

## English 111: The Racial Imaginary

Block 2: October 3–26, 2016, in the Van Etten-Lacey House

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Office hours: Fridays 11-12pm in the Van Etten-Lacey House, & by appointment

### WELCOME!

This is a course in college writing. It is equally a course about race: how and why race is imagined, and what the consequences of this act of imagination might be. Both topics are huge and difficult. Instead of aiming to master either, we'll work to deepen, sharpen, and complicate our grasp of both.

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 Ta-Nehisi Coates's memoirs, Wesley Yang'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.

### YOU CAN EXPECT TO...

- Write prolifically
- Think critically about literary, academic, and popular texts, and about the world around you
- Examine the reading process in fine-grain detail
  - o Figure out what makes you trust an essay, what convinces you of an argument, and how your reading experience differs from others'
  - o Unravel the factors that shape a reading experience, including purpose, context, and design
- Examine the writing process in fine-grain detail
  - o Determine which generative exercises and revising practices best help you develop and communicate your thinking
  - o Use the writing process as a means of thinking about and figuring out new ideas
  - o 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
  - o 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
- Create a public project that uses research to contextualize a contemporary race-related incident for your peers

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

### MATERIALS

- *Citizen*, by Claudia Rankine
- *The Racial Imaginary*, edited by Claudia Rankine, Beth Loffreda, and Max King Cap
- Additional readings: These must be printed out and brought to class on the day they are due.
- Full-size notebook for in-class writing by hand.

## 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 speak up (or send an email). This syllabus is meant to sketch the outlines of a learning experience that you modify and actualize yourself.

## ON READING

Read all texts slowly, carefully, at least twice. Look up words that are unfamiliar, and note their definitions (you'll want them handy during class). Your conversation with published authors begins here, so 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 why you feel the way you do.

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 respect, attention, and care.

## ON WRITING

Above all, write 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. 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 feel bored or stuck, *talk to me*. I want to help you find enjoyment in your work.

## ON PARTICIPATION

You are expected to attend every class meeting. 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. This class is a collaborative effort that requires constructive input from everyone. You should arrive focused, prepared, and on time. 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).

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 our required reading.

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; 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. 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 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 day four. 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.

## ON 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: 25%
- Revisions:
  - o Found text (*Oct. 5*): 5%
  - o Encounter or reckoning essay (*Oct. 11*): 10%
  - o Open letter (*Oct. 18*): 10%
- Moodle posts (*Oct. 5, 6, 13*): 10%
- Group research project/presentation (*Oct. 13*): 10%
- Public project (*Oct. 21*): 18%
- Academic/reflective essay (*Oct. 26*): 12%

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 writing and thinking 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.

Note: I don't believe in "extra credit." But there are a number of excellent supplementary readings linked here and posted to Moodle. Bringing ideas from any of these readings into our class discussions will be a welcome "extra."

## 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.

## CAMPUS RESOURCES

Please make use of the Writing Studio (and consultant Jennifer Haigh, [jhaigh@cornellcollege.edu](mailto:jhaigh@cornellcollege.edu)) and Cole Library (and interim CTL director/consulting librarian Jen Rouse, [jrouse@cornellcollege.edu](mailto:jrouse@cornellcollege.edu))!

The following SCHEDULE is tentative. Any changes will be announced in class.

