

# Racial & Ethnic Visual Representations

**NCLC 375 010**

**4 credits, 1 EL credit**

**Fall 2013**

**Thursdays 1:30-4:10**

**Robinson B 222**

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**And by appointment**

## Commitment to Diversity

New Century College, an intentionally inclusive community, promotes and maintains an equitable and just work and learning environment. We welcome and value individuals and their differences including race, economic status, gender expression and identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion or irreligion, age and disability. We value our diverse student body and desire to increase the diversity of our faculty and staff.

- We commit to supporting students, faculty and staff who have been the victims of bias and discrimination.
- We promote continuous learning and improvement to create an environment that values diverse points of view and life experiences.
- We believe that faculty, staff and students play a role in creating an environment that engages diverse points of view.
- We believe that by fostering their willingness to hear and learn from a variety of sources and viewpoints, our students will gain competence in communication, critical thinking and global understanding, aware of their biases and how they affect their interactions with others and the world.

*"We must continually remind students in the classroom that expression of different opinions and dissenting ideas affirms the intellectual process. We should forcefully explain that our role is not to teach them to think as we do but rather to teach them, by example, the importance of taking a stance that is rooted in rigorous engagement with the full range of ideas about a topic."*

**-bell hooks, Chronicle of Higher Education, p. 14, 1994**

## Course Description

This investigates the media representations of a range racial and ethnic groups and the ways the visuals have changed over the years in response to cultural events, such as civil rights laws, the events of 9-11, wars, etc. A significant portion of the course will be devoted to understanding the concept of the social construction of race and ethnicity. We will analyze images and apply the theoretical concepts of scholars such as bell hooks, Michael Davis, Janell Hobson, Cherrie Moraga, and Edward Said. In this broad-brush approach, we will interrogate the ways in which the negative visual stereotypes of the marginalized groups are similar (and the result of western and white hegemony) and also the ways in which they are unique to the specific group.

We will spend a considerable amount of time on the historical record of black people in this country not only because theirs is a unique history but also because many of the theoretical concepts that we study will be readily applied to multiple races and ethnic groups. We will explore the meaning of representation and what it means to be the object of a type of representation that feels *not real*. We will spend time talking about power – who has it; who does not, why it matters, and how it influences visual representations. Although nearly all of our written texts will deal with African American, your EL work and much of our classroom work will focus on other minority groups. As we go along, we will learn to apply the concepts we have learned to the contemporary representations of groups such as Arabs, Muslims, Latinos/as, Southeast Asians, etc. Ultimately, we will attempt to answer the questions about why this study matters and what our responsibility is in charting a different course.

### **Required Texts**

- Berger, Maurice. *White Lies: Race and the Myths of Whiteness*, NY: Farrar, Staus and Giroux, 1999.
- Harris, Michael D. *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina press, 2003.
- Hobson, Janell. *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture*, NY: Routledge, 2005
- Various supplemental texts throughout the semester

### **Course Goals**

**Students who actively engage with the written and visual texts and class discussions, will be able to**

- Demonstrate an understanding of visual “representations” and how these representations generate knowledge – accurate or not – about who we are, what we stand for, and what we believe in.
- Articulate the complexities of visual representations and how they can be used as vehicle for social change as well as for producing inaccurate stereotypes about minorities.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the cultural history and social movements that have generated visual representations.
- Express clearly the role of visual representations for marginalized groups as they have appeared on the currents of political and social changes.
- Define representation and how various representations affect the viewers as well as the subjects of the representations.
- Achieve a heightened understanding of the way our ideas and assumptions are governed by the visual images we view regularly.
- Demonstrate new ways to interrogate media images and other forms of visual representations regarding of some of the big questions/injustices/myths they address.

**These goals will be achieved through**

- Creating a self-portrait project, writing an explication, and producing a 3-minute class presentation.
- Maintaining a sketchbook/journal.
- Working in groups to produce a final presentation, which is based on individual EL research.
- Writing two integrative essays.
- Engaging in class discussions and completing in-class quizzes and writing assignments.
- Writing an integrated essay.

**This learning community stresses the following competencies:**

- Communication: written, verbal and visual
- Critical thinking: analysis of written and visual texts
- Group interaction: collaborative in-class work and classroom discussions

## Course Requirements and Evaluation

I expect careful reading of all assignments and consistent class attendance. My expectation is that you will be actively engaged in the learning process by completing the assignments on time. You must turn in all writing assignments at the beginning of the class period *in person!* On course assignments, late papers will be marked down one letter grade for each day they are late. **I will not accept work that is more than one week late without a valid written medical excuse or notice of a death in the family. I do allow a “life happens” rule: that is, you may turn in an assignment late (up to 3 calendar days) with no late penalty.** Be sure to write “life happens” on the top of the paper. The life happens rule does *not* apply to the presentations or to any group work. The evaluation process will take place through written feedback, interaction in peer groups and conversations with me.

