

Race and Racism in Shakespeare
AIQS 100-114: Academic Inquiry Seminar
Fall 2023

Course meeting times: MWF 3:20-4:10pm

Classroom: Crawford 13A

Dr. John Higgins

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Office Hours: By appointment through the WRC & email

Academic Inquiry Seminar Course Description:

This course develops the habits of mind and writing/communication processes that characterize academic discourse. Students engage with questions and topics from multiple perspectives, and they establish effective writing processes (including planning, drafting, responding to feedback, revising, reflecting, and self-assessing).

Course Description: This class will use several of Shakespeare's plays to introduce students to central questions surrounding the scholarly examination of race. Several decades ago, many scholars argued that race as a social category was not really present in Shakespeare's plays or his culture; clearly there were prejudices in both, but these literary scholars and historians argued that these prejudices were not based in "race" as it has come to be understood in a modern sense. More recent scholars have challenged this view, however, and argued that racial categories provide a powerful explanatory for explaining what goes on in Shakespeare's plays. This class will look at several Shakespeare plays with central characters who – in a modern understanding – seem to come from racial minorities. We will ask whether or not Shakespeare and his culture seem to understand these people as belonging to a distinct "race" of people. We will also ask whether Shakespeare's plays present race as a biological reality or a social construction, and whether the plays seem to endorse the prejudices articulated by characters within them. We'll also discuss how race intersects with gender, sexuality and class, and examine several modern adaptations of the plays that we read, to see how more contemporary writers, actors and directors have engaged with the potentially troubling implications of how Shakespeare represented minority characters.

Course Learning Outcomes:

- Establish the dispositions, habits, and writing processes that support successful academic engagement
- Participate in academic inquiry by formulating questions based on information gaps or by reexamining existing information, and by contributing their own insights
- Think critically and deliberate ethically about differences in values and assumptions, including describing the way that systems privilege some perspectives and present barriers to others
- Identify and use (analyze, engage with, attribute appropriately) authoritative information sources and scholarly concepts in written, oral, and/or multimodal projects

- Effectively communicate information and ideas in formats appropriate to the assignment and in ways that meet the needs/expectations of the audience, context, and purpose

Required Texts and Materials:

- Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*.
- Shakespeare, William. *Othello*.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*.
- Césaire, Aime. *A Tempest*.
- Film adaptations and images, posted on Canvas and screened in class.
- Other supplementary readings, posted on Canvas
- Gerald Graff & Cathy Birkinstein, *They Say / I Say*, 5th Ed. New York: W.W. Norton, C., 2021. (ISBN: 978-0393538700)

Class Schedule (Subject to Revision)

Week 1: Aug. 28 – Sept. 1

M: Course Introduction

W: The Writing Process

F: Writing Workshop: Endorsement v. Depiction

Screening: Film Clip – Shown in Class

Discussion Board: Free Write, written Friday during class

Week 2: Sept. 4 – Sept. 8

M: *Labor Day – No Class*

W: *Merchant of Venice*, Act 1

F: *Merchant*, Act 2

Readings: Acts 1 & 2

Discussion Board: Commonplace Book, due Friday before class

Week 3: Sept. 11 – Sept. 15

M: *Merchant*, Act 3

W: *Merchant*, Act 4

F: Qualified Claims & Thesis Statements

Readings: Acts 3 & 4, Coryate, Willet & Holinshed (Canvas)

Discussion Board: Thesis & Claims Draft (written Friday during class)

Week 4: Sept. 18 – Sept. 22

M: *Merchant*, Act 5

W: Introductory Paragraphs

F: **First Essay Peer Review**

Readings: Act 5

Assignment: **Rough Draft** (due Thursday @ 8pm)

Week 5: Sept. 25 – Sept. 29

M: *Othello*, Act 1
W: *Othello*, Act 2
F: Using Evidence in Body Paragraphs
Readings: Acts 1 & 2
Assignment: **Final Draft, Essay #1** (due Friday @ 8pm)

