Course Description
This course examines how contemporary US culture represents its racial others. Drawing on theories and methods from sociology, history, and literary theory, we will develop a provisional model of interdisciplinary cultural analysis that will enable us to understand how racial representations work, why they matter, and how they can be most fruitfully interpreted. We will then conduct a series of case studies in racial representation. Each case will be organized around a recent film, and each film will be examined from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, with particular emphasis on how the various disciplines both illuminate and obscure various aspects of the racial representation at hand.

Requirements
Close Readings (30%): A series of written responses to the films we will be viewing. By the end of the course, you should have 3 close readings. Instructions for this assignment appear in a separate handout.

Group Projects (20%): Twice during the course, you and a small group of your classmates will be asked to summarize the day’s reading, explain its relevance to the film, and lead class discussion. Instructions for this assignment appear in a separate handout.

Final Paper (20%): A 10-12 page essay in which you analyze a contemporary film as an example of a racial project. Instructions for this assignment appear in a separate handout.

Final Exam (20%): A cumulative examination asking you to demonstrate a competent understanding of key terms and concepts explored in the course.

Class Participation (10%): You will be expected to contribute regularly, actively, and intelligently to class discussion. You can also earn class participation points by contributing to the discussion fora on the course Blackboard site. Criteria for class participation appear below.

Policies
Attendance: You are allowed two absences. If you exceed the number of allowed absences, you will automatically fail the course. You will be counted absent if you come to class more than 15 minutes late, if you come to class late on a regular basis, if you come to class unprepared, or if you miss a scheduled appointment with the instructor.
Late Work: You are allowed two late assignments. If you exceed the number of allowed late assignments, you will automatically fail the course. Homework submissions will not be accepted over email.

Emergencies and University-Sponsored Activities: If you must take an absence or a late assignment due to an emergency or university-sponsored activity, please provide a note from a doctor, dean, or coach. If you provide such a note, you will not hurt your final grade, but you will still be using an allowed absence/late assignment. Moreover, if you have already used up your allowed absences/late assignments, you will be retroactively penalized for them. For this reason, it would be best to save your allowed absences/late assignments for genuine emergencies.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is any act, deliberate or not, that misleads a reader about the source of ideas, language, or data in a piece of written work. The deception may be deliberate, in which case the plagiarism is a reflection of the personal integrity of the writer, or it may be accidental and a result of carelessness or ignorance of rules of attribution. In either case, the result is plagiarism and constitutes an act of academic dishonesty. If you plagiarize, you will be subject to severe disciplinary sanctions, including automatic failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the University.

Paper Consultations: If you would like feedback on your written work, you are welcome to visit my office hours at any point during the writing process. You are also welcome to visit the tutors at the Writing Center. I do ask, however, that you refrain from soliciting feedback via email. As a medium, email is inherently unsuited to the Socratic forms of conversations necessary for effective writing instruction. If you’d like feedback on your work, then, get it the old-fashioned way; talk to someone face-to-face.

Accommodations: Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of Fordham University. If you believe that you have a disabling condition that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, coursework, or assessment of the object of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please schedule an appointment to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services (Rose Hill - O’Hare Hall, Lower Level, x0655 or at Lincoln Center – Room 207, x6282).

Texts Available for Purchase at the Bookstore

Films on 4-Hour Reserve
- *The Pursuit of Happyness* (DVD 6108)
- *The Help* (DVD 12,818)
- *Romeo Must Die* (DVD 7009)
- *Better Luck Tomorrow* (DVD 902)
Criteria for Class Participation
Your class participation will be graded on a scale from zero-to-four, four being the highest. Please note that, although I will make every effort to include as many voices as possible in discussion, it is ultimately up to you to participate in class.

Preparation
- Absent. (0 points)
- Present, not disruptive. (1 point)
- Adequate: knows basic reading facts, but does not show evidence of trying to interpret or analyze them. (2 points)
- Good: knows reading facts well, has thought through their implications. (3 points)
- Excellent: has analyzed reading exceptionally well, relating it to other course materials (e.g., other primary and secondary readings, other discussions, other courses, etc.). (4 points)

Frequency
- Does not participate. (0 points)
- Minimal. Tries to respond when called upon but does not offer much. (1 point)
- Adequate. Does not offer to contribute to discussion, but contributes to a moderate degree when called upon. (2 points)
- Good. Contributes well in a consistent and ongoing way. (3 points)
- Excellent. Contributes in a very significant, active, and ongoing way. (4 points)

