

INDS 247
Narratives of Passing: American Modernism and Race

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Time: M/W 1:10 pm-2:30 pm
Room: Hathorn Hall 305
Office Hours: M/W 3-4pm,
or by appointment

Course Description:

This class will focus on the intersection of race and modernism by looking at a particular genre that arose in the late 19th century—the genre of passing. One of the things that made passing a source of such fascination and anxiety was the way in which it simultaneously deconstructed and reinforced the concept of racial difference. The fact that one could pass indicated the arbitrariness of racial categories and therefore the injustice of racial oppression, but it also reinforced those categories, since the act was viewed as a betrayal of one’s “true” self and “true” people. Passing also had its corollary in modernist aesthetics, as black writers debated the relationship of racial difference to literary style, and black and white writers alike sought creative innovation and critical acclaim by crossing the color line in their art. This class will consider the way in which modernist literature and modernist aesthetics reflect the period’s anxieties about the construction of race by way of key essays and fictional works (novels, short stories, and films) in which the crossing of the color line is paramount.

Course Goals:

By the end of this course, students will be able to: 1) analyze, describe, and discuss the construction of racial identities in literary texts and that construction’s relationship to formal considerations such as style, voice, genre, authorship, etc.; 2) by way of their analysis of this relationship, discuss the political ramifications of literary techniques considered more broadly; and 3) practice and develop their skills in the analysis of textual evidence and argumentation.

Course Requirements—Class Participation:

The main requirement for the class is an intense engagement with the readings, not only in writing but in class discussion as well. Because class discussion is an opportunity to practice the critical skills that we will be developing in the course, attendance and active participation—which entails listening and responding to one another—at every class session are expected. Students who are late to class will be marked as absent, and students who do not speak of their own volition **at least once a week** will either be called on, or their grade will suffer. If a student cannot attend a particular class, he or she must let me know in advance and make arrangements for another student to take notes and collect handouts on his or her behalf. Missing more than two classes will negatively affect a student’s participation grade. Finally, because students must be able to support the claims they make about the texts with evidence from those texts, all students must bring the reading to class every day **in printed form**. No laptops or cell phones in class, please. A grading rubric will be handed out in class and posted on lyceum.

Course Requirements—Weekly Writing and Discussion Questions:

By 9pm each Sunday (starting in **Week 3**), students will post a one-to-three paragraph response to the day’s reading on the lyceum weekly writing forum for that week. These responses offer

students the opportunity to connect previous class discussions to the new reading, or to propose new lines of inquiry for our Monday discussion. You are expected to read everyone's posts, so you are encouraged to respond to one another's posts and turn this forum into a dialogue. You will receive written feedback on all of their posts, so these posts are an excellent opportunity to practice the skills required for longer writing assignments. All posts that engage thoughtfully with the reading will receive a check (equivalent to a "B"), but check-pluses (equivalent to an "A") will be given to posts that demonstrate proficiency in the central skills of argumentative writing by 1) making a contestable claim about a text or texts 2) supporting that claim with evidence from the text and 3) explaining the significance of that claim. A check-minus (equivalent to a "C") will be given only on those rare occasions when posts are consistently underdeveloped. There will be ten opportunities to submit forum posts throughout the quarter, but students are only **required to submit eight**. Late postings will not be accepted.

In preparation for class on Wednesday (starting in **Week 2**), students are also required to prepare two or three discussion questions based on the day's reading. These questions should refer to, and demand responses that refer to, specific moments in the texts (citing page numbers!). Students should post their questions (each one as a unique post) on the lyceum discussion question forum for that week by 9pm each Tuesday night. By midnight on Tuesday, students are then responsible for selecting one question from among those posted that they would like to talk about in class on Wednesday. To select this question, they should reply to the post, explaining their reasons for wanting to discuss it in class. Part of our time on Wednesdays will be spent in small groups discussing one another's questions.

You are **never to consult the internet or other secondary sources** for ideas in devising your weekly writing responses and discussion questions. I am interested in seeing your ideas, not someone else's. Presenting someone else's ideas as if they are your own constitutes plagiarism.

Course Requirements—Group Presentation

At some point before Winter Recess, students will be assigned to groups of two or three for presentations on one of the popular magazine articles on passing that can be found on lyceum. In **Week 10**, students will present a brief (5-7 minute) presentation on one or more of the popular magazine articles available on lyceum in which they make an argument about the relationship between that article and something else we have read in class, and then lead class discussion on that article for a further 7-10 minutes. Much like your most polished weekly writing assignments, these presentations should advance a contestable and significant argument about the text that is supported by evidence from the text. However, they should also push further by opening up questions or problems for whole class discussion, questions that follow from their initial claim. When thinking about what kinds of questions to ask, you should consider what kinds of questions have been most interesting and stimulating in previous class discussions. Consider starting simple, and following up with more complicated questions, and always have relevant places in the text ready to help direct class discussion. Each group must also prepare a clear and visually appealing **handout or PowerPoint** to go along with their oral presentation, and **must email this to me** as an attachment by 9pm the night before the presentations are due.

Course Requirements—Formal Paper Assignments:

There are two formal paper assignments: a midterm (5-6 pages) and a final paper (8-10 pages). Paper prompts, derived from student-generated discussion questions, will be provided, but students are welcome to use ideas developed in weekly writing assignments as the basis for these papers provided that those ideas help them to address the prompt. All papers must be posted on lyceum. Late papers will be penalized by up to 1/3 of a letter grade for each day they are late. Paper topics and a grading rubric will be handed out in class and posted on lyceum.

