

Race, Culture, & Colorblindness

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Stephane Robolin, SAS - English Writing Program

T 04:30-07:30

Honors College Seminar Room N106

College Ave Campus

Will Count Towards SAS - English Writing Program Major

Will Count Towards SAS - English Writing Program Minor

The spectacles of violence against black citizens, xenophobic discussions of immigration, racial profiling, and the continuing Black Lives Matter campaigns across the United States all remind us that earlier celebrations of an American “post-racial” society were strikingly premature. But what does a post-racial society mean, and why is that our chief way of imagining a socially just society? This honors seminar will explore the various ways that conceptions of race have organized and shaped modern American society into the twenty-first century. This exploration requires posing several other key questions: If race is a social construction, what exactly does that mean? How do specific conceptions of race predominate, and how do they change over time? What does racial difference mean in our current post-9/11 moment? How do we define and identify racism, and how do we combat it?

We will approach these questions from a variety of angles: legal studies, history, literature, film, cultural studies, sociology, and geography. This course asks students to think about race as a changing cluster of ideas and a range of practices that form one of our defining categories of difference. That approach involves an accounting of social power that, on one level, seems baldly apparent, and yet, in other ways, often remains unspoken, invisible, or stubbornly hard to pin down. Part of what has made race so slippery is the popular and legal adoption of colorblindness—the attempt to not recognize race—as a way to address racial disparities. But its controversial roots and assumptions provide us with reason to scrutinize this approach that continues to define our contemporary moment. We will, thus, pay particular attention to colorblindness and its role in the formation and reformation of American culture.

To assist us in our intellectual journey, we will turn to studies, essays, films, poems, and position pieces that will help us think about race in American culture. The readings will likely include the following (in part or in full): Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen*, H.M. Naqvi’s *Home Boy*, Ta-Nehesi Coates’s *Between the World and Me*, Richard Delgado’s *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, Karen Fields and Barbara Fields’s *Racecraft*, Craig Wilder’s *Ebony and Ivy*, Wendy Cheng’s *The Changs Next Door to the Diazes*, Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*, Jeff Chang’s *Who We Be*, and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s *Racism Without Racists*. Films may include *Invictus*, *Dear White People*, *Trouble the Water*, and *Flag Wars*.

Student evaluations will be based on regular participation, one presentation, weekly short blog posts, and 2 essays.

STÉPHANE ROBOLIN is an associate professor of English and director of the Center for African Studies. The author of *Grounds of Engagement: Apartheid-Era African American and South African Writing*

(2015). He studies post-colonial African literature, African American literature, critical race theory, and spatial theory.