

HI/AAS 580

A History Of Racial Thought

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### The Course

This course examines the nature of racial feeling, thinking and being as a constitutive dynamic in the rise of modern western selves, cultures and societies. It is based on the perception that racial thought, emotion and being cannot be fully grasped unless we understand the shifting cultural and intellectual contexts in which it was created, which it supports and is supported by it and in which it continues to exist. Racial thinking, as we conceive of it, could not exist without the cultural-intellectual assumptions, presuppositions and assemblages that support it and which it, in turn, supports. Too often we study racial thinking and attitudes in isolation from that cultural background. The result is a flawed understanding of racial thinking and puzzlement about why racism persists despite persistent efforts to eradicate it. In this course we will study racial thinking as a vital and creative aspect of modernity with the understanding that what we know as racial theories and racial attitudes can be compared to the topmost portion of an iceberg. It rests on a vast sub-aquatic structure that we seldom attempt to locate and analyze. Much of our work in this course is directed to revealing that hidden substructure. Therefore, we will focus on subjects that are not traditionally seen as racial, such as the rise of modern science, the 'invention' of the self and modernity. I will introduce and explain examples of racial theories, attitudes and thinking in the course of class discussion and relate them to the cultural substratum revealed in the text that we will study.

The number one requirement for this course is class participation. Each student must come to class fully prepared to engage in class discussion. The course cannot work unless you are committed to active engagement with the texts and the ideas of your colleagues and your instructor. It is my view that discussion is a far better mode of teaching than lecturing. But for this mode of learning to work you must be willing to accept the idea that learning is the product of our thoughtful interaction with others whether or not we are in their physical presence. When Hamlet, in the isolation of his room, says “Oh what a rogue and peasant slave am I!” he is implicitly evaluating himself against cultural standards that he has to some degree internalized. He makes this relationship explicit when in the same speech he asks, “Am I a coward?” Over the course of this semester we will all be conducting a discourse with each other, with the authors of the books we will read, with the people whose ideas they treat and with the wider cultures in which we live. The knowledge that we gain will derive from this interaction. It will not be the result of the instructor giving you information or revealing truth. Theoretical physicists tell us that there are an infinite number of possible histories of the universe. This course operates with the assumption that there are an infinite number of histories of racial thought. Each of us writes one of those histories either implicitly or explicitly. We are going to try to become aware of our authorship and how it relates to the others with whom we are inextricably connected.

A major goal of this course is to foster creativity because creativity is an essential precondition for human liberation and the development of a humane world. I will place great emphasis on encouraging you to make creative connections between ideas and subjects that are normally held to be separate and distinct in the general culture. Thus, each of you will develop a script for a play, a screenplay or a television episode during the course of the semester. Your work will illustrate an aspect of race or racism or an episode in racial history, such as the lynching of Black men in the 19<sup>th</sup> and twentieth centuries. We will discuss the nature of dramatic writing and how to go about engaging in it in class, and a portion of each class session will be devoted to discussing your developing scripts. In the meantime a few helpful remarks are in order. First, you will be drawing on historical and other pertinent research as needed to develop your scripts. That means that you will learn all you can about the historical period in which your play is set in order to bring your characters to life. You will want to gain an understanding of how such people might think or feel about their situations, what their aspirations, hopes and fears might be how they might regard the world of the living and the dead. In other words, you will seek to gain as rich an understanding of the *life world* of your characters as you can and let that understanding inspire and guide your creative efforts.

As you go about your research, reading and thinking you will keep a careful record of what you are doing and how you are doing it. In addition you will keep the research notes that you develop. At the end of the semester you will

draw on those materials to write a report that includes a description of the historical research that grounded your creative work, explaining how your fictional creation is related to “*real world*” history and what you learned about the concept and practice of “history”, its possibilities, limitations and illusions, from your creative work.

You may chose to complete a nonfiction research project instead of a creative project. If you chose this option your research paper should be between ten and fifteen pages in length and must include reference notes and a bibliography. You must use at least ten books and at least several primary sources, such as documents, letters, diaries, films and novels.

**The creative or research project will be your only written work for this course I have made this allowance in order to give you ample time for working on it. Accordingly, I will not grant any extensions to the due date of April 24. Your creative or research project must be submitted to me in class on April 24 or it will not be accepted.**

In addition to the creative or research project each of you will make a ten minutes oral presentation in class on one of the texts that we read for this course.

I am excited about the prospect of working with you all in what I hope you will find an interesting and engaging manner.

## Grading

You will be graded as follows:

Class participation: 50%

Written work: 50%

## Due Dates

Character selection or research topic due February 13 in class.

First draft of your character sketch due in class on March 20

Final projects (creative and research) due: In class on April 24.

You may email me your creative project topics or research topics at any time from today. You must get my approval before beginning your work. I will not accept a final project on a topic that I have not approved.

## Required Texts

Kant - Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, 2nd (Hackett), ISBN 9780872205932

Kant - Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals, (Camb), ISBN 9781107401068

Kierkegaard - Concept of Anxiety, (Cal-Prince), ISBN 9780691020112

Nietzsche - On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo, (Random), ISBN 9780679724629

Nietzsche - Beyond Good and Evil, (Random), ISBN 9780679724650

Defoe - Robinson Crusoe, (Oxf), ISBN 9780199553976

Fredrickson - Racism: A Short History, (Cal-Prince), ISBN 9780691116525

Brooks - Flesh and Machines, (Random), ISBN 9780375725272

Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, (Perseus D/Grove), ISBN 9780802143006

Bu Bois, The Souls of Black Folks

Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son

### Course Outline

January 23: Orientation

January 30: Kant, Groundwork.

February 6: Kierkegaard, The Concept of Anxiety.

February 13 (Tuesday): Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil

February 21: Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morals

**Be prepared to discuss your character development in general terms.**

February 27: Baldwin, Notes of a Native Son

March 13: Defoe, Robinson Crusoe

March 20: Frederickson, Racism

**First draft of your character sketch due in class**

March 27: Fanon, Black Skin White Masks

April 3: Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folks

April 10: Brooks, Flesh and Machines

April 19: Discussion of creative projects

April 24: **Oral Presentation of creative projects and submission of projects in class**

May 5 retrospective