English 111-A: The Racial Imaginary
Block 3: October 26–November 18, 2015, in 121 Law Hall
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Office hours: Mondays 3-4pm in Van Etten-Lacey House, & by appointment

WELCOME
Race is a social construct—an idea we imagine—but it's an imagined idea so powerful it shapes our histories, our social systems, and our daily lives. Using Claudia Rankine and Beth Loffreda's anthology *The Racial Imaginary* as a critical text, this course will examine the role of race in the life of the mind, with particular attention to the consequences of American racial conceptions in today's literary, political, and interpersonal spheres. What happens when, as one author writes, our imaginations are "riddled with the stories racism built"? When "the voices least sanctioned to speak come from the bodies most on display"? Or when an author is silent because "I'm afraid of what I might say about race, afraid of examining what I think and feel about race"? We'll read a variety of texts—including James Baldwin's memoirs, Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah's criticism, and Eula Biss's lyric investigations—in an attempt to address such questions, and to learn how to better write about race and ethnicity ourselves.

IN THIS COURSE YOU WILL…
- Write prolifically
- Think critically about literary, academic, and popular texts, and about the world around you
- Examine the reading process in fine-grain detail
    - Figure out what makes you trust an essay, what convinces you of an argument, and how your reading experience differs from others'
    - Unravel the factors that shape a reading experience, including audience, purpose, context, and design
- Examine the writing process in fine-grain detail
    - Determine which generative exercises and revising practices best help you develop and communicate your thinking
    - *Use* the writing process as a means of thinking about and figuring out new ideas
    - Learn to approach your own compositions as you would someone else's, and apply that awareness to bring your work as close as possible to achieving its desired effect
    - Become a more ambitious, ruthless, and radical reviser
- Converse meaningfully with your peers, in writing and aloud, about ideas, texts, events, and issues that matter
- Enter into meaningful written conversation with texts by academic and non-academic writers

This course supports the Educational Outcomes of Cornell College with particular emphases on inquiry, communication, intercultural literacy, ethical behavior, and citizenship.

MATERIALS
- *The Racial Imaginary*, edited by Claudia Rankine, Beth Loffreda, and Max King Capp
- *Notes from No Man's Land*, by Eula Biss
- Additional readings: These must be <u>printed out</u> and brought to class on the day they are due.
- Full-size notebook for in-class writing by hand.

HOW SHOULD I READ IN THIS CLASS?

- Actively. Your conversation with published authors begins while you read. Keep a pen or pencil in hand, and use it to underline phrases and ideas that strike you, ask questions in the margins, and record your range of reactions. You are expected to have opinions about each reading, and to be able to say where they originate, and why you feel the way you do.
- Carefully. Read all texts slowly. Look up words that are unfamiliar. Then read the entire text again. You'll notice new things the second time around, and learn just as much, if not more, than the first time you read it.
- Attentively. We'll be reading to understand WHAT a text is saying, of course—as college students, you'll be expected to understand an essay's argument, reasoning, evidence, and other content. But reading in this class will never be about trying to figure out what an author was thinking, or what symbols and meanings they were conniving to hide from their reader. Instead, our focus will be on HOW a text says what it says, and what makes us believe or doubt it.
- Respectfully. Many of the essays we'll discuss this semester will be published, and some will be works-in-progress by your peers. You are expected to treat all work, no matter whose, with the utmost honor and care.

HOW SHOULD I WRITE IN THIS CLASS?

- Honestly. Don't pretend to believe things you don't believe. Don't shy away from complexity or contradiction. Dig deeper, go further, look more closely, and try again.
- Passionately. Do not ever write anything that bores you. You'll learn much more—and your writing will improve much more—if you are writing about something that genuinely interests you. If you ever need help finding a topic, let me know. I love brainstorming.
    - Hint: If you feel bored while you are writing, then your writing is boring. If you feel passionately about your inquiry, your reader will feel it too. And the more precisely you define your interest, the more palpable it will be.

WHAT WILL I WRITE IN THIS CLASS?

