ES 213 Race & Popular Culture Fall 2020

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3 credits, 37.5 contact hours, no prerequisites

Course Description

Race & Popular Culture will explore how popular culture, race and racism, and law and policy interact in the UK. Students will examine how stereotypes communicated through film, television, books, news and social media, music, art, and other forms of popular culture influence society, law, and policy. Students will engage with guest lecturers, participate in debates, lead class discussions, reflect on films, participate in field trips, and interview a member of the London racial justice community. Students will choose a topic of particular interest to them as the subject of their class paper. By focusing on this topic they will explore in depth an aspect of race and popular culture in the UK and share their discoveries with their classmates. Reading materials will be posted on the course website.

This course fulfills the following student learning objectives:

1. Communicate effectively, both orally and in writing.
2. Demonstrate increased proficiency of cultural competence.
3. Demonstrate awareness of students’ cultural values and biases and how these impact their ability to work with others.
4. Communicate appropriately and effectively with diverse individuals and groups.
5. Demonstrate knowledge of diversity with a focus on your chosen topic.
6. Demonstrate an increased capacity to analyze issues with appreciation for disparate viewpoints.
7. Increase awareness of global perspectives
8. Foster appreciation for different cultures
9. Sharpen skills of critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration and global competence in a global setting

Grading

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**Student Papers**

Students will complete a paper on the topic of their choice related to race and popular culture in the United Kingdom. Students should come prepared to submit their proposed topic on the second week of class. During this class, I will approve topics. Students should email me their approved topic by 8pm that evening unless I have granted an extension. By discussing their topics in class, students will be able to share resources throughout the course when they come across information related to other students’ topics. By the beginning of our fourth class meeting, students should submit an outline of their paper. The outline should consist of a statement of the paper’s argument/thesis, headings indicating which topics will be covered, and a list of sources discovered so far. I will give feedback on the outlines before the next class meeting. A completed rough draft of the paper is due by the beginning of the eighth class meeting. I will provide feedback on these drafts before the ninth class meeting. The final draft of the paper is due one week after the last class meeting.

Papers should be approximately 15 pages in length, double spaced with one-inch margins, with footnotes. 10 of the 50 points will be awarded for handing in the paper topic, outline, and complete first draft on time. Students will earn full points on their papers by making an original contribution to their topic of choice, making a logical argument and supporting the argument with sources.

**Paper Presentations**

Students will have 20 minutes (including a question and answer period) to present their paper to the class and receive feedback. This presentation offers an opportunity for the presenter to learn from their peers, to incorporate their feedback, and to improve their papers. Presentations can include images, videos, and other multi-media. Students will earn full points by making a clear presentation of their topic.

**Debates**

There will be two class debates. Students will be divided into teams. There will be sign-ups ahead of the debates to choose a team. Each debater will have five minutes to present their argument and six minutes to answer questions from the class. They will also have two minutes for rebuttal at the end of the arguments. Students will earn full points for the debate if they present clear arguments, speak loudly and clearly, and listen and respond to the other side’s arguments.

**Interview**

Students will submit a report on an interview with an individual active in London’s racial justice community. Identify the individual you would like to interview, make contact, and set up an in-person interview. Write a report of the interview that outlines what you learned from speaking with this person and how it affected your perspective on an issue related to race and popular culture. Interview reports should be 800 words, double spaced with one-inch margins. They are due before the last class. Students will get full points for writing a clear report of their interview.
Participation

Class participation includes regular attendance and thoughtful contributions to class discussions. Students will earn full points by attending classes, speaking at least once per class, and completing the film review presentation assignment.

The following representative assignments will be adjusted to reflect the availability of local opportunities and guests in addition to current topics in race, culture, and law.

Class 1: What is Race? What is Privilege?

During our first meeting, students will explore the meaning of race in popular culture, society, and law. Is race biological or is it a social construct? How do we know what race we are, or what race others belong to? How is race defined in the context of law? We will engage in exercises and discussion to explore these questions.

Assignment:


Peggy McIntosh, *White Privilege*, http://nationalseedproject.org/white-privilege-unpacking-the-invisible-knapsack


Class 2: What is Race in the UK?