Week 6: Oct. 2 – Oct. 6
M: *Othello*, Act 3
W: *Othello*, Act 4
F: Counterarguments
Readings: Acts 3 & 4
Discussion Board: Commonplace Book, due Wednesday before Class

Week 7: Oct. 9 – Oct. 13
M: *Othello*, Act 5
W: Act 5 con't & Paraphrase v. Quotation
F: **Second Essay Peer Review**
Readings: Act 5
Assignment: **Rough Draft** (due Thursday @ 8pm)
Discussion Board: Quotation & Paraphrase Exercise, written Wed. in-class

Week 8: Oct. 16 – Oct. 20
M: *The Tempest*, Act 1
W: *Tempest*, Act 2
F: Essay Questions
Readings: Acts 1 & 2
Assignment: **Final Draft, Essay #2** (due Friday @ 8pm)

Week 9: Oct. 23 – Oct. 27
M: *Fall Break – No Class*
W: *Tempest*, Act 3
F: Essay Questions, Part 2
Readings: Act 3
Discussion Board: Free Write (due Friday before class)

Week 10: Oct. 30 – Nov. 3
M: *Tempest*, Act 4
W: *Tempest*, Act 5
F: Using Evidence, Part 2
Readings: Act 4 & 5
Discussion Board: Commonplace Book (due Friday before class)

Week 11: Nov. 6 – Nov. 10
M: Césaire's *A Tempest*, Act 1
W: *A Tempest*, Acts 2 & 3

F: Third Essay Peer Review

Readings: Césaire, A Tempest

Assignment: Rough Draft (due Thursday @ 8pm)

Week 12: Nov. 13 – Nov. 17

M: *The Tempest*: Images and Costumes (Canvas & In-Class)

W: *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* (Canvas)

F: Final Paper Brainstorms

Readings: Vogel, Desdemona

Assignment: Final Draft, Essay #3 (due Friday @ 8pm)

Discussion Board: Final Paper Brainstorms, written Friday in class

Week 13: Nov. 20 – Nov. 24

M: *Othello*: Stage & Screen Adaptations (Canvas & In-Class)

W: *Thanksgiving* – No Class

F: *Thanksgiving* – No Class

Readings: None

Week 14: Nov. 27 – Dec. 1

M: *Merchant*: Stage & Screen Adaptations (Canvas & In-Class)

W: Presentations Skills & Workshop

F: Presentations

Readings: Speak (Canvas)

Discussion Board: “Elevator Pitch” & “Headline Statement” (due Wed. before class)

Week 15: Dec. 4 – Dec. 8

M: Presentations

W: Presentations

F: Reflection & Course Summary

Final Essay Due: Dec. 11 @ 8pm (on Canvas)

Final Portfolio Due: Dec. 16 @ 8pm (on Canvas)

Grade Calculation

Participation	–	20%
Presentation	–	10%
Writing Folder & Reflective Essay	–	15%
Essay #1 (4 pages)	–	10%
Essay #2 (5 pages)	–	15%
Essay #3 (5 pages)	–	20%
Essay #4 (3 pages creative, 3 reflective)	–	10%

Writing Assignments

Essay #1: Argumentative Essay (4-5 pages)

This essay will ask students to answer one of several prompt questions relating to race and Jewishness in *The Merchant of Venice*. Students will have to answer the question with a focused thesis statement, and defend their thesis with evidence from the text, logical reasons and well-organized body paragraphs.

Essay #2: Counterargument Essay (5 pages)

The second essay will ask students to look at how race and either gender or class intersect in Shakespeare's *Othello*. As with the first essay, students will be given prompt questions that they should answer in a thesis statement, and use evidence and reasons to support their argument. This essay will also require students to consider a *counterargument* - an argument that another reader of the play might legitimately make – and explain to your reader why your own argument proves stronger.

Essay #3: Question & Argument Essay (5 pages)

The third essay will not only ask students to make an *argument*, but also to develop their own topic and question about Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (possibly in conversation with Césaire's *A Tempest*). Considerable time will be spent in class discussing how to pose academic questions and focus on a sufficiently narrow topic for the essay. As with previous assignments, students will have to answer their question with a thesis, defend their argument with evidence and reasons, and engage a potential counter-argument.

