Anthropology 214, Spring 2012:
Race, Nature and the Cultural Politics of Difference
Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays 12:00-12:50, Location: 209 Burke Library

Instructor: Chris Vasantkumar, 244 KJ, cvasantk@hamilton.edu
Office Hours: TBD and by appointment.

Description: Are the boundaries between human populations natural or created by people themselves? Are scientific understandings of ‘human nature’ infallible and eternal or are they shaped by the times and places of their production? These two related questions are central to the intellectual project of this course. This semester we will explore four main domains that have been subject to processes of racialization both historic and contemporary: skin color, blood, genes, and culture. Addressing each of these in turn, we will look for similarities and divergences in the manner in which each has been yoked to ideas of the natural, the essential, and the normal. Further, we will ask what racialization itself might mean if the notions of nature to which it appeals are themselves historically contingent and culturally variable. In this effort, we will spend some time attempting to defamiliarize our own common sense notions of human “nature.” Here we will look at the ways in which both folk and scientific notions of gender, kinship and human biology in the West are not simply reflections of how things are but are themselves political and symbolic constructions. We will attend to “Blood” and “Genes” as both the basis for and products of processes of socially constructing significance. Further, we will explore alternative worldviews that posit a dazzlingly unfamiliar understanding of the role of biology in human kinship and reproduction. The goal is ultimately to start thinking about notions of human nature as cultural constructions. If that last sentence doesn’t make sense now, hopefully this class will help you make sense of it.

Books (Available for purchase at College Bookstore)
Required (7):

Recommended (1):

Other readings will be made available on-line via Blackboard/Electronic Reserve.

Expectations and Requirements:
1. Show up. Attendance at all class meetings is required. If you must miss a class meeting it is your responsibility to provide me with documentation of an unavoidable absence ahead of time. Students who have more than 3 unexcused absences from class will get a 0% in individual participation. This is not a good thing.
2. **Keep me awake.** You can help accomplish this by being prepared and engaged. Be prepared to talk and devote your full attention to discussion (i.e. be caffeinated if necessary; please silence all cell phone ringers, etc.).

3. **Don’t Cheat:**
Cheating is defined as fraud, deceit, or dishonesty in an academic assignment, or using or attempting to use materials, or assisting others in using materials which are prohibited or inappropriate in the context of the academic assignment in question. Plagiarism is defined as use of intellectual material produced by another person without acknowledging its source, for example:

- Wholesale copying of passages from works of others into your homework, essay, term paper, or dissertation without acknowledgment.
- Using the views, opinions, or insights of another without acknowledgment.
- Paraphrasing another person’s characteristic or original phraseology, metaphor, or other literary device without acknowledgment.
- Submitting the same assignment for more than one course without prior approval of all the instructors involved.

Y’all have an HONOR CODE here and I expect you to follow it.

4. **Complete all assignments on time.** I will not accept late work.

**Important Dates:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event/Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>January 25</td>
<td>Paper #1 topics handed out</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 1</td>
<td>Movie: <em>Black/White</em>. Time and Place: TBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 13</td>
<td>Movie: <em>Sex:Unknown</em>. Time and Place: TBD</td>
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<td>February 17</td>
<td>SYMPOSIUM #1</td>
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<td>February 18</td>
<td>Paper #1 Due due 11:59PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 27</td>
<td>Paper #2 topics handed out</td>
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<td>February 29</td>
<td>CV in Singapore, No Class</td>
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<td>March 2</td>
<td>CV in Singapore, No Class</td>
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<td>March 7</td>
<td>Movie: <em>Jefferson’s Blood</em>. Time and Place: TBD</td>
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<td>March 9</td>
<td>SYMPOSIUM #2</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 10-25</td>
<td>Spring Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 31</td>
<td>Paper #2 due 11:59PM</td>
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<td>April 6</td>
<td>Final Paper topics handed out</td>
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<td>April 13</td>
<td>SYMPOSIUM #3</td>
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<td>April 23</td>
<td>Movie: <em>Starting Fire With Gunpowder</em></td>
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<td>May 3 or 4</td>
<td>SYMPOSIUM #4</td>
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<td>May 6 (SUNDAY)</td>
<td>Portfolio due 11:59PM</td>
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<td>May 11</td>
<td>Final Paper Due</td>
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**Grading and Assessment:** Your grade will be based on the following components:

1. Participation (45%) which in turn consists of
   a. Attendance, Individual Class Participation, Leading Discussion (25%) and
   b. Portfolio of Written Responses (20%; see below)
2. Two short papers of 4-6 pages (15% each)
3. A Final paper of 8-10 pages (25%).

Class Participation: This class is based on active, engaged and constructive participation by all members of the seminar. It is the responsibility of everyone in class to know their classmates’ names and to make each other feel comfortable with expressing themselves to the group. Participation is a major component (45%) of your grade. You will be assessed not simply on the amount of participation, but on the relevance and insightfulness of your contribution to discussion.