Sophistication
- Does not participate. (0 points)
- Minimal. Offers brief contributions, showing little engagement with the conversation. (1 point)
- Adequate. Offers straightforward, unelaborated information (e.g., plot summaries straight from the reading). (2 points)
- Good. Offers interpretations and analysis of course material (i.e., more than just facts) to class. Responds to other students’ points; thinks through own points; questions others in a constructive way; offers and supports suggestions that may be counter to the majority opinion. (3 points)
- Excellent. Offers analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of readings: puts together discussion threads to develop new questions that take the class further into the material. Keeps analysis focused; responds very thoughtfully to other students’ comments; contributes to cooperative argument-building; suggests alternative ways of approaching material; and helps class analyze which approaches are appropriate. (4 points)
Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Tuesday, May 29
• Welcome to the course

Wednesday, May 30

Thursday, May 31
• Omi and Winant, “The Great Transformation,” pp. 161-84; and “Racial Reaction,” pp. 185-210

Monday, June 4
• Screening and preliminary discussion of The Pursuit of Happyness (2006)

Tuesday, June 5
• Omi and Winant, “Colorblindness, Neoliberalism, and Obama,” pp. 211-44; and “Contrarieties of Race,” pp. 245-70.

Wednesday, June 6
• Screening and preliminary discussion of The Help (2011)

Thursday, June 7
• Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought, pp. 4-8, 72-75 (BB)
• Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Hochschild, Global Woman, pp. 1-13 (BB)
• Group A: Close Reading #1 due

Monday, June 11
• Screening and preliminary discussion of Romeo Must Die (2000)

Tuesday, June 12
• Group B: Close Reading #1 due

Wednesday, June 13
• Screening and preliminary discussion of Better Luck Tomorrow (2003)

Thursday, June 14
• Helen Haran Jun, “Neoliberalism and Asian American Racialization,” pp. 123-47 (BB)
• Group A: Close Reading #2 due
Monday, June 18
• Screening and preliminary discussion of *No Country for Old Men* (2008)

Tuesday, June 19
• Lee Clark Mitchell, “Dismantling the Western” (BB)
• María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, “No Country for Old Mexicans” (BB)
• Group B: Close Reading #2 due

Wednesday, June 20
• Screening and preliminary discussion of *Sleep Dealer* (2009)

Thursday, June 21
• Group A: Close Reading #3 due

Monday, June 25
• Screening and preliminary discussion of *We’re the Millers* (2013)

Tuesday, June 26
• *Keywords*: normal, family (online), white (online)
• Eric Lott, “The Racial Unconscious” (BB)
• Group B: Close Reading #3 due

Wednesday, June 27
• Screening and preliminary discussion of *Get Out* (2017)

Thursday, June 28
• Final Exam
• Final Paper due
Instructions for the Final Paper

Using at least 3 academic sources, write an original 10-12 page research essay analyzing one of the films discussed in class as an example of a racial project. Here are some of the moves I expect to see in your paper.

1. Establish a pre-critical interpretation of the film. If you didn’t know much about critical race theory, the history of race relations, or how racial representations work and why they matter, how would you interpret the film? Support this pre-critical interpretation of the film by citing reviews of the movie from the popular press. Note, however, that these reviews will not count as academic sources.

2. Challenge the pre-critical interpretation. You can do so in a number of ways. For instance, you might point out aspects of the film that the pre-critical interpretation overlooks or fails to explain. You might introduce a critical or theoretical concept that somehow questions or contradicts the pre-critical reading. Or you might outline a historical narrative that in some way undermines the pre-critical reading.

3. Propose an alternative reading of the film as an example of a racial project. That is, explain how, in your view, the film represents racial identities and meanings, and how those representations ultimately serve to organize and distribute economic, social, and cultural resources along specific racial lines. (This step will obviously require you to synopsize Omi and Winant’s theory of racial formation at some point in your paper.)

4. Support your interpretation of the film by offering close readings of specific scenes from the movie. Incorporate the historical and theoretical discussed in class wherever it seems appropriate, and employ whatever other materials you may have discovered in the course of your research.

5. Conclude by recapitulating your thesis and stating its larger significance. (In other words, answer the “so what?” question. So what if this film can be understood as a racial project? Why should anyone care?) In addition, state what further questions your argument raises, and offer some speculative responses to those questions.