### Grades for the course will be determined from the following assignments.

- Sketchbook/journal 10%
- Participation and in-class writing assignments/quizzes 20%
- Integrative essay #1 20%
- Self-portrait project and presentation 10%
- Final Group presentation 10%
- Experiential learning 10%
- Integrative essay #2 20%

### Grading Standards

- **A = Superior** work that demonstrates a profound commitment to the assignment or to the course material, and that uses the material as a springboard for independent thought and work.
- **B = Very good** work that completely fulfills all of the requirements of the assignment or of the course in a conscientious and dedicated manner and that demonstrates mastery of the course content.
- **C = Satisfactory work** that fulfills all of the requirements of the assignment or of the course but that falls short of demonstrating rigor and mastery.
- **D = Unsatisfactory work**
- **F = Fails** to fulfill the requirements of the assignment or of the course

### Attendance and Prepared Participation

Attendance is expected and active participation is essential for success in this course because most of what occurs in class cannot be replicated outside of the classroom. DVDs presented in class are usually NOT found in the library. I will take attendance at the beginning of each class period, and both absences and lateness will count against your final grade, as explained in the University catalogue. **More than 2 absences will certainly reduce your final grade; two late arrivals or early departures will count as one absence.** Please note that it is your responsibility to find out from a classmate (not from your professor) what happened during any class from which you were absent. **Please also be aware that I do not grant permission to miss class or to leave class early. There are no excused or unexcused absences. You may always choose to be here or not, but missed classes can never be made up.**

Your participation grade is based on more than occupying a seat in the classroom during every class. (That will earn a grade of “C.”) Prepared participation means that you have read the works and that you come to class ready to participate in discussions and other class activities every class period. I expect respectful exchanges, even during heated disagreements, and **enough self-awareness to keep you from monopolizing the discussion.**

## Classroom Ethics and Etiquette

I have a few guidelines for the way we conduct our work in this learning community that may be a bit different than some of your other courses.

- I respectfully ask that you eat lunch *before* you come to class. I do not allow any food in the classroom unless there is enough food for every person in the room to enjoy. You may bring beverages.
- I place a high value on promptness. Please see my attendance and lateness guidelines above. I feel very strongly that there are very few excuses for late arrivals, and coming after class has started is rude and disruptive to me and to your classmates. You know that parking is a serious problem. You know that traffic flow is unpredictable. You know that the line for coffee could be extremely long. So—figure all of those issues into your planning for class each week.
- I like to see your textbooks, notebooks and journals open on your desks during class. You cannot possibly do well in this class without taking notes on the DVDs we view in class and demonstrating (through notes, questions, etc. in your textbooks) that you are reading the texts each week.
- I have an **absolute ban on electronic communication** including cell phones, PDAs, iPods, computers and any other equipment without express permission. You will not be permitted to use text messaging (even reading text messages), instant messaging, emailing, reading Facebook, or web surfing during class time. Please do not make me embarrass you, and **please know that for every single time I SEE a cell phone, I will count you absent for the day and will deduct 5 points from your FINAL grade.**
- I am committed to responding to email messages promptly; therefore, if you email me and you have not heard back from me within 24 hours, please email me again (and don't forget the "3" on the end of sscott in my address). Likewise, I expect you to check your email frequently for changes or additions throughout the semester.

## Assignments for Semester

### Assignments

You will be working individually and in groups throughout the semester. These are the people you will be working with in the classroom, and on your final group presentations. The groups have been pre-assigned.

### Sketchbook/Journal

- **Weekly Journals/Sketchbooks:** You should maintain a physical sketchbook/journal that includes substantive responses to the reading assignments, questions that arise while you are reading, and the points that strike you as the most critical to your understanding of the world we live in. You may cut out images from magazines/newspapers or print images that you see on the Internet to complement your writing in your journal. If you prefer, you may also sketch images. The journal can be as creative as you want it to be or as straightforward. Either way, however, what is there must be substantive and on time! I will not collect the journals every week, but it's a good idea to bring them so that you can refer to your notes and/or share your images with the class (if you choose).

### Self-Portrait Project and Presentation

For this first project on identity, I ask you to create a self-portrait with words. You may use paper, an electronic file, a video, an object, or a live-action performance piece to define yourself *for the class*. You will have 3 minutes to present your self-portrait in the front of the class, and you will turn in only a "process paper" to me. The one-page paper should include the following:

- Your name and date

- The identity **you are claiming at that particular time** to present to the class.
- How or why you chose that identity over the multiple other selves you could have chosen.
- What the process of creating the self-portrait provided for you in terms of **claiming an identity**.

