Unteaching Racism
RC Core100.01 Winter, 2006
Tu. Thurs. 3-5 PM 28 Tyler

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Attendance Policy: If you must be absent, please try to message me beforehand and let me know what's up. Then contact another student for any assignments and to find out what happened in class. Please do not ask me for this information. You also must make up any videos you missed. They’re available at the Film and Video Library -- second floor Shapiro Library (UGLI).

Required Reading (books available at Shaman Drum, or buy used on line, or in some cases, find on reserve at the Benz library in the RC)

- Coursepack available at Ulrich’s
- Olson, Steve: Mapping Human History: Discovering the Past Through our Genes
- Katzenelson, Ira: When Affirmative Action Was White
- Your choice of one book from each category in the list below (total 5 books):
  - African American
    - Williams, Gregory Howard (1995) Life on the color line: The true story of a white boy who discovered he was black. New York: Dutton. How a child who was raised in the south with the privileges afforded to whites saw
everything change when he moved north and made the acquaintance of his black relatives.

**Asian American**

Fadiman, Anne (1997). *The spirit catches you and you fall down.* NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. A child of an immigrant family from Laos is diagnosed with severe epilepsy, a condition that is interpreted quite differently by her US doctors and her Hmong relatives. Winner of the National Book Critic’s Circle Award.

Him, Chanrithy (2000). *When broken glass floats.* NY: WW Norton. Child’s eye view of Cambodia during the bloody reign of the Khmer Rouge. An unforgettable account of how children survive under impossible conditions: forced labor camps, starvation, illness, and terror. It is important to know this history in order to understand Cambodian immigrants and their lives in the U.S.


**Native American**

of the 1960s. Her account of Indian boarding schools, meant to “civilize” and “uplift” the natives, is gripping.


**Latino/Hispanic**

Breslin, Jimmy (2002). *The short, sweet dream of Eduardo Gutiérrez.* The life of an undocumented immigrant, from his childhood in a dusty town in central Mexico to his tragic death on a construction site in Brooklyn, as reported by one of America’s most respected journalists. A New York Times Notable Book.


Thomas, Piri (1967; 1997) *Down these mean streets.* Classic tale of Spanish Harlem during the depression years of the 1930s. From the book jacket: “Here was the testament of a born outsider: a Puerto Rican in English-speaking America; a dark-skinned morenito in a family that refused to acknowledge its African blood. Here was an unsparing document of Thomas’s plunge into the deadly consolations of drugs, street fighting, and armed robbery . . .”
European American

Conley, Dalton (2000) Honky. NY: Vintage. A middle class child of artsy parents who lived by choice in the slums of Manhattan’s Lower East Side, Dalton Conley grew up, as he puts it, “a white minority, a honky in a community of color.” Now a sociologist, he tells stories of his childhood that explain his emerging views on race, on being a minority, and how the “cultural capital” of the white middle class allowed him to escape the projects while many of his friends were left behind.

Covington, Dennis (1995) Salvation on Sand Mountain. NY: Penguin. This book has an unlikely theme: the tradition of religious snake handling among poor rural whites of southern Appalachia. Beautifully written by a veteran reporter who goes to the region to cover a bizarre murder trial and finds himself drawn into “a world of unshakable faith, where people handle poisonous snakes, drink strychnine, speak in tongues, lay hands on the sick, and, some claim, raise the dead.”

Macdonald, Michael Patrick (1999) All Souls: A Family from Southie. NY: Ballantine. From the book jacket: “Michael Patrick MacDonald grew up in ‘the best place in the world’--the Old Colony projects of South Boston--where 85% of the residents collect welfare in an area with the highest concentration of impoverished whites in the U.S. This is a contradictory world where residents are besieged by gangs and crime but refuse to admit any problems, remaining fiercely loyal to their community. We meet his mother, Ma MacDonald, an accordion-playing, spiked-heel-wearing, indomitable mother to all; Whitey Bulger, the lord of Southie, gangster and father figure, protector and punisher; and Michael’s beloved siblings, nearly half of whom were lost forever to drugs, murder, or suicide.”

Rose, Mike (1989) Lives on the boundary. NY: Penguin. A child of Italian immigrant parents growing up in a Los Angeles ghetto, Mike Rose describes the bleakness of poverty: uninspired schooling, low expectations, poor grades, and impoverished intellectual life. After a chance encounter with an encouraging guidance counselor, Rose decides to apply to college, where he finally began to thrive through careful, devoted mentorship by his teachers. Now a professor, Rose advocates for all students who were never given a chance.

author’s father, a Polish Jew who survived the horror of Auschwitz, his mother, who committed suicide after their safe arrival in America, and the author himself, whose emotions go haywire trying make sense of it all. Winner of the 1992 Pulitzer Prize