This class will explore how racial identities and racism are different in different places and times. It will compare experiences of race and racism in Hawaii and the US to those in the UK. Students will read and discuss excerpts from *TAKING UP SPACE*, documenting the writers’ experiences being Black and female at Cambridge University and *BLACK, LISTED*, a book that lists and explores the terms used to describe, represent, classify, and oppress Black communities in Britain.

Assignment:


**Excerpts: Jeffrey Boakye, Black, Listed: Black British Culture Explored (2019)**
Class 3: Intersectionality: Gender and Race in the UK

This class will connect racism in the UK to gender issues and other aspects of oppression such as sexuality, gender identity, physical ability, age, and immigration status. Students will read and discuss first-hand accounts of peoples’ experiences at the intersection of race and other forms of oppression in the UK.

Assignment:

Excerpts: AKWUGO EMEJULU & FRANCESCA SOBANDE, TO EXIST IS TO RESIST: BLACK FEMINISM IN EUROPE (2019)

Excerpts: DEREK OWUSU, SAFE: BLACK BRITISH MEN RECLAIMING SPACE (2019)

Class 4: Race and Social Media

Guest Lecturer, Dr. Francesca Sobande, Cardiff University School of Journalism, Media and Culture

Dr. Sobande is a lecturer in Digital Media Studies with research interests and expertise in issues related to race, gender, structural inequalities, media and the marketplace. She is Course Director of the BA Media, Journalism and Culture. Dr. Sobande’s work focuses on digital culture, Black identity and diaspora, feminism, celebrity, the creative and cultural industries, and popular culture. Francesca has published work on YouTube, digital blackness and Black women’s online media experiences (European Journal of Cultural Studies, and Consumption Markets & Culture), celebrity and authenticity (Celebrity Studies), digital remix culture and British politics (IPPR Progressive Review), as well as the role of gender archetypes in marketing the assisted reproductive technology and fertility industry (Marketing Theory).

Assignment

Excerpts: FRANCESCA SOBANDE, THE DIGITAL LIVES OF BLACK WOMEN IN BRITAIN (2020)

Class 5: Race and Resistance in Popular Culture

This class explores how popular culture acts as a site of resistance against racism. The discussion will focus on cultural production that directly or indirectly reproduces or disproves stereotypes. Students will learn how to analyze portraits of people of color in the media and popular culture with a critical eye. Students will also explore how to balance expression, activism, healing and self-care.

Assignment:

Excerpts: RENI EDDO-LODGE, WHY I’M NO LONGER TALKING TO WHITE PEOPLE ABOUT RACE, Bloomsbury (2017).
CHIDERA EGGERUE, WHAT A TIME TO BE ALONE: THE SLUMFLOWER’S GUIDE TO WHY YOU ARE ALREADY ENOUGH (2018)

Class 6: Race and Hair

This class will focus on the issue of hair discrimination. It will examine the laws against hair discrimination enacted in California and New York and their impact. Students will explore whether a similar law enacted in the UK is feasible and strategize as to how it might be implemented.

Assignment:

The C.R.O.W.N. (Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural hair) Act


EXCERPTS: EMMA DABIRI, DON’T TOUCH MY HAIR (2019)

Class 6: Race and State Violence

Guest lecturer, Dr. Eddie Bruce-Jones, Deputy Dean, Birkbeck School of Law

Dr Eddie Bruce-Jones’ is the author of Race in the Shadow of Law: State Violence in Contemporary Europe, a socio-legal study of law and anti-racism work in Europe, with a focus on the German context. It analyses the tension between conventional legal discourse and experiential modes of describing state violence, anti-discrimination legislation and immigration policies to arrive at a deeper understanding of the ways that laws affect the lives of Black Germans. He remains active in research and policy work on deaths in custody and state violence in Europe.

Dr Bruce-Jones is currently writing his second manuscript, which is a methodologically disruptive legal history of the indenture of South Asians to Jamaica during the British colonial era. Dr Bruce-Jones’ research interests fall broadly into four categories: 1) Race and the Law 2) Immigration and Asylum, 3) Critical Approaches to Equality and Human Rights Law and 4) Law and the Humanities.