	<i>morning (9:30-11am unless otherwise noted)</i>	<i>afternoon (1pm-3pm)</i>	<i>at home</i>	<i>for more information... (available on Moodle)</i>
M. Oct. 3 (9am start)	<p>Course introductions. Freewriting.</p> <p>Personal reflection &amp; introductions (Lyon, Cisneros).</p> <p>Introduction to <b>race as a construct</b>. <i>Race: The Power of an Illusion</i>. Race vs. ethnicity.</p> <p>Found text readings (Coste Lewis, Sharif, NourbeSe Philip, Shields).</p> <p><u>Over lunch</u>: Carefully read syllabus. Bring at least one question to afternoon class.</p>	<p>Syllabus, continued.</p> <p>Partner introductions.</p> <p>Walking as research (found text assignment).</p> <p>Introduction to public project &amp; brainstorm.</p>	<p>McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"</p> <p><a href="#">"Sorting People"</a></p> <p><u>Found text assignment</u>: Find a body of text somewhere in the world. Using the examples we looked at together today for inspiration, reassemble it in a way that shows us something we might not have seen or noticed about it before.</p> <p><u>Upload your draft to Moodle by midnight</u>, and bring a copy to class tomorrow.</p> <p>Bring <i>Citizen</i> to class.</p>	<p>Brodin, "Where Did Race Come From?"; <a href="#">Gannon, "Race Is a Social Construct"</a>; <a href="#">Coates, "What We Mean When We Say Race Is a Social Construct"</a>; <a href="#">Smedley &amp; Smedley, "Race as Biology is Fiction; Racism as a Social Problem Is Real"</a>; McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege"</p>
T. Oct. 4	<p>Names. (Finish introductions.)</p> <p>Reflections on race as construct, "Invisible Backpack." (<i>Fade Away</i>, RI 116)</p> <p>Found text: sharing &amp; workshop.</p>	<p>"Invisible Backpack," continued.</p> <p>Found text revision time.</p> <p>Begin reading <i>Citizen</i> together.</p>	<p><i>Citizen</i> pp. 1-37; Yang, "Paper Tigers"</p> <p><u>Found text revision</u>: Bring a printed copy of your revision to turn in tomorrow morning, along with a copy of the draft and process materials.</p>	<p><a href="#">Youngman, "ART THOUGHTZ"</a>; <a href="#">"Serena Williams vs Jennifer Capriati Blown Calls"</a>; <a href="#">Rankine, "The Meaning of Serena Williams"</a>; <a href="#">Sue, "Microaggressions in Everyday Life"</a></p>
W. Oct. 5	<p><i>Citizen</i>: As research. As multimedia text. As multigenre text. As...</p> <p>Yang.</p> <p>Found text reflection.</p>	<p>Screening: <a href="#">White People</a> / <a href="#">White Like Me</a></p> <p><a href="#">Hsu, "The Trouble with White People"</a></p> <p>Writing: encounters with race.</p>	<p><i>Citizen</i> pp. 41-87; Biss, "Is This Kansas"</p> <p><u>Moodle discussion post</u> by midnight. Incorporate at least one quotation (found text!).</p>	<p><a href="#">"Situations" by Claudia Rankine and John Lucas</a></p>
Th. Oct. 6	<p><i>Citizen</i> and Biss. Introduction to MLA style.</p> <p><u>Over lunch</u>: Continue work on personal essay begun yesterday. <u>Bring a typed draft</u> to 1pm class.</p>	<p>Workshop: encounters with race.</p> <p>Writing exercise: personal to critical.</p>	<p><a href="#">Heller, "The Big Uneasy"</a></p> <p>Read and complete exercises: <a href="https://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/">https://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/</a></p> <p><u>To Moodle by midnight</u>: Five questions inspired by the Heller essay. Be as specific as possible.</p>	<p><a href="#">The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, "Campus Racial Incidents"</a></p>
F. Oct. 7	<p>Heller conversation.</p> <p>Freewriting, dialectical notebook, brainstorming. Introduction to group project.</p> <p><u>Over lunch</u>: Tonouchi reading.</p>	<p>Tonouchi, "Da State of Pidgin Address"</p> <p>Walk.</p> <p>Writing: reckoning.</p>	<p><a href="#">Samundi, "We Need a Decolonized, Not a 'Diverse,' Education"</a></p> <p>Continue work on reckoning essay from class today. <u>Bring a typed draft</u> to Monday morning class.</p>	<p>Gatto, "Against School" Baldwin, "If Black English Isn't a Language..." Tan, "Mother Tongue"</p> <p><a href="#">This American Life, "The Problem We All Live With"</a></p>

