

Philosophies of Race: PHILO 394.68

Fall 2009 -- Mondays/Wednesdays 5:35-6:50

Course Syllabus

Professor Linda Martín Alcoff

Department of Philosophy

Office: 1419 Hunter West, 212-772-5081

Office Hours: Wednesdays 3:30-5:00 and by appointment

Course Description:

The concept of “race” has become controversial in recent years. The controversy concerns two broad issues: first, whether “race” is a legitimate way to demarcate human groups, as opposed to, say ethnicity, or simply seeing all persons as individuals; and, second, whether the continued use of the category of race exacerbates racism. Some also argue we have now achieved a post-racial era and the category of race has lost its relevance.

Contemporary philosophers have been making important contributions to this debate, addressing such questions as: what is the true meaning, or meanings, of the concept of “race”? Is the concept of race a mere myth or fiction? Does the use of racial categories exacerbate racism? Is one’s racial identity relevant to one’s judgment, as Judge Sotomayor asserted? What race is a mixed race person? What is the race of Latinos or Arabs? How should questions of ambiguous or complex racial identity be decided, and by whom? Do specific cultures, or artistic forms of expression such as the blues or Hip-hop, express a racialized experience? How is racism best defined, as primarily an emotion or as a belief? Can people of color be racist? How can racism best be reduced and resisted?

This course will explore recent philosophical work on the concept of race and the political effects of racial identities, including the questions above. By considering the debates over race, students will also gain an understanding of how philosophers approach the analysis and meaning of concepts and approach metaphysical and normative debates.

Because of the significant variability of these issues across different parts of the globe, we will mainly draw from readings about the United States focusing on racialized groups here.

Course Requirements:

(1) Attendance and an informed participation in the class discussion is required.

Students who miss no more than 3 classes for whatever reason during the semester will gain 1/3 letter grade at the end, for example, moving from a B- to a B or from a B+ to an A-. Reasons for missing class are irrelevant to this.

(2) Pop-quizzes: there will be several short pop-quizzes throughout the semester to assess your reading comprehension. (total of quizzes: 15%)

(3) two in-class exams: one on Oct. 7 and one on Nov. 18. These will be based on the reading assignments. (50%)

(4) Teaching Collectives: I will assign small groups of teaching collectives who will work together to research, organize, and present a class lecture/discussion on one of the topics addressed by the course. The collective will be responsible for teaching the class for the assigned day in an organized, thoughtful, and imaginative way. Graded collectively. (10%)

(5) Final take-home paper: based on a topic relating to the course materials and your own particular interests and concerns. All topics need to be cleared with me no later than Nov. 11. These papers must be 6-8 pages typed double-spaced. (25%)

There will also be two film nights; attendance is required, and if students write a 1-2 page analysis of the film shown they will get extra credit.

Required Books:

The following required books are available at Shakespeare and Co.:

Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks

Tim Wise, Between Barack and a Hard Place

Patricia Williams, Seeing a Color Blind Future

Tommie Shelby We Who are Dark

Philomena Essed and David Theo Goldberg, editors, Race Critical Theories

Paul Taylor Race: A Philosophical Introduction

Schedule of Readings:

Aug 31: Introduction to the course

section 1: color-blindness vs. race-thinking

Sept 2: Tim Wise, pp. 7-110

Sept. 9: Patricia Williams, Seeing a Color-Blind Future [NO CLASS SEPT 7]

Sept 14, 16: Paul Taylor, pp. 1-118

Optional: Gary Peller, "Race Consciousness"

Section 2: phenomenologies of black identity

Sept 21, 23: Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks selected chaps.

Sept 29: Gooding-Williams "Look, a Negro!" [CLASS ON TUESDAY NOT MONDAY]

WED. SEPT 30: 1st IN-CLASS EXAM

Section 3: what race is, what race isn't

Oct 5, 7: Omi and Winant in Race Critical Theories pp. 123- 145, 455-459

Paul Taylor pp. 70-118

Section 4: cultural racism

Oct 14: Said in Race Critical Theories pp. 15-38, 437-440;

Ranajit Guha, in Race Critical Theories 146-151, 503-505;

Oct. 19, 21: Chandra Mohanty, in Race Critical Theories, pp. 195-219, 506-508;

Vijay Prashad "Forethought" and "The Strange Career of Xenophobia"

Oct. 26: Gooding-Williams, "Black Cupids, White Desires" and "Disney in Africa and the Inner City"

WED. OCT. 28: 2nd IN-CLASS EXAM

Section 5: other others

Nov. 2, 4: Gary Okihiro "Is Yellow white or black?"

Nadine Naber, "Look Mohammed the Terrorist is Coming!"

Louise Cainkar "Thinking Outside the Box: Arabs and Race in the United States"

George Martinez "Mexican Americans and Whiteness"

Juan Flores "The Latino Imaginary"

Section 6: whiteness

Nov. 9, 11: David Roediger in Race Critical Theories pp. 325-343, 493-495;

Charles Mills "White Right: The Idea of *Herrenvolk* Ethics"

Alison Bailey "Despising an Identity They Taught me to Claim"

Kim Q. Hall "My Father's Flag"

Lisa Tessman and Bat-Ami Bar-On "The Other Colors of Whiteness"

Section 7: mixed-race identities

Nov. 16, 18: Maria P.P. Root in Race Critical Theories pp. 355-368, 513-516;

Ronald Sundstrum, "Responsible Multiracial Politics"

Adrian Piper "Passing for White, passing for black"

Langston Hughes "Passing"

Section 8: practices of resistance

Nov. 23, 25: Paul Taylor, Race, pp. 119-183

Manning Marable Race Critical Theories pp. 344-354, 496-499

Vijay Prashad "Kung Fusion: Organize the 'Hood under I-Ching Banners"

Nov. 30, Dec. 2, 7, 9: Tommie Shelby We Who are Dark pp. 101-258,
Tim Wise, pp. 111-149