- Freewrites and other informal in-class exercises. These are designed to stretch your writing muscles and facilitate risk. Don't think too hard; don't worry about punctuation or spelling or the end result; try not to stop writing; see what comes out. Think of your notebook as a sketchbook for ideas that may or may not see canvas. The goal here is expression, more than communication.
- Reading responses (in our class's Moodle forum). Sometimes you'll be asked to address a particular question—like what you might learn from the reading to apply in your own work. Most of the time, you'll be responding to the content of a text, or analyzing how an author's choices affected you. These responses will be short (250-400 words) and fairly informal, but you should read over them to clarify your ideas and style before you post.
- Responses to peer work. Mostly written in-class, these responses are one of your greatest learning opportunities—a chance to think actively and creatively about someone else's work-in-progress, developing a muscle that will help you to think actively and creatively about your own. Workshop is thereby a gift from one writer to a group of readers. You can show your gratitude for this exercise by being generous in return. Be thorough in describing your reading experience to the writer, and empathetic in exploring what the essay is trying to do, where it feels most incisive or alive, and how it might deepen and develop further.
- Process notes and reflections. These are opportunities to reflect on your goals and your writing process for a particular assignment. They're also a chance to reflect on your writing habits more generally, and revise your behavior accordingly.

- Drafts. These drafts should be typed (double-spaced) and complete in the sense that they have beginning, middle, and end (or almost-end). They shouldn't be first drafts, but they needn't be particularly polished, either—they're works in progress. Bring in something you care about, something you're excited about, and something that you hope to revise further—something for which you will genuinely welcome our feedback.
- Revisions. You'll be expected to substantially revise all of your drafts after workshop. "Substantially" means doing much more than changing some punctuation marks or words here and there. You won't be expected to take into account all of the feedback you receive—that's impossible—but you should select the feedback that resonates with you, and revise accordingly, reconsidering structure, meaning, example, reasoning, and anything else that needs to be addressed. You might even think of this revision (re-"vision": seeing it all over again!) as an entirely new project on the same subject or theme. (See "Radical Revision" worksheet, Moodle week 4.) Remember that revising *is* writing.
- Formal essays. Please keep in mind the old, not-school definition of the *essay* as *essai*: a trial or an attempt. You'll write three in this class, following MLA format:
    - Essay 1 will reflect on a personal experience with race, in conversation with at least one assigned reading.
    - Essay 2 will sharpen and define a precise question about the racial imaginary, and so serve as a springboard into Essay 3.
    - Essay 3 will use research to investigate a question about the consequences of racial conceptions in the literary, political, or interpersonal sphere.

POLICIES

THIS IS *YOUR* CLASS.
Your success in this course is your own responsibility. If there's something you'd like to change about the class or your performance; if you have questions about a discussion, an assignment, feedback you've received, or anything else; or if there's something you simply want me to know, please take the initiative to speak to me or email me.

GRADING
If I didn't have to grade you, I wouldn't. I want students to work hard because they care about the work, not because they crave the praise of an A or fear the disapproval of a D. I want above all to help you get satisfaction from your work on your own terms. But the college deems grades necessary, at this stage in your lives, because they are shorthand—crass, ugly shorthand—for me to communicate to the future my completely subjective evaluation of your performance at this tiny moment in the present.
Unfortunate as it is, I take that responsibility seriously, and have high expectations. I am always, always happy to give you a verbal or written evaluation that is more nuanced than an A or a D, but here's how that most primitive evaluation will break down:

- Participation (*see below*): 24%
- Reading responses in Moodle forum (*Oct. 27, Oct. 29, Nov. 4, Nov. 5*): 16%
- Essay 1 (*Oct. 30*), including all process materials: 15%
- Group research project/presentation (*Nov. 2-3*): 5%
- Essay 2 (*Nov. 6*), including all process materials: 15%
- Presentation (*Nov. 16*): 5%
- Essay 3 (*Nov. 18*), including all process materials: 20%

Earning a C in this class signifies satisfactory performance: producing competent college-level work, completing all projects satisfactorily and on time, contributing positively to the classroom

environment, giving basic attention to revision, and showing improvement. Good work (B) exceeds requirements by demonstrating evidence of effective revision; showing preparation, organization, and improvement; and/or contributing actively and constructively in the classroom. Excellent work (A) shows initiative and sophistication that consistently exceeds expectations, reflecting a deep commitment to the creative process; a capacity for analysis, reflection, and bold revision; and/or an active, thoughtful leadership role in the class. Earning a grade of D or lower means that you have not met minimum class standards in some way, have not shown consistent effort, or have hurt your grade by plagiarizing, not turning in work, or failing to participate.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

You're expected to take inspiration from published work and from your classmates, but any borrowing (of language, concept, or form) must be clearly and explicitly acknowledged. If you're unsure whether or how to acknowledge source material, always *ask.* Paraphrasing, too, must always be acknowledged. Failure to appropriately acknowledge sources—i.e., plagiarism—will be reported to the College.