Symposia/Leading Discussion:
Periodic symposiums (scheduled at or near the end of course units) will feature student-led discussion. Sign-ups will take place the first or second week of class. Each student’s responsibilities in this regard will depend on course enrollment but you should expect to help lead discussion (in groups of two) at least twice times over the course of the semester. Facilitators have lots of freedom in how they approach things. You can devise small group activities, debates, skits, show and comment upon videos from Youtube or of your own making, or you can analyze and pose questions about key points in the reading, the lectures or the links between the two. The goal is not to talk for the whole time but to provide the framework for further conversation. I have two requirements for the students who lead discussion in these sessions: 1) Y’all have to draw upon the Response Papers your classmates have written as at least a partial inspiration for how you approach the subject matter. 2) Be creative!

Response Papers: You will be expected to submit at least six (6) Response Papers over the course of the semester. I want you to post your Response Papers to the class Blackboard discussion group by the evening of the day before Friday class (i.e. Thurs.). The deadline is 8pm, but the earlier you post them, the better. Please read your classmates’ notes before coming to class on Friday and be prepared to discuss their responses. If you submit fewer than 6 your grade will be negatively impacted. If you submit more than seven, you may receive some extra-credit or gold stars (see below).

The Response Papers consist of three parts: First, a section comprised of a sentence or two on each of these 5 topics ON EACH OF THE REQUIRED READINGS:

1. The main argument of the reading(s) in question (What is the author saying?)
2. The impact or importance of this argument (Why should we care?)
3. The relationship of this piece to other readings for the week or class as a whole (How does it fit?)
4. What quotation (or scene/moment) from this piece sums up its contribution/impact most succinctly? (Give us the quote and tell us where it’s from)
5. How do you feel about this reading/film (Was it compelling? Was it intelligible? Couldn’t keep your eyes open?)

Second, a paragraph on what you want to talk on during discussion on Friday (or, rarely, Monday). Be as specific as possible. (What readings didn’t get talked about sufficiently, what points confused you, what claims did you find problematic, is there some outside material that’s relevant?)

And third a 2 page written response that incorporates a critical response (not just summary of) to the week’s reading(s). There are several ways to approach this task: raise questions prompted by the readings or lectures, identify especially difficult or provocative passages, relate the readings to what you observe around you, link the readings to something happening in the real world, struggle with a particular concept or respond personally. Whatever approach you choose, however, the readings should be the primary focus of your response paper. As I mentioned, I do not want summaries of
the week’s reading. Rather some form of critical reflection should be the goal. You should treat these as mini-essays. Feel free to be creative, but please organize your arguments carefully.

I will note receipt of these responses but will not grade them until I receive your response portfolio at the end of the class. Please note, reading responses posted to blackboard after class on Friday will not count towards your quota. Sharing your Response Papers with your classmates will spark conversation and help us all to draw connections between the readings, the lectures and the real world. Submitting your notes on Thursday evening will allow us to read your notes before class meets the next afternoon. I expect you to have read your classmates notes before you come to class. **Bring paper copies with your comments to class on Friday.** I will periodically collect notes with your comments to check up on your reading of classmates’ work!

Especially good Response Papers will reference others’ points (and will be good candidates for a gold star; see below). Students who are leading discussion will also be expected to read and draw upon these Response Papers.

**The Portfolio of Written Responses** is composed of two parts. **First**, of the response papers you submit over the course of the semester, choose the best 3. You may rewrite the responses for submission in the portfolio if you wish. **Second**, write a 2-3 page (double-spaced) reflection on the process of writing and selecting the responses. Use this essay as an opportunity to reflect on the effect of the course on your intellectual trajectory. Your portfolio is due by email by the end of the last week of classes (no later than 11:59pm on May 6, 2012).

**Gold Star for the Day:**
Based on entirely subjective criteria, the gold star system is my way of rewarding notes and presentations that go above and beyond the usual. Especially thoughtful, creative or well argued work may be awarded a gold star. There is no limit to the number of possible winners per week or per section. Rewards are on the following basis (stars are cumulative; i.e. they don’t go away after you use them):

- **3 Gold Stars:** 1 week off Response Papers (to be used whenever you want).
- **6 Gold Stars:** 2 day extension on any assignment (must be used in advance).
- **9 Gold Stars:** 1 excused absence from class.

**COURSE OUTLINE:**

**PART I: COLOR**

**Week 1**

1/16
Intro and Logistics

1/18
Race Thinking Before Race

Readings:
1. Silverblatt, “Prologue,” 1-27,

1/20
Race Before Color

Readings:

Week 2

1/23
Before the Caucasian Race

**Readings:**

1/25
Intra-Racial Racializations (Race Beyond Color?)
(also Cletus and What Can Brown Do For You?)

**Readings:**
3. Amazon.com reviews of
4. (Rec.) Lander, *Stuff White People Like*  (Selections)

**PAPER #1 TOPICS HANDED OUT IN CLASS**

1/27
Epidermal (In)visibilities

**Readings:**
1. Frantz Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness” in *Black Skins, White Masks*. 109-140
2. Adrian Piper, “Passing for White, Passing for Black.”

