

RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF WHITENESS, Spring 2008

NAT400 (40200); REL 449 (39618)
WF 8 to 9:20 AM, 105 Hall of Languages

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Introduction

We will start with the assumptions that whiteness is a kind of religious mythology. It has a mythological underpinning that has had lasting and devastating consequences in many parts of the globe. Whiteness grows out of various kinds of colonial contexts. We will be primarily reading about whiteness in the US but we will also reading about a similar phenomenon in India. Seen as myth implies that whiteness is not a natural category. Ethnicity is a much more “natural” marker of identity than race. And yet we have to deal with race before other issues of identity in the US can be settled.

The reason I have started with the category of whiteness is that historically other categories of blackness, redness, yellowness, etc are derived from whiteness. This is an essential point usually missed in our public conversations about race. Historically whiteness was the privileged ideological position of certain group of people who then determined who was, and who was not, part of their group. Some groups of people have become white in America, including Jews and the Irish. We will read about these groups, which will present us with interesting cases of assimilation. But in order for us to start resolving some of the pain of our past we have to come to terms with the tenuous creation of our identities around color codes. My sense is the best place to start is with the category of whiteness. By the way, I have found that white people are the least capable to discuss this topic academically. Most all of our authors are from disadvantaged groups “of color” who have studied whiteness as a survival strategy.

To get a sense of some of the many dimensions of whiteness we will start with a book by a Unitarian/Universalist who has a more personal take on race matters. Learning to be White will allow us to discuss the personal dynamics of whiteness. Nandy’s The Intimate Enemy is a classic. It is a psychological analysis of colonialism in India. Allen’s The Invention of the White Race is a Marxist history of the development of whiteness. Morrison’s Playing in the Dark is a deep analysis of how she is read by and how she responds to a white world. Newcomb’s new book, Pagans in the Promised Land looks at the devastating legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery, which is a Christian doctrine that enabled whites, or Europeans, to dispossess indigenous people all over the world. Deloria’s Playing Indian is a study of white people who masked themselves as Indians in history for specific reasons. What do these studies imply about the problem of identity in American culture? What do they indicate about the mythology of racial consciousness in the US? What is the future of race and its general viability as an “orienting symbol system?”

Required Texts:

Allen, The Invention of the White Race, Volume I
Deloria, Playing Indian
Morrison, Playing in the Dark
Newcomb, Pagans in the Promised Land
Nandy, The Intimate Enemy
Thandeka, Learning to be White

Course Goals:

In accordance with the Department of Religion this class has four major goals that shape its teaching and its expectations of what students expect to gain from this course:

1. to think both critically and imaginatively about the nature of religion as a basic response to and expression of the human condition in America;
2. to recognize and appreciate the difficulties and possibilities inherent in undertaking a coherent, disciplined study of religion; and to become aware of the diversity of perspectives within that study;
3. to come to a distinct yet corrigible conception of "religion," and to be able to recognize its appearance not only within the historical institutions of diverse religious traditions, but also in other social/cultural forms;
4. to develop an understanding of key instances in the diversity of human religious history, phenomena, and experience; and to achieve a fluency in interpreting and describing them.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading</u>
<u>January</u>		
16	Introductions—whiteness as religion	
18	White identity and self-hatred	Thandeka, Chapters 1 & 2
23	Victims of privilege and loss	Thandeka, Chapters 3 & 4
25	New sense of self	Thandeka, Chapter 5 & 6
	Discussion topic paper #1-What is the mythology of Whiteness?	
30	Whiteness and Colonialism	Nandy, chapter one
<u>February</u>		
1	Undoing the intimate enemy	Nandy, chapter two
	Discussion topic paper #2	
6	Social roots of racism in America	Allen, Introduction
8	Oppression	Allen, Chapter 1
	Discussion topic paper #3	
13	The Irish	Allen, Chapter 2
15	Protestantism and Whiteness	Allen, Chapter 3
	Discussion topic paper #4	
20	Social control	Allen, Chapter 4
22	Ulster	Allen, Chapter 5
	Discussion topic paper #5	
27	Anglo-America	Allen, Chapter 6
29	The Sea-Change	Allen, Chapter 7
	Discussion topic paper #6	
<u>March</u>		
5	Romancing the shadow	Morrison, Chapter 1 & 2
7	Disturbing nurses and kind sharks	Morrison, Chapter 3
	Discussion topic paper #7	
12 & 14	Spring Break—no class	
19	Final paper/project outline due	
21	Good Friday—no class	

Date	Topic	Reading
<u>March</u>		
26	Doctrine of Discovery	Newcomb, Intro & Chapter 1
28	Cognitive Theory Discussion topic paper #8	Newcomb, Chapters 2-4
<u>April</u>		
2	Religion and dispossession	Newcomb, Chapters 5-7
4	Revoking the Papal Bulls Discussion topic paper #9	Newcomb, Chapters 8-10
9	Ambiguity of American identities—the Patriots	Deloria, Intro & Chapter 1
11	Fraternal Indians Discussion topic paper #10	Deloria, Chapter 2
16	Literary Indians	Deloria, Chapter 3
18	Natural Indians Discussion topic paper #11	Deloria, Chapter 4
23	Hobby Indians	Deloria, Chapter 5
25	Counterculture Indians Discussion topic paper #12	Deloria, Chapter 6 and Conclusion

Final Presentations: Thursday, 1 May, 7:15 to 9:15 PM: Location TBA

Grading

Final grades will be based on discussion topic papers on Blackboard, a Final Paper/Project and Outline on Blackboard, and attendance and class participation.