ON PARTICIPATION

You are expected to attend every class meeting, arriving focused, prepared, and on time. More than merely attending, though, you are expected to be *present* in every sense of the word—mentally and physically—no matter who is speaking or what the class activity is that day. This class is a collaborative effort that requires constructive input from everyone. But effective participation is not simply about having a lot to say; it's about maintaining a strong level of engagement with your fellow classmates and the subject at hand, thinking consciously about when to share the floor, how to listen dynamically, and when to speak up in a way that will take the conversation further and create openings for others to join in. Participate generously, keeping in mind that your thoughtful contributions, and your facilitation of others' contributions, constitute a crucial part of everyone's learning experience. YOU are an essential element of the course; your ideas are part of our required reading.

The work of this class will happen in an ANALOG SPACE. Not because there's anything wrong with the digital spaces we inhabit, but because a cell-phone and computer-free zone will facilitate the hush we need to read and write and observe and listen and think well. Cell phones, laptops, and all other electronic devices must be turned off and stowed away during class, old-school airplane-style. Exceptions will be made on a case-by-case basis (e.g., for emergencies or to accommodate individual learning styles).

I keep a daily record of participation and will share this feedback with you at midterm and on request. Any unexcused absence will cause your participation grade to drop incrementally; falling asleep or otherwise being "absent" during class—even if you are physically present—will also be recorded as absence.

EXCUSED ABSENCES (for illness, emergency, religious obligation, etc.) will not affect your grade, but—because so much of your learning in this course happens during irreproducible in-class conversation—more than three excused absences will occasion a conversation about potential withdrawal. Please be in touch about excused absences before they occur, if possible, and provide documentation where applicable. Students are responsible for finding out about work missed during absences of any kind.

LATE WORK is acceptable only by arrangement *at least 24 hours in advance* with me, and it may not always be logistically possible to make up a workshop, even if an absence is excused. I will try to accommodate you—it helps if you are in touch by email as soon as possible.

LEARNING ACCOMMODATIONS

Cornell College is committed to providing equal educational opportunities to all students. If you have a

documented learning disability and will need accommodation in this course, you must request the accommodation(s) from me as early as possible and no later than the end of week one. Additional information about the policies and procedures for accommodation of learning disabilities is available at http://www.cornellcollege.edu/academic-support-and-advising/disabilities/index.shtml. Whether or not you have a documented disability, you are encouraged to be in touch as soon as possible about your particular learning needs.

CAMPUS RESOURCES

Please make use of the Writing Studio (and consultant Gabi Torres, gtorres@cornellcollege.edu) and Cole Library (and consulting librarian Jen Rouse, jrouse@cornellcollege.edu).

SOME WRITING ADVICE FROM YOUR SEASONED INSTRUCTOR

- After you complete a draft (of an essay or even a discussion post), go back and shorten the beginning. Then expand the end. Almost always, beginnings are too long (the writer is grinding her wheels) and endings too short (relieved to have gotten there, the writer gives up).
- Here's a rule of thumb for incorporating research into an essay: For every one sentence of paraphrase or quotation, you should include at least three sentences of explanation and analysis that show the reader why this particular idea or wording is important to the inquiry or argument your essay is developing.
- I don't like to pay much attention in class to conventions of grammar and punctuation, because these details, which correspond to ostensibly "right" and "wrong" choices in the context of academia, can distract from the hoarier and arguably more important questions writers face—questions of structure, style, inclusion and exclusion of content, and so on—for which there *are* no "right" or "wrong" choices. But here's an attempt to prevent some frequent errors:
    - A semicolon should be used only when there is a complete sentence (as defined by subject + verb) on either side. Semicolons should be used sparingly; they are for those rare moments when, for whatever reason, two independent sentences need to kiss.
    - A regular colon is like an equals sign: it explains, expands, or introduces a list.
    - Lonely commas can't sit between two independent sentences, this results in a comma splice. Use a period and capital letter—or, in rare cases, a semicolon—instead.