### **Integrative Essays**

At around the mid-term and end of the semester, you will write a 5- to 7-page integrative essay that synthesizes your learning up to that point in the semester. I will provide a prompt for the essay two weeks prior to the due date, but here are the important points to remember about writing an integrative essay.

- **Write a clear thesis statement that ties together the main points you want to make in the essay.** Consider the “conclusion” you have reached from what we have studied so far.
- **Decide which sources you want to use.** You will need to use all of the texts we have used to that point in the semester, plus you also need to consider the visual texts (videos, images, etc.) you have seen.
- **Cite the sources.** Even though your sources will be ones we have used in class, you must still create a works cited page and use proper in-text citations for all of the sources (indirect and direct quotations, paraphrases, ideas/concepts). Please use either APA style or MLA, and be consistent.

### **Group Presentations**

You will work with your group to present a 20-minute (MAXIMUM) presentation on December 5, the last day of class. Since you will also be working in groups during class time each week, my hope is that you will use some of that time to begin thinking about what you want to present to the class at the end of the semester. You must have a one-page written proposal to me by October 21.

The goal of the group presentation is for your group to bring to the class information about the current state of representation by groups *other than African American*. To be able to do this effectively, you must be able to apply some of the theoretical concepts about power, hegemony, whiteness/white supremacy, etc., to the representations of the groups you are researching.

The most successful group will begin working individually on the EL assignments and think about how that work can be incorporated into the final presentation. For example, you may want to explore the ways different clothing stores, athletic shops/fitness stores represent racial groups, or the ways different minorities appear in film and on TV or in magazines.

As you are working on your EL projects and making new discoveries, discuss those with your group, and then you can decide as a group how you want to present your research, as a group, to the class.

Your presentation grade will be based on the quality of the research and the theoretical concepts you are able to grasp well enough to apply them to other issues, on the smoothness of the presentation itself, and on the visuals you choose as your representations.

### **Embedded EL Requirements**

The fourth credit you earn for this course is an embedded experiential learning (EL) credit. The requirement for EL credits is approximately 45 contact hours for every one credit. Those hours are outside of our classroom meeting time and outside of your course preparation time.

For your EL requirements, you will choose events on campus that are related to our coursework; documentary films from Netflix or the library, feature films, TV shows; posters and images around town and around campus; and close observation of environments where many different racial and ethnic groups mingle.

I will provide a list of examples/possibilities for you, but you may also propose other possibilities to me. Please be sure to log your hours (30 hours minimum; 45 maximum) on the log sheet provided. **Also, please write legible field notes, which you will turn in with your log and with your final EL paper.**

### **The Experiential Learning Paper**

As part of the experiential learning requirement for this course, I expect you to write a 5-page reflection paper on your learning experiences for the EL requirements. The EL experiences should be as valuable to you as your in-class experiences, and I expect you to be able to competently apply the classroom learning to the EL events. In your final paper, you will discuss the overall value of your experiences and the kind of learning that took place through various activities. You do not need to write lengthy descriptions of each activity; rather, you should write about what you learned and use several concrete examples from your experiences as *evidence* of that learning.

### **Vocabulary/Concepts**

- **Representation**
- **Hegemony**
- **Power**
- **Discourse**
- **Signify/signifier/signified**
- **Subject**
- **Binaries (gender/racial)**
- **Liminality**
- **Appropriation**
- **Social construction**
- **The Other**
- **Spectacle and “spectacle of the Other”**
- **Masculinity**
- **Femininity**
- **Visual Codes (of masculinity....of femininity)**
- **Stereotypes**
- **Assumptions**

# University Policies

## Honor Code, Plagiarism, Collaboration

The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. This is especially true in New Century College. Mason has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that:

- all work submitted be your own
- when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations;
- if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification.

No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. If you feel unusual pressure or anxiety about your grade in this or any other course, please talk with us or to a trusted friend or counselor to get your situation in perspective. The University provides a range of service to help with test anxiety, writing skills, study skills, and other related concerns.

Some projects are designed to be undertaken individually. For these projects, you may discuss your ideas with others or ask for feedback; however, it is not appropriate to give your paper to someone else to revise. You are responsible for making certain that there is no question that the work you hand in is your own. If only your name appears on an assignment, your professor has the right to expect that you have done the work yourself, fully and independently.