Assignment:

Class 7 Debate: Government Compensation to the Windrush Generation Falls Short of Real Justice

In the first of two in-class debates, students will argue about the value and impact of the UK government’s compensation to members of the Windrush generation, immigrants from the Caribbean who later became subject to deportation. The Windrush scandal had a monumental impact on UK politics. Students may rely on the sources below to craft their arguments and/or are free to find their own.

Sources:

COLIN GRANT, HOME COMING: VOICES OF THE WINDRUSH GENERATION (2019)

Video: From Slavery to Windrush: My Family’s Story, BBC News

Video: Windrush Generation: The Scandal That Shook Britain Explained and Debated


Class 8: Debate: Britain Must Acknowledge and Compensate For its History of Slavery

In the second in-class debate, students will argue about the role of British slavery in British history and modern British race and racism. Students may rely on the sources below and are free to find their own.

Sources:


Video: Britain’s Forgotten Slave Owners, BBC


Class 9: Race in Britain Represented in Film

Students will choose one of the following films to watch and report on its representation of race and racism in the UK. We will use a sign-up sheet to ensure that everyone watches a different movie. Students may also select a movie of their choice subject to my approval. We will also discuss the lack of representation of people of color in British films, the impact of this low representation, and potential approaches to increasing representation.

My Beautiful Laundrette
Belle
Bend it Like Beckham
Gone Too Far!
A United Kingdom
Pressure (1975)
Burning an Illusion (1981)
Young Soul Rebels
East is East
Babylon (1980)
Jemima and Jimmy
Playing Away

Assignment:

Liv Francis-Cornibert, *Surprised by these movie posters? That's because Britain is erasing Black narratives*, New Statesman, March 13, 2018,
https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2018/03/surprised-these-movie-posters-s-because-britain-erasing-black-narratives

**Class 10: Field Trip: Tate Modern Turbine Hall Memorial**

For this class, students will journey to the Tate Modern to see and discuss Kara Walker’s sculpture, Fons Americanus.

Some history behind the sculpture:

In 1807, the Act for the Abolition of the British Trade in Slaves from any part of the coast or countries of Africa was enacted. As the bicentenary approached in 2007, discussions about how this bicentenary would and should be commemorated – rather than celebrated – heightened. Memorial 2007 launched a campaign to memorialize not the white parliamentary abolitionists, but the Africans who were victims of and fought against the institutions of British slavery. The intention was for the sculpture, chosen by public competition, to be unveiled during the bicentenary year in 2007. Twelve years on, Walker’s intervention at Tate Modern is a stark reminder that no such memorial on a national scale has yet found a place in the capital.
Chaired by Oku Ekpenyon, Memorial 2007 has been campaigning since 2002 to raise funds to complete its mission, but that campaign is now nearly out of time. The group have secured planning permission for a space in the Rose Gardens in Hyde Park, but this expires in less than a month, on November 7, 2019. Every prime minister since the group formed has been asked to support the memorial, but no funds have been forthcoming. Although Boris Johnson, then Mayor of London, hosted an unveiling of a statuette of the memorial sculpture at City Hall, letters to Number 10 since he became prime minister have been met with silence. A petition to ask the government to fund the memorial before the deadline has been gaining momentum.

The state’s failure to acknowledge the pain and suffering of the victims of the British transatlantic slave trade through memorialization is reflective of its failure to acknowledge the legacies of enslavement in contemporary Britain; its legacies of financial and social capital for those who benefited from it and the ongoing marginalization of the descendants of those who were enslaved, as the recent Windrush Scandal painfully exposed. For Ekpenyon, the campaign to bring a memorial into being has been an exhausting 17 years of frustration, disappointment, anger and sadness.

**Class 11 & 12: Paper Presentations**

During the last two class meetings, students will present their papers to the class. Presentations may include powerpoint slides, video or any other kind of visual media. Students will have twenty minutes to present their work, answer questions, and receive feedback.