All papers should follow MLA parenthetical citation. Failure to cite your sources properly constitutes plagiarism and will be dealt with accordingly.
Instructions for Group Presentations

Twice during the course, your group will summarize the day’s secondary reading and speculate on how it illuminates the primary text. To complete this assignment, you must do the following:

1. Meet with your group in person well before class. Each person should have read all the secondary material before the meeting.

2. Post a written report on the secondary readings to the course Blackboard site at least 24 hours before class. The page requirements are flexible, but aim for 3-5 pages. Your report should summarize each secondary reading and relate it to the film. If your secondary reading included an essay directly about the film, then you should explain whether and to what extent you find the essay’s analysis useful. (What aspects of the film does it satisfactorily explain? What does it leave out?) If the readings consisted of historical narratives and/or theoretical concepts, then you should attempt to explain how those histories and/or theories might help us interpret the film as a racial project.

3. Prepare a 20-30 minute oral presentation on the secondary reading. Again, you will not be allowed simply to read from your report aloud. Instead, practice extemporizing your presentation. Make sure each group member has something to contribute to the oral presentation.

4. Answer questions from your classmates and your teacher about the secondary readings.

5. Submit a signed copy of the following statement: “We pledge that we have each contributed equally and fairly to this project. We understand that misrepresenting our contributions to this project constitutes an act of academic dishonesty punishable by automatic failure in the course, as well as suspension or possibly even expulsion from the university.”
Guidelines for Leading Discussion

Before class…

- Contact your group-mates, and arrange a time to meet well in advance of your presentation.

- Each person should bring to the meeting at least 1 scene from the film that she or he would like to discuss.

- As a group, agree on 3 or 4 scenes that you’d like to examine.

- Collaborate on a close reading of each scene. Reach a consensus on (a) the surprising features you most want to call to your classmates’ attention, (b) the interpretive questions you most want to ask them, (c) the hypotheses you most want them to consider, and (d) the statements of significance you most want to share with them. (Your group doesn’t need to submit formal close readings. Just a set of bullet-pointed notes on each scene will suffice.) Prepare clear, crisp formulations of the surprising features, interpretive questions, hypotheses, and statements of significance on which your group agreed. You’ll be expected to share these in class. The clearer and crisper your formulations are, the better the presentation will go.

In class…

- Explain the background of the scene you’d like to discuss, then show the scene.

- Solicit input from your classmates (e.g., “what stood out to you about this scene?”), and wait. Your goal is to get as many responses from your classmates as possible. Here are some strategies for encouraging participation.
  - Thank each person who contributes (mandatory).
  - Have a note-taker at the board, recording your classmates’ contributions (optional).
  - Cold call on people (ruthless, but effective).
  - Give the class a few minutes to free-write about the scene, then open the floor for discussion (effective, but occasionally boring).
  - Point out areas of debate whenever they emerge. For instance, if two people offer contradictory responses, highlight the tension between them, and ask the rest of the class to weigh in. E.g., “so it sounds like you disagree with the point Joe made earlier in the conversation. What do the rest of you think?” (An ace-level move.)
  - Summarize the class consensus, then challenge it. E.g., “It sounds like we’re all saying the tone of this scene is cheerful, but then what do you guys make of this violent image in the middle of the scene?” (Another all-star level play. I’ll be very impressed if you can pull this one off.)

- Share the surprising features that your group saw in the scene. Do NOT do this step prematurely. If you do, you’ll kill the momentum of the discussion. Instead,
wait until each of your classmates has offered something. That way, you’re more likely to get your classmates’ engagement.

☐ State a discussion question. You can use either the discussion question that you prepared outside of class, or a question that you’ve improvised based on the in-class contributions of your classmates. The improvised question often works best, because it’s based on material that’s fresh in people’s minds; but it’s fine if you use a prepared question as well.

☐ Let your classmates bat the question around as much as possible. Again, your goal is to get as much participation as possible from your classmates. Use the strategies for encouraging participation described above.

☐ Share the hypothesis your group formulated in answer to the interpretive question, as well as its significance. Again, it’s best to wait until your classmates have all had their say before you make this move.

☐ Rinse and repeat.
Group Presentations Sign-up Sheet

You must sign up for two presentations.

Thursday, June 7: *The Help*

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Tuesday, June 12: *Romeo Must Die*

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Thursday, June 14: *Better Luck Tomorrow*

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Tuesday, June 19: *No Country for Old Men*

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Thursday, June 21: *Sleep Dealer*

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Tuesday, June 26: *We’re the Millers*

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