Week 3

1/30
Ambiguous Cases: Who is Black in Brazil?

**Readings:**

2/1
The Cultural Politics of Skin Tone

**Readings:**

2/1 Video: Selections from *Black/White*. Time and Location: TBD

2/3
Stage Makeup or Race Change?

Discussion of *Black/White*
Week 4

2/6
Phenotype Beyond Color I: Dress and Comportment

Readings:
3. (Rec.) David Theo Goldberg, “The Masks of Race” Ch. 4 in *Racist Culture*. 61-89

2/8
Phenotype Beyond Color II: Language (Guest Lecture by Bonnie Urciuoli)

Readings:
2. Bonnie Urciuoli “The Race/Class/Language Map” Ch. 5 in *Exposing Prejudice*.

2/10
Phenotype Beyond the Person: Race & Place

Readings:

INTERLUDE: SOCIAL NATURES I: NATURAL AND UNNATURAL BODIES

Week 5

2/13
Intersex and the Abnormal Natural Body

Readings:
[SELECTIONS MAY CHANGE]

2/13 Video: *SEX: Unknown*; Time and Location: TBD

2/15
Look Natural: Trans and Intersex Conditions and Surgical Intervention

Readings:
3. (Recommended) *Fixing Sex*, Chs. 6,7: 179-236.

2/17
SYMPOSIUM – (INTER)SEX AND (INTER)RACE

Readings:
PART II: BLOOD

Week 6
2/20
States and Stains
Readings:
1. Silverblatt, “States and Stains.” 117-140

2/22
The Rise of Scientific Racism
Readings:
2. Baum Rise and Fall 58-117.

2/24
Drawing Blood
Readings:

Week 7
2/27
What Counts As Blood? Hypodescent and Hyperdescent
Readings:
1. Omi and Winant, 53-54.

2/29, 3/2 NO CLASS

PAPER #2 TOPICS HANDED OUT IN CLASS

Week 8
3/5
Blood as Paper Trail, Blood as Memory?
Readings:

3/7
Blood before the Law
3/7 Movie: *Jefferson’s Blood*; Time and Place: TBD

3/9
SYMPOSIUM: MISCEGE-NATION
Readings:

MARCH 10-25 SPRING BREAK

INTERLUDE: SOCIAL NATURES II: OTHER BIOLOGIES

Week 9

3/26
Is Blood Thicker Than Water?
Readings:
1. David Schneider (1984), Ch. 14 and Conclusion in *Critique of the Study of Kinship*, 165-177, 187-201.

3/28
Folk Biologies of Kinship
Readings:
1. Bamford, *Biology Unmoored*. Ch. 1,2. (pp. 20-80)
2. S. Helmreich “Dissolving the Tree of Life: Alien Kinship at Hydrothermal Vents,” Ch. 2 in *Alien Ocean*. Pp. 68-10

3/30
Relatives
Readings:
1. Bamford, *Biology Unmoored*. Ch. 3,4. (pp. 80-149)

PAPER #2 DUE BY 11:59 PM on SATURDAY MARCH 31

Week 10

4/2
Biologism and Biological Imperialism
Readings:

4/4
Genetic Natures in Cultural and Anthropological Context
Readings:

4/6
The Eth(n)ics of Race in a Genomic Age

**Readings:**

**FINAL PAPER TOPICS HANDED OUT IN CLASS**

**Week 11**

**4/9 The Genetics of Inequality I**

**Readings:**
1. Montoya, *Making the Mexican Diabetic* (SELECTIONS)

**4/11 The Genetics of Inequality II**

**Readings:**
1. Montoya, *Making the Mexican Diabetic* (SELECTIONS)

**4/13 SYMPOSIUM: CULTURAL DNA**

**Readings:**

**PART IV: CULTURE**

**Week 11**

**4/16**
Race and the Culture of the Anthropologists

**Readings:**
2. Baum, *Rise and Fall*, As much of 118-192 as you can get through.

**4/18**
Boas and The Racial Politics of Culture

**Readings:**
3. Finish Baum reading from Monday.

**4/20**
Culture’s Interpretations

**Readings:**

**Week 13**

4/23

Culture’s Predicaments

**Readings:**
3. Gupta and Ferguson “Beyond Culture” Pp. 33-51 in *Culture, Power, Place*

**4/23** Video: *Starting Fire With Gunpowder*. Time and Place: TBD

4/25

Do Cultures Vanish? –1

**Readings**
2. (Rec.) Silverblatt “Becoming Indian”, 187-217.

4/27

Do Cultures Vanish? –2

**Readings**

**Week 14**

4/30

Cultural Racism after 9/11

**Readings**
2. Paul Gilroy on Ch.2 in *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*. Pp. 43-71

5/2

Adieu Culture?

**Readings**

5/4

**SYMPOSIUM: WHITHER CULTURE?** (May be rescheduled for evening of 5/3)

**SUNDAY 5/6 PORTFOLIO DUE BY 11:59 PM**

**FINAL PAPERS due MAY 11 by 11:59 PM**