Essay #4: Adapting Shakespeare (3 pages creative, 3 pages reflective)

The final essay for the course will ask students to *adapt* one of the three plays that we have already read, focusing on the way that these plays depict minority characters. The paper will have two components. In the first portion, you will sketch out or write an adaptation of the play, either rewriting the work, or simply making casting, costuming and staging decisions. In the second portion, you will explain your adaptations through an analysis of the original primary source and your own creative engagement with it. The assignment will be judged primarily on the student's ability to demonstrate critical thinking skills, not on her creative abilities.

Final Portfolio & Reflective Essay

The Writing Program and the University require that students submit a reflective essay following the completion of their AIQS course. In this class, I will ask you to write a brief essay - 900-1100 words - reflecting on your growth and progress as a writer over the course of the semester. I will also ask you to compile an electronic “folder” of documents that help in the process of reflection and which support the claims that you make in your reflection.

Presentation

Students will be asked to present their adaptation and analysis to the rest of the class in a brief, “elevator pitch” style format. Presentations will be ***brief*** (3 minutes long), and students should be prepared to field one or two questions from the professor and classmates following their presentation. The assignment is meant to mimic the types of situations that students will encounter when attending conferences and other professional meetings, and should be approached more as a “sales pitch” for the student’s work and ideas than as an argumentative talk.

Revision

Developing a strategy for drafting and revision is an important aspect of being a successful writer. Therefore, in this class you will be required to write multiple drafts of every assignment. On some assignments, this will involve planning and drafting essays during class time. On some assignments this will involve asking you to participate in review – undertaken either in class amongst peers, or at the writing center with consultants – of drafts written outside of class. In all cases, you will have to learn to decide when a paper is ready for a final submission to the professor for a grade.

Even with hard work, though, students will sometimes submit final drafts that are either not successful, or do not meet the standards and the goals that they set for themselves. If you encounter this situation you may ***choose*** to revise your first, second, or third essay once more after the your final evaluation. If you choose to do this, you are strongly encouraged ***meet with the professor*** to discuss a revision strategy before submitting the revised final draft. Your meeting should be ***within one week of the graded essay*** being returned to you, and you will have ***two weeks after the paper was returned*** to complete the revisions and resubmit. The grade on the revision will ***replace the original grade***.

Late Assignments

Unless a student has arranged an extension prior to the due date, or has a documented medical emergency or other accommodation, late assignments will be subject to penalty. Five points will be deducted from your grade for each day that papers are late. Extensions will be granted at the discretion of the instructor, generally in consultation with an appropriate dean or the Office of Disability Resources.

Class Participation

Student participation is a key element of learning in all classes. AIQS classes are organized as seminars, meaning that they prize interactive learning, classroom discussion, and exploration over the “banking model” of education in which faculty experts deposit knowledge into empty students. Moreover, discussion and classroom exercises make-up the key, unwritten first draft of most student writing; before ideas are crafted as formal essays, they are usually tested out in conversations with other students and in informal exercises composed in and for the class. As a result, participation makes up a major element of student grades. In general, engaged, thoughtful and respectful interaction with other students, the professor and the course materials are the hallmark of good participation. Disengaged, silent, and/or disrespectful students should expect lower scores.

I have posted a rubric that I will use to assign participation grades on Canvas. Students will periodically be asked to reflect upon and assess their own class participation. Although the professor will assign the participation grade, he will discuss discrepancies between his assessment of students' participation and their own, and he will also discuss strategies for improvement with interested students.

Attendance

Since AIQS classes are conducted as seminars, attendance in class is a required element, and does not make up a separate component of the grade. Students are expected to treat all meetings as *required*. That said, students ***should not attend in person classes when feeling ill***. Students will be offered an opportunity to do make up work in the case of absences, and only require a doctor's note should they miss a significant number of classes.