TERMS AND CONCEPTS

The following terms and concepts will help us focus on the rhetoric (or the HOW) of the published and in-process texts we examine this semester, including our own. *Note: This course defines "text" very broadly, encompassing nearly every communicative act or artifact you can observe and make meaning of (i.e., read). Texts include images, speeches, advertisements, public service announcements, television and radio programs, films, photos, paintings, websites, songs, performances, and so on.*

- Audience: To whom is the text addressed? What about the text suggests a particular target audience? // When writing or speaking, toward whom are you directing your ideas?
- Purpose: What is the writer or speaker trying to achieve in the text? This is related to a question that might arise during reading discussions: *what does the writer want from us?* // When you read and write and speak, what response do you hope to elicit from your audience: interest, sympathy, agreement, understanding, a change of heart or behavior, or something else?
- Occasion or context: Into what situation is the writer or speaker introducing ideas? What surrounding concerns (social, political, cultural, historical, etc.) may have helped shape or define the author's message? What surrounding concerns define your reading of the text? // your writing of it?

- Persuasive appeals: There are three primary types of appeals: to reason or logic (*logos*: the *why* and *because*), to emotion (*pathos*), and to morality or justice, usually via the author's credibility, character, or authority (*ethos*).
- Other useful considerations include the assumptions that underpin such appeals (what values and beliefs does the rhetorician assume the audience shares?), and the crucial question of style: beyond content (what the author is saying, what s/he includes or excludes), consider organization (*how* is the text arranged? what information comes first, second, and so on?), voice or register (formal/informal, fluid, crisp, conversational, colloquial, elevated…), and word choice.

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COURSE SCHEDULE

All readings are DUE at the noted date and time. Asterisks indicate readings available on Moodle; these must be printed out before you read them and brought to class. Meeting times are listed below. 12:30pm classes run until 3pm; 9:30am meetings run until 11am except on November 16, when we may continue until 12:30pm; 10am classes may last until 12:30.

week one
PERSONAL STORIES, CONTEXTUAL SELVES

M OCT 26
9am introductions & in-class writing
1pm *"Readings for 10/26" [Tonouchi, Baldwin, Tan]

T OCT 27
9:30am Biss, "Relations" (15-35); *Yang, "Paper Tigers"; *McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege"; Moodle forum response due by 9am
1pm *reading discussion & discussion of* Race: The Power of an Illusion *(film)*

W OCT 28
12:30pm *Hoagland and Rankine conversation; *RI* 13-25, 31-48, 106-112

TH OCT 29
10am Essay 1 draft due (bring 2 copies). *Workshop.*
by 3pm Read *Baldwin, "Stranger in the Village" and Biss, "Back to Buxton" (117-130) and respond on Moodle forum: What can you learn from these essays to use in your own? *(No afternoon meeting.)*

F OCT 30
12:30pm Essay 1 due. *Library research session.*

week two
REPRESENTATION, INQUIRY, CRITICISM

M NOV 2
9:30am *Ghansah, "If He Hollers"; *Rankine re Williams; *Gay, "Girls Girls Girls"; *Zhang, "They Pretend to Be Us While Pretending We Don't Exist"
1pm *Group research readings uploaded to Moodle*. *Discussion of* Ethnic Notions *(film).*

T NOV 3
12:30pm Read student-provided readings. *Presentations, discussion, workshop.*

W NOV 4
12:30pm *RI* 83-90, 123-39, 170-195, 208-11, 214-18, 238-41, 262-66; Moodle forum response due by noon. *Midterm evaluations (in-class).*

TH NOV 5
10am Essay 2 draft due (bring 2 copies). *Workshop.*
by 3pm Read *Gatto, "Against School" and Biss, "Land Mines" (45-55) and respond on Moodle forum: What can you learn from these essays to use in your own? *(No afternoon meeting.)*

F NOV 6
12:30pm Essay 2 due. *Discussion of Gatto and Biss; Essay 3 sounding board.*

week three
RESEARCH INTO ARGUMENT

M NOV 9
9:30am *Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*; Biss, "Is This Kansas" (131-44); **This American Life*, "The Problem We All Live With"; *Coates, "The Case for Reparations"; Biss, "No Man's Land" (145-69)
1pm Essay 3 proposals due (2 copies, 2 possibilities)

T NOV 10
12:30pm *Dartmouth readings (TBA)

W NOV 11
Conferences and independent research
3:30pm Jacqueline Roche reading at the Van Etten-Lacey House.

TH NOV 12
10am Essay 3 draft due. *Workshop.*
Conferences as needed.

F NOV 13
10am Essay 3 re-draft due, with vision document. *Workshop.*
Conferences as needed.

week four
RE-VISION AND REVISION

M NOV 16
9:30am Presentations.

T NOV 17
12:30pm Revised work-in-progress (at least two completely new paragraphs) due. *In-class revision and reflection, presentation and celebration*.

W NOV 18
12:30pm Final essays due, with all process materials.