Required Video Viewing:
- A Class Divided
- In Whose Honor? American Indian Mascots in Sports
- Unconstitutional: The War on our Civil Liberties

Introduction
The idea for this course arose from a conversation with a former Residential College student, a white male, who told me that many of his classmates felt the urgency of doing something -- not just talking, but doing something tangible in the community about racism. Although I have written a book about race (“When Race Breaks Out” – a chapter of which is in our course pack) and have spoken out and written about racism for some years, I wasn't aware of the extent to which racism still permeates our society until I started putting this course together about eight years ago. And I still have much to learn. No matter how much I read and talk to people and reflect on my experiences growing up in a so-called "integrated" Chicago community in the 1950s, graduating from a predominantly black high school, and working in Asia and Africa in education and community development, I still can't say I understand -- or even fully see -- the extent of the damage that white people have done to people of color. Although it is relatively easy for me to identify and explain the injustices of colonialism and institutional racism, I continue to underestimate the emotional power of the everyday indignities that I have been taught to view as "normal": the demeaning of intelligence and abilities, the glassy-eyed avoidance, the ridicule, the barely concealed disgust and contempt that people of my color and background so often feel toward the world majority. And I continue to be amazed that despite this history of rejection, most people in the African American community and in fact every community of color I have visited around the world have reached out to me with great friendliness and warmth even before they had the slightest knowledge of me as an individual. This makes me feel a great humility -- not guilt, really, but a sense that I have been shown very quietly and powerfully what it is to be a human being. I hope to share some of this feeling as I work with you.

Course Goals:
* to learn some ways that race, ethnicity, country of origin, gender, class, culture, and history have shaped relations between people of color and whites in the United States
* to come to grips with the ways that "blatant" and "subtle" forms of racism have shaped us all individually and personally
* to expand our knowledge of how racism is taught, learned, practiced and institutionalized
* to practice "un-teaching racism" in the local community
Through readings, videos, discussions, speakers, student presentations, and attempts to facilitate conversations in the community, we will look for answers to six broad, deceptively simple questions: What is race? What is racism? How are minority group identities assigned, chosen, and experienced? How significant is racism and stereotyping in the U.S. today? How do we internalize our society's racist assumptions and practices? How can we un-learn and un-teach racism?

**Note:** This course can be quite a different experience for students of color than it is for white students. Many of the readings and videos are meant to demonstrate the prevalence of racism today, on campus, in the streets, and in the lives of people of color. Discussion of these facts, so obvious to most students of color yet so elusive to most well-meaning whites, may lead to tension and exasperation on the part of students of color, and confusion, guilt, shame, silence, and/or anger on the part of whites. Please be reassured, all these reactions and emotions are normal. Racism is inherently wounding for both people of color and for whites, and attending to the wound will cause a certain amount of pain. Come and talk to me if it hurts too much. Write about your feelings in your journal assignments. But don’t give up on your classmates. Everyone is here because they sincerely want to help solve the problem.

**Community Anti-Racism Project**

Working in small groups, you will plan and carry out a significant effort to "un-teach" racism in the community. This might take the form of facilitating conversations about racism on campus or in a local high school classroom. You might create some kind of art exhibit or live performance on campus and start up a conversation about it with an audience. You could create a publication for distribution around the RC or on campus. You could promote discussions about self-segregation on campus or set up a public debate about the different ways to promote equal access to higher education. You could talk with student groups about the racism and racial profiling against Muslims and Arab Americans that has occurred since September 11th. Whatever you choose to do, it should involve an active educational effort and be carried out over the latter two-thirds of the semester. You will write up a report of your community project for your final writing assignment, below.

**Writing Assignments**

**1. Reading “Journal”**

For each class I will assign several pages of in-depth reflection on course readings (articles and books). For each assignment I expect you to write at least two typed, double-spaced pages -- more if you like. Sometimes I will assign specific questions or issues to consider. Other times the assignment will be more open-ended; for these, you may ask yourself questions, refer to personal experiences or other readings, disagree with the author, and show your thinking about the reading. I will grade these journal entries as follows: ++ for excellent work (you’ve impressed me), + for acceptable work (it’s okay, but it could be deeper or more interesting), and RW (rewrite) for entries that need more depth of reflection, specific details, and/or attention to sentence level issues (grammar, sentence structure, word choice, clarity of ideas). At the end of the semester I will ask you
to arrange your journals sequentially, read them over thoroughly, and write a 2 to 3-page introduction to your portfolio that assesses your personal growth (see Assessment).

2. Dialogue on racism (5-8 pages)
   For this paper I would like you to create a character to dialogue with on paper about a thorny racial issue that we have discussed in class or that you have encountered in your family or neighborhood. Write in interview style, using realistic conversational language and tone. The object is to show you can listen fairly to your imaginary character, no matter how obnoxious s/he is, and keep that person listening while you help move the conversation toward a more accurate and compassionate understanding of the racial situation. The more you listen to and participate in conversations about race outside of class, the easier this paper will be. However, I prefer that you go further than simply reporting a conversation that actually took place. Try to stretch yourself by addressing a subject that you've not felt confident to take on in the past, or that has often ended in frustration for you.