Students will be offered *two absences without reason*; these will not require make-up work. Further absences will be considered – holistically – as part of the participation grade. Students who miss a significant number of class sessions with no explanation should expect to see this recorded in their participation grade (potentially resulting in failure); students who miss a majority of classes should expect to see their final course grade suffer as well. Students who are always absent with an explanation, and make a good faith effort to keep in touch with the professor and make up for missed class work, will not be penalized, even if they are absent from several classes.

Discussion Boards

Throughout the semester, students will be asked to write *briefly* on discussion boards in preparation for approximately one class per week. Discussion posts are considered *idea generating activities*, and thus will not be graded. For the most part, they will also not receive comments from me, though I will read them before the relevant class and will send a student a private note if the post does not show much evidence of having done the reading for the class period. Discussion posts will be considered – holistically – when assessing students' class participation. Consistently thoughtful and excellent discussion posts will obviously help participation grades; rougher and more developing posts will also help, provided that the student shows clear engagement with the reading and the course ideas. Students who digress off topic, show no engagement with readings, or who do not post at all will not be productively participating in the class, and their participation grades will reflect this.

Academic Integrity

Students at Case Western Reserve University are expected to uphold the highest ethical standards of academic conduct. Academic integrity addresses all forms of academic dishonesty, including cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation, obstruction, and submitting without permission work to one course that was completed for another course. Please review the complete academic integrity policy. Any violation of the policy will be reported to the Dean of Undergraduate Studies and the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards.

Accommodations

In accordance with federal law, if you have a documented disability, you may be eligible to request accommodations from Disability Resources. In order to be considered for

accommodations, you must first register with the Disability Resources office. Please contact their office to register at [216.368.5230](tel:216.368.5230) or [get more information on how to begin the process](#). Please keep in mind that accommodations are not retroactive.

Email Policy & Use of Electronic Devices

I find that email is a good way to answer simple questions, but a very inefficient way to answer complex questions, particularly those related to student writing. As a result, I will generally **limit answers** to questions I receive via email **to two sentences or less**. Please do not be shy about asking questions, or interpret this as me saying, “I don’t like getting email.” Simply expect that I will frequently suggest that students see me in office hours to answer complex questions, and make an appointment to see me if you know that your question requires a complex answer.

It may take up to 48 hours for me to respond to emails, and I generally ***will not read email after business hours or on weekends***. Please keep this in mind not only when waiting for a response, but also when ***writing an email***. Email that assumes the student will get a response in less than 48 hours or outside of regular business hours are generally considered unprofessional. This being said, many types of email do not assume that students will get an immediate response, and so are appropriate to send as soon as issues arise. As examples: Last minute requests for extensions are unprofessional, since they assume that the professor will respond quickly. Notes letting the professor know that you are feeling unwell and can’t come to class are considered professional; even though the professor may not read the email before class, the student does not need permission in order to miss class when feeling unwell, and the professor can contact the student to discuss possible make-up work over the next two days or when the student is feeling better.

Email should also ***follow basic professional etiquette***, and thus contain a heading, closing, subject line, and text explaining the purpose of the email and any attachments. One of your goals in college should be to develop the skills of a working professional; email to professors, just like email to bosses and potential clients, should not read like a text message.

Laptop computers and tablets should be used ***in an appropriate way***. Browsing social media, chatting, or checking email in class is obviously inappropriate. Doing research during small group work, using laptops to complete group writing assignments, and so forth, are all appropriate uses of technology. Cell phones should be ***silenced and put away*** during class, primarily because it will improve your learning. Research has shown that phones present on students’ desks and in their pockets – even when switched off – hinder performance on basic memory tests.

Writing Resource Center

The Writing Resource Center (WRC) provides support for writers across the university. Consultants in the WRC provide individualized, hands-on instruction specific to each writer’s goals. They encourage visits from writers at any stage of the writing process, from understanding contexts for writing and interpreting assignment prompts, to organizing and revising ideas. And, they work with all campus writers, including undergraduate students working on course assignments, graduate students working on theses and dissertations, post-doctoral and faculty

writers composing grant applications and specialized genres, and staff members working on personal and professional projects.

Visit: <https://case.edu/artsci/writing/resources/writing-center> for more information and to make an appointment.