Course Requirements—Academic Honesty:

Intellectual honesty is fundamental to scholarship. Accordingly, the College views plagiarism or cheating of any kind in academic work as among the most serious offenses that a student can commit. Plagiarism occurs when one presents work—ideas and/or specific language—which is taken from another person who is not given due credit. Students who are uncertain in any specific situation as to whether plagiarism may be involved should discuss the matter with me.

All students are responsible for reading the College’s statement on plagiarism, found here:

<http://abacus.bates.edu/pubs/Plagiarism/plagiarism.html#0>

For all members of the academic community, citing sources not only protects them and their ideas, but it helps them to know when they do have a new idea, or whether they have achieved a meaningful synthesis of other people’s ideas. It also helps their readers, by providing means whereby he or she can verify their account, seek further knowledge on their topic, and understand how they arrived at your conclusions. To cite sources in your own work, please **follow carefully the MLA guidelines**, found here:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

Course Requirements—Email:

Students are required to check their Bates email regularly, as I will be emailing the class with information, updates, and reminders throughout the semester. In the event of an emergency class cancellation, I will also notify students via email.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

15%	Attendance & participation	20%	Group presentation
15%	Weekly writing & discussion questions	20%	Midterm paper (5-6 pages)
		30%	Final paper (8-10 pages)

Required Texts (available at the Bates Bookstore in Chase Hall):

- Mark Twain, *Pudd’nhead Wilson*
- James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*
- Nella Larsen, *Passing*
- George S. Schuyler, *Black No More*
- Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives*
- William Faulkner, *A Light in August*

All other readings will be available on lyceum in the “Additional Readings” folder.

Class Schedule:

Week 1: Plessy, Passing, and “Local Color”

- Tues: Toi Derracotte, “Passing” (1997)
Wendy Rose, “For the White poets who would be Indian” (1980)
- Thurs: Booker T. Washington, “Atlanta Exposition Address” (1895)
U.S. Supreme Court, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896)
Charles Chesnutt, “What is a White Man?” (1899)
W. E. B. Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” from *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)

Week 2:

- Tues: Lydia Maria Child, “The Quadroons” (1842)
Frances Harper, selections from *Iola Leroy or, Shadows Uplifted* (1892)
Kate Chopin, “Desiree’s Baby” (1893)
- Thurs: Joel Chandler Harris, “Introduction,” “Uncle Remus Initiates the Boy,” “The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story,” “Why the Negro is Black,” from *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings* (1880)
Charles Chesnutt, “The Passing of Grandison,” “The Goophered Grapevine” (1899)
In class: blackface minstrelsy lyrics, images, film clips, etc.

Week 3:

- Tues: Mark Twain, *Pudd’nhead Wilson* (1894)
- Thurs: Mark Twain, *Pudd’nhead Wilson* (1894)

Week 4: Harlem Renaissance: Selling your birthright, or neither black nor white

- Tues: James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912/27)
- Thurs: James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912/27) & Preface to the *Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922)

Week 5:

- Tues: Jessie Fauset, “The Sleeper Wakes” (1920)
Alain Locke, “The New Negro” (1925)
Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1926)
George Schuyler, “The Negro Art Hokum” (1926)
- Thurs: Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929)

Week 6:

- Tues: Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929)

Thurs: George S. Schuyler, *Black No More* (1931)

Week 7: Modernism: Passing, Dialect, and Blackface

Tues: George S. Schuyler, *Black No More* (1931)
Langston Hughes, “Who’s Passing for Who?” (1952)

Thurs: Gertrude Stein, “Melanctha,” *Three Lives* (1909)
Alan Crosland, *The Jazz Singer* (1927)
In class: selections from William Carlos Williams, “Shoot it Jimmy!” (1923),
Sherwood Anderson, *Dark Laughter* (1925), DuBose Heyward, *Porgy*
(1925), and Carl Van Vechten, *Nigger Heaven* (1925)

Week 8:

Tues: William Faulkner, Ch. 1-5 of *A Light in August* (1932)

Thurs: William Faulkner, Ch. 6-12 of *A Light in August* (1932)

Week 9:

Tues: William Faulkner, Ch. 13-16 of *A Light in August* (1932)

Thurs: William Faulkner, Ch. 17-21 of *A Light in August* (1932)

Week 10: The Legacy of Passing: Passing for white, passing for black

Tues: John M. Stahl, *Imitation of Life* (1934)
Sterling A. Brown, “Imitation of Life: Once a Pancake” (1935)
Langston Hughes, *Limitations of Life* (1938)
In class: presentation on popular magazine articles on “to pass”

Thurs: Douglass Sirk, *Imitation of Life* (1959)
In class: presentation on popular magazine articles on “not to pass”

Week 11:

Tues: Zora Neale Hurston, selection from *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948)
Hugh M. Gloster, “Race and the Negro Writer” (1950)
Nick Aaron Ford, “Blueprint for Negro Authors” (1950)
In class: presentation on popular magazine articles on “the end of passing”

Thurs: Norman Mailer, “The White Negro” (1957)
John Howard Griffin, selection from *Black Like Me* (1961)
In class: presentation on popular magazine articles on “the other side of passing”

Week 12:

Tues: Eddie Murphy, “White Like Me” (1984)
Toni Morrison, “Recitatif” (1983)
Danzy Senna, “What’s the Matter with Helga and Dave?” (2011)

Thurs: Curtis Hanson, *8 Mile* (2002)
Dave Chappelle, selections from *Chappelle's Show* (2003–2006)
Tyra Banks, selections from *America's Next Top Model* (2003–present)