Discussion Topic Papers: You are required to post 12 papers that each have a minimum of 250 words (about a page). Each paper is to be on a topic assigned on a class day preceding the Friday on which it is due. These Fridays are noted on the syllabus above. Discussion topic papers are on the topic for each week's reading and can be posted in the discussion folder on Blackboard at the course website (<http://blackboard.syr.edu>). Consult the Course Schedule above for weekly topics and reading assignments. Discussion topic papers will not be accepted late. The papers are intended to generate discussion so **you are required to read the papers of other students and respond to at least two other papers each week.**

Your papers will be graded on a sliding scale. Exceptionally well crafted papers that are equivalent to the letter grade 'A' are worth 4 points each; 'B' papers are worth 3 points; 'C' papers are worth 2 points; and 'D' papers are worth 1 point. You will receive a failing grade, worth 0 points, if you do not hand the papers in on time or if your paper fails to address the issues presented in the reading. In addition, you are required to respond to two other papers on the discussion board for which you will receive 2 additional points. You can receive up to 6 points for each paper submitted per week for a possible semester total of up to 72 points for 12 papers (up to 48 for the paper and 24 for responses to the papers of other students). Both the paper and the responses are due the Friday that they are scheduled.

Final papers/projects and the outline: You will write a final paper on an aspect of religious dimensions of whiteness. This will require you to do some outside research and prepare a brief paper on the topic. Outlines for your final papers/projects, which are primarily planning documents, must be posted to the Discussion Board about half way through the course (consult the Schedule for the precise date). At the same time you post your Outline of the final project you will be asked to comment on two other student projects. Good outlines should include a brief explanation of your topic, including how you intend on investigating this example of racial mythology or identity issues (who you will interview and/or where you will visit and when). As with Discussion Topic Papers you are required to give a response to other student's outlines. The Outline is intended to give each student feedback from their peers on the effectiveness of their paper/project. It would behoove you to decide the subject of the final paper/project as early in the semester as possible. You may contact me directly, through the course website, to discuss your possible options. Your project outline will be graded on a sliding scale similar to the weekly Discussion Topic Papers. As with the Discussion Topic Papers an 'A' outline will get 4 points; a 'B' outline will receive 3 points; a 'C' outline will receive 2 points; and a 'D' paper will receive 1 point. Failing to post an outline or putting little or no work into your outline will result in 0 points. In addition you will receive 2 additional points for responding to two other student project outlines. A total of 6 points are possible for the outline of your final project.

The best final papers/projects incorporates ones personal knowledge and experience with individual research in the library or on the web. All materials should be appropriately arranged and cited at the end of the paper. Most students find that the final paper/project gives other

students a chance to learn through each other's experience making it a rich and important component of the class. The paper should be from 500 to 1000 words in length and include other photographic or graphic material where it is appropriate. Consult the Schedule above to learn when it should be posted on the Discussion Board. You can receive up to 12 points for an 'A' project; 9 points for a 'B' project; 6 points for a 'C' project; and 3 points for a 'D' project. Projects that are not posted on time or which exhibit little or no effort will receive 0 points.

I will record your grade each week on the website in an online grade-book. Your grades will only be available for you to view throughout the semester and you can check your grade as often as you wish. In fact, each time you log onto Blackboard your grade for the class will come into view.

It is best to cut and paste your Discussion Topic Paper, Final Project Outline and Final Project into the Discussion Board since many people cannot access attachments. In addition to your comments each week I will respond to many of your papers. Make sure you choose a topic for your final project as early as possible. The deadline for outlines/plans of action regarding your final project is on 23 March and comes up quickly. The deadline for posting your final paper/project is the Final Examination date posted on the schedule above.

The criteria listed below are used when assessing your 12 Discussion Topic Papers, Outline and Final Paper/Project. Percentages are only to demonstrate the relative weight of each of the criteria in any given assignment.

- **Clarity.** The viewpoints you present in your writing must be clearly conceived and well argued. Your writing style should be straight-forward, easy to read and should be clearly related to the issues you wish to address. Topic sentences at the beginning of each paragraph are helpful in establishing the issue and argument for the reader at the outset. (40%)
- **Engagement with the material.** Entries are to be related to the reading material. They are *not reviews* of what has been stated in the book but are your *critical analysis* of the reading. Avoid direct quotes. Instead seriously take-up what you consider to be the 'key' issues for the study of religion in the reading. An analysis of the issues discussed in the course become clearer the closer your writing is to the texts used in class. (40%)
- **Creativity.** The 'work' of Religious Studies, and perhaps the Humanities in general, is essentially creative. Interpretation of religious phenomena requires that you come to some meaningful relationship with your object of study. This is one of the defining characteristics of creativity. You have a unique and important contribution to make to our collective understandings. There are no predetermined experts in the area of interpretation, only well refined and well argued positions. Your interpretations will be dealt with as importantly as you regard them yourself. (20%)

Attendance and class participation: Attendance is mandatory for this class. Lectures and reading will be intimately related but quite different. It is therefore in your own best interest to do the reading and attend class as both will reflect on your performance on discussion topic papers, the midterm, and final. You will be given regular opportunities to participate in class either by asking questions, making comments, and interacting with other students in discussion in class or on Blackboard.

Final grades will be determined as follows:

Discussion topic papers	72 points
Outline of Final Project	6 points
Final paper	12 points
Presentation of Final Project	5 points
Attendance and class participation	5 points

I will use this grading scale to calculate your final grades:

A	91-100 points
A-	88-90 points
B+	84-87 points
B	81-83 points
B-	78-80 points
C+	74-77 points
C	71-73 points
C-	68-70 points
D+	64-67 points
D	61-63 points
D-	58-60 points
F	57 points and below