3. Report on Your Community Anti-Racism Project (about 5 pages)
   For this paper, I'd like you to imagine a somewhat different audience. If you were employed by a neighborhood agency to "unteach racism" in the community, you would be expected to write a report of your activities. Your supervisor would want to know exactly what you did, what the challenges were, how you would fairly describe and analyze your successes and failures, and what work remains to be done in this area by others. Agencies appreciate reports that are succinct, thorough, honest, and easy reading.

Assessment
Your grade/evaluation in this course will be determined by your attendance, the quality and quantity of your written work, your contributions to class discussion, and your engagement in group projects and community activities. Since this is a first year writing course, it will be very important to improve your writing throughout the semester. I expect you to write several drafts of your longer papers and I will give you almost endless opportunities for feedback and rewriting of each assignment. BE PRO-ACTIVE in making appointments with me for individual feedback and help with your writing. I'll make plenty of time for each of you.

Because of my philosophy of teaching and learning, I generally do not letter-grade writing, as it seems to pit students against each other, inhibit risk-taking, and make both students and teacher forget any higher purpose of education. I'll be glad to tell you how you're doing on a major paper or in the course if you ask me in conference. It will be up to you to keep up with assignments, because nothing will ever really come "due" until the last day of class. On this day at our farewell get-together you should bring your portfolio which will include all drafts of all your writing including your reading journals, two longer papers, and a 2-3 page introduction to your portfolio that describes your personal
growth in the course. These pages should be arranged sequentially and fastened securely with metal prongs in a cardboard binder.

My Expectations
  * Be there! Attendance counts.
  * Be involved! Speak up in class, come see me in conference, show responsible leadership in group work and your community project.
  * Do significant work on your writing. Be attentive to feedback, come to me for help at any stage in the writing process, edit your final products carefully.
  * Be honest and pro-active. If I say or do something that hurts or offends you, let me know about it. If the group process is driving you crazy, use your skills in listening and dialogue to help improve the situation. If your group project isn't getting off the ground, come and talk to me about it.

CALENDAR (subject to change according to your needs)
Thurs. Jan. 5  Introductions, Team Building
Tues. Jan. 10 Group Norms. Definitions
Mon. Jan. 16 MLK Day! Required attendance at least one event, preferably on MLK day itself. Activities continue for several weeks. You will write up the event, giving a short synopsis of what went on as well as your analysis and reactions.
Tues. Jan. 17 Discussion: How real is “race”? (continued)
Thurs. Jan. 19 Video: *A class divided.* Discussion: How do we learn to be racist?
Tues. Jan. 24 Discussion: stereotypes; hate “incidents” on campus
Thurs. Jan. 26 Discussion: Hurricane Katrina and other racial indignities
Tues. Jan. 31 Discussion: African American Identities (your chosen books)
Thurs. Feb. 2 Discussion: Which is worse, race or class privilege?
Tues. Feb. 7 Discussion: *When Affirmative Action Was White*
Thurs. Feb. 9 Discussion: *Race Privilege is Wrong and Bad* and other arguments against affirmative action. **Start community projects**
Tues. Feb. 14 The Michigan Civil Rights Initiative (MCRI): Should it be passed?
Thurs. Feb. 16 Discussion: Racial identity development
Tues. Feb. 21 Discussion: Asian American Identities (your chosen books)

  **WINTER RECESS**
Tues. Mar. 7 Video and discussion: *In Whose Honor?* Are sports “mascots” offensive? Who gets to decide? What should be done?
Thurs. Mar. 9 Discussion: Native American Identities (your chosen books)
Tues. Mar. 14 Discussion: Institutional Racism (housing, health care)
Thurs. Mar. 16 Institutional Racism (criminal justice system)
Tues. Mar. 21 Institutional racism (education)
Thurs. Mar. 23 Discussion Hispanic/Latino Identities (your chosen books)
Tues. Mar. 28 Discussion: Arab Americans, Islam, and 9-11
Thurs. Mar. 30 Video: *Unconstitutional: The War on Our Civil Liberties*
Tues. Apr. 4 Discussion: White Identities (your chosen books)
Thurs. Apr. 6  Discussion (students’ choice of topic)
Tues. Apr. 11 Discussion (students’ choice of topic)

Report on Community Project due.

Thurs. Apr. 13 Discussion: Being an ally
Tues. Apr. 18 PORTFOLIOS DUE. Food and sharing of community
projects at Helen's house, 2266 Georgetown Blvd. Ann Arbor (off
Plymouth Rd. just above North Campus).