Using someone else's words or ideas without giving them credit is *plagiarism*, a very serious offense. It is very important to understand how to prevent committing plagiarism when using material from a source. If you wish to quote verbatim, you must use the exact words (including punctuation) just as it appears in the original and you must use quotation marks and page number(s) in your citation. If you want to paraphrase ideas from a source, that is, convey the author's ideas **in your own words**-you must still cite the source, using MLA or APA format. The re-use of papers, presentations, etc., from one course in another course is not appropriate. In every NCC course, faculty members expect that work that is submitted has been done *only* for that class.

## Academic Citizenship

I expect students to take responsibility for their own learning and their own learning environments. I expect you to come to class prepared to take part and even to facilitate class discussion and to support your assertions and theories with evidence from reading and research.

Mason prides itself on having one of the most diverse student populations in the U.S. That makes this a rich environment for learning. It means, too, that we must continually be aware of the differences and avoid discriminatory remarks or practices based on ideas about race, religion, ethnicity, national origin, gender or sexual orientation.

## Electronic Etiquette

Mason provides email and access to the Internet to support the educational mission of the university. Use of these facilities is defined as a privilege, which means that access can be denied in the case of inappropriate use (such as sending of chain letters, harassment of any kind, etc.). Sometimes the nature of electronic communication and the feeling of invisibility one may have when using email may encourage disrespectful behavior. If you say something rude or offensive, even unintentionally, your message will be preserved permanently in writing and can easily be forwarded to a much larger audience (including faculty and prospective employers). Electronic communication is more public than a conversation between friends in the

hallway. Also, please remember the purpose of class list-serves and restrict their use to material appropriate to be shared in class.

When you email me, please always remember to sign your name. Frequently, your email is not familiar to me. Remember, I learn your first names very quickly; not so much the last names!

### **Students with Disabilities**

If you have a learning difference, please inform me at the beginning of the semester. You will need to contact the Disability Resource Center and supply me with a faculty contact sheet from that office explaining your learning difference so that I can adjust your course requirements accordingly.

### **Writing Center**

Occasionally, I will refer students to the Writing Center, located in Enterprise on the ground floor. The services of the Writing Center are available by appointment, on-line and, occasionally, on a walk-in basis. I take these referrals very seriously; therefore, if I have referred you to the Writing Center, I expect a report from the Writing Center tutor on your progress. If you are in any way concerned about writing the research paper, please do not put off going to the Writing Center for help. They will help you!



**Racial and Ethnic Visual Representations**  
**Day-by-Day Schedule**  
**Fall 2013**  
 Subject to Change

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Reading/Viewing Assignment</b>	<b>Due</b>
8/29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductions</li> <li>• Syllabus and Expectations</li> <li>• Why this stuff matters</li> <li>• Course outline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No Reading Assignment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please come prepared to discuss why this course matters!</li> </ul>
9/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction of Race</li> <li>• EL Options</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harris: Introduction, pp 1-13</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journals</li> </ul>
9/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constructing identities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harris, chapter 1: pp.14-37</li> <li>• “Social Justice” file (on wiki)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journals</li> <li>• Self-portrait projects</li> </ul>
9/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representation and meaning: Sharing the codes and Image as Ideology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harris, chapter 2: pp, 39-82</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journals</li> </ul>
9/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The black female body</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harris, chapter 4: pp.125-148</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journals</li> <li>• <b>EL check-in/check-up</b></li> </ul>
10/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Color lines and the construction of differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harris, chapter 5: pp149-188</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journals</li> </ul>
10/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dealing with difference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Berger, “Prologue” through “Trust” pp1-81</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journals</li> <li>• Integrative essay #1</li> </ul>
10/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Racial awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Berger, “Caught” through “Mirror” pp 82-152</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journals</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
10/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding whiteness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Berger, “Color Blind” through “Epilogue” pp. 153-218</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journals</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
10/31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exhibiting Other Cultures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hobson, chapters 1 and 2, pp. 1-54</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journals</li> <li>• Presentation Proposals (1 page)</li> </ul>
11/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exhibiting Other Cultures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hobson, chapters 3 and 4, pp. 55-112</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journals</li> <li>• <b>EL check-in/check-up</b></li> </ul>
11/14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exhibiting Other Cultures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hobson, chapters 5 and Epilogue, pp. 113-148</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final Journals</li> <li>• Integrative essay #2</li> </ul>
11/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allot time for group work for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No new reading assignment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>EL papers, notes and logs</b></li> </ul>

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Date	Topic	Reading/Viewing Assignment	Due
	presentations • Final Exam Posted	• Review guidelines for final exam	
11/28	• NO CLASS. THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY		
12/5	• Putting it All Together • Evaluations	• No new reading assignment •	• Group Presentations 5 groups = 20 minutes max each