Week 2

M. Oct. 10	Workshop: reckoning.  Samundi conversation.	Samundi, continued: How do we assign credibility?  Group project work: question brainstorming.  Introduction to annotated bibliography.	<i>Citizen</i> pp. 88-119  <u>Revise either</u> the personal essay or the reckoning essay. Bring the revision, along with drafts, peer feedback, and any other materials, to morning class.	Selected articles from last year's groups: <a href="#">Moule, "Understanding Unconscious Bias..."</a> <a href="#">Towbin et al., "Images of Gender, Race, Age, and Sexual Orientation in Disney..."</a> <a href="#">Cobb, "Tarantino Unchained"</a> <a href="#">Flatow, "What Has Changed About Police Brutality..."</a>
T. Oct. 11	Library session & group work time.  <u>Over lunch:</u> Finish <i>Citizen</i> .	<i>Citizen</i> conversation.	<u>By 1pm tomorrow:</u> Upload your selected article to Moodle discussion forum, along with annotated bibliography showing two other source options.	<a href="#">Dartmouth, "Materials for First-year Writers"</a>
W. Oct. 12	In groups: Prepare an annotated bibliography and select an article to answer your research question. Upload the article to Moodle by 1pm.	In groups: Prepare presentation explaining why you selected this particular source. Include 2-3 honest questions about HOW or WHY the text is written as it is.	<u>Print out, carefully read, and annotate</u> articles from all groups. Bring questions to tomorrow's class.  Complete <u>midterm self-evaluation</u> .	<a href="#">Ghansah, "If He Hollers Let Him Go"</a>
Th. Oct. 13	Presentations and discussions of selected work.	Presentations, continued.  Hoagland & Rankine: Introduction to <i>The Racial Imaginary</i> & the Open Letter project.	Loffreda & Rankine, "Introduction" ( <i>RI</i> 13-22); Perry, "Americana/Dying of Thirst"  <u>Moodle discussion post</u> by midnight. Incorporate at least one (cited) paraphrase.	<a href="#">Older, "This Far: Notes on Love and Revolution"</a>  <a href="#">Demary, "A Conversation with Andre Perry"</a>
F. Oct. 14	Discussion of <i>RI</i> introduction & Perry letter.  Public project brainstorming.  <u>Over lunch:</u> Baldwin, "A Letter to My Nephew"	Baldwin.  Walk.  In-class writing...	Coates, "Letter to My Son"; Osmundson, "Love Letter to White People"; Llewellyn, "What We Could Do with Writing" ( <i>RI</i> 43-48)  <u>Draft:</u> an open letter to a specific person or a specific group, drawing on something you've learned about race in this class. Due 1pm Monday.  Public project research and proposals. <u>Bring two potential ideas</u> on Monday morning.	Baldwin, "Notes of a Native Son," "Stranger in the Village"

Week 3				
M. Oct. 17	Public project sounding board.  The open letter form.  Time with <i>The Racial Imaginary</i> .	Workshop: open letters.  Time with <i>The Racial Imaginary</i> , continued.	Loffreda & Membreno, "Open Letter" (RI 208-213)  Public project research: bring in two potential sources tomorrow.  <u>Revise</u> your open letter. Show us something new about a text, or about your own experience, by setting the two in juxtaposition. Bring a copy, with all process materials, to tomorrow morning's class.	
T. Oct. 18	Public project research & drafting time.	Time with <i>The Racial Imaginary</i> .	<u>Sketch or outline</u> of public project due tomorrow morning.	
W. Oct. 19	Workshop: public project outline.	Time with <i>The Racial Imaginary</i> .	<u>Complete draft</u> of public project due tomorrow morning.	6pm: Garth Greenwell reads from <i>What Belongs to You</i> at the Van Etten-Lacey House (4pm conversation with Alliance at Harlan House)
Th. Oct. 20	Workshop: public project draft.	Radical revision, additional research, conferences.	<u>Final revision</u> of public project due in the morning.	
F. Oct. 21	Public project finals due: presentations, distribution, in-class writing.	Conferences as needed.	<u>Draft</u> of academic/reflective essay due Monday morning (bring 2 copies to class).	2-5pm on Saturday: Join the Center for the Literary Arts Homecoming reception, featuring refreshments and alumni and readings (including yours truly)!
Week 4				
M. Oct. 24	Workshop: essay draft.  Coates, "Creative Breakthroughs"	Radical revision exercises.	<u>Revision</u> : Do at least one more exercise from the Radical Revision worksheet. Bring at least two brand-new paragraphs to class tomorrow.	
T. Oct. 25	Workshop: second draft.	Conferences as needed.	<u>Final revisions</u> of academic/reflection essay by 1pm tomorrow, with all process materials.	
W. Oct. 26	<i>No class meeting</i> : Writing & conferences as needed.	12:30pm: Final revisions due with all process materials.	HAPPY BLOCK BREAK!	