a variety of texts that examine the mixed race experience in America and a variety of works by mixed race persons (particularly mixed race philosophers and writers) in an effort to come to grips with some of these lessons, and to become more racially sensitive human beings in the process.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students' primary objective in this course is to become sensitized to the highly contingent character of human racial categories. A second objective is to become sensitized to the degree to which human racial categorization nonetheless plays a significant role in American society. A third objective is to gain new insight into both traditional and contemporary philosophical questions (e.g., appearance and reality, the continuum between universality and particularity, the relationship between human beings and the world -- a/k/a the mind/body problem -- whether any authentically legitimate difference can be said to exist between descriptive and normative claims, whether objective knowledge can be had) in light of lessons learned from the mixed race experience in America.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADING

- A term paper (70% of the final course grade): The paper should be an argument in support of a thesis analyzing a particular philosophical point raised by one of the readings. The final paper should be fifteen pages long.
- Reading analyses (20% of final grade): Students should post on Moodle an analysis of the reading to be discussed in class that day before the start of the class in question. Analyses may be sent via email if the Moodle system is not working properly, for whatever reason. Each analysis should be at least one page long and should have two components: (1) a summary worth 75% of the analysis grade, and (2) a paragraph critically assessing the reading including thoughts raised by the reading.
- Meaningful class participation (10% of final grade): Meaningful class participation is regular participation in class discussions that evidences substantive engagement with the assigned reading prior to the class meeting.

COURSE MATERIALS

Excerpts from many of the texts below will be made available on Moodle

- Alcoff, Linda Martin. *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*. Oxford University Press. 2005.
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *The Ethics of Identity*. Princeton University Press. 2007.
- Botts, Tina. "Antidiscrimination Law and the Multiracial Experience: A Reply to Nancy Leong," 10 *Hastings Race and Poverty Law Journal* 191, Summer 2013.
- Botts, Tina and Rosemarie Tong. "Women of Color Feminisms," in *Feminist Thought*, 4th Edition. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2013.
- Broyard, Anatole. *Kafka Was the Rage: A Greenwich Village Memoir*. Vintage. 1997.
- Broyard, Anatole. *Intoxicated by My Illness*. Ballantine Books. 1993.
- Broyard, Bliss. *One Drop: My Father's Hidden Life—A Story of Race and Family Secrets*. Back Bay Books. 2008.
- Douglass, Frederick. *The Collected Works of Frederick Douglass*. Halcyon Press. 2009.
- Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Dover Publications. 1995.
- Durrow, Heidi. *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky*. Algonquin Books. 2011.
- Elam, Michelle. *The Souls of Mixed Folk*. Stanford University Press. 2011.
- Hughes, Langston. *The Short Stories of Langston Hughes*. Hill and Wang. 1997.
- Hughes, Langston. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. Vintage. 1995.
- Hughes, Langston. *The Big Sea*. Hill and Wang. 1993.
- Johnson, James Weldon. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. Dover Publications. 1995.
- Larsen, Nella. *Passing*. Penguin Classics. 2003.
- Sundstrom, Ronald. *The Browning of America*. State University of New York Press. 2008.
- Piper, Adrian. *Race, Gender, and Embodiment*. Duke University Press. 2011.
- Zack, Naomi. *Thinking About Race*. Cengage Learning. 2005.
- Zack, Naomi. *Philosophy of Science and Race*. Cengage Learning. 2005.
- Zack, Naomi. *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Micro-diversity*. Rowman and Littlefield. 1995.
- Zack, Naomi. *Race and Mixed Race*. Temple University Press. 1994.

COURSE POLICIES

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students have the responsibility to know and observe UNC Charlotte's "The Code of Student Academic Integrity." See <http://www.legal.uncc.edu/policies/ps-105.html>.

DIVERSITY

UNC Charlotte strives to create an academic climate in which the dignity of all individuals is respected and maintained. Therefore, we celebrate diversity that includes, but is not limited to ability/disability, age, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. The UNC Charlotte Diversity Website is <http://diversity.uncc.edu/>.

EMAIL RETURN POLICY

Students can generally expect an email turn-around within 2 business days. Note, however, that student emails will be returned during business hours only (9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday)

STUDIENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with documented disabilities requiring accommodation in this course should contact Disability Services in Fretwell 230. Their website is <http://www.ds.uncc.edu/>.

RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS

UNC Charlotte provides reasonable accommodations, including a minimum of two excused absences each academic year, for religious observances required by a student's religious practice or belief. Such reasonable accommodations must be requested in accordance with the procedures in this Policy, and include the opportunity for the student to make up any tests or other work missed due to an excused absence for a religious observance. An accommodation request imposes responsibilities and obligations on both the University and the student requesting the accommodation. UNC Charlotte faculty are required, as part of their responsibility to their students and the University, to adhere to this Policy and ensure its full and fair implementation by reasonably accommodating individual religious practices or beliefs. Regardless of any accommodation that may be granted, UNC Charlotte students are responsible for satisfying all academic objectives, requirements and prerequisites as determined by their instructor and the University. A full explanation of this policy can be found at: <http://legal.uncc.edu/policies/up-409>.

COURSE SCHEDULE

August 21	Introduction to Mixed Race Theory
August 28	James Weldon Johnson
September 4	HOLIDAY
September 11	James Weldon Johnson
September 18	Michelle Elam & Heidi Durrow
September 25	Nella Larsen
October 2	Anatole Broyard & Bliss Broyard
October 9	Langston Hughes
October 16	Frederick Douglass
October 23	Adrian Piper
October 30	Kwame Anthony Appiah
November 6	Ronald Sundstrom
November 13	Linda Martín Alcoff
November 20	Naomi Zack
December 4	Tina Botts