This seminar explores the cultural politics of race and ethnicity in the United States with an emphasis on popular media. Given that each of the terms mentioned in the title of this course (“race,” “ethnicity” and “popular media”) are in and of themselves notoriously ambiguous categories that resist easy definition, we will spend a great deal of time this semester engaging four deceptively straightforward questions: What exactly is race? How does race differ from ethnicity? What exactly constitutes “popular media”? And how is any of this collectively related? Over the course of the semester we will primarily devote our attention to three issues. First, we will begin thinking about how the issue of race (more specifically: the pernicious legacy of racism and racial inequality) continues to expose the limitations and contradictions of U.S. democracy. Secondly, we will think about how the language that most Americans use to talk about race (whether it be through conversational buzzwords like “colorblind,” “reverse racism,” “post-racial,” or “multiculturalism”) has come from what they have heard, read or seen in some mass mediated context (whether it be in a newspaper, on a television talk show, or on the radio). Lastly, we will think about the vital role that expressive media (a phrase broad enough to encompass everything from music and cinema to theater and social networking) has historically played in influencing how we talk about and re-present race in American culture.

Required Textbooks:
1. Cornel West, Democracy Matters: Winning the War Against Imperialism
4. Tricia Rose, Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop—And Why It Matters
5. J. Halberstam, Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal
*In addition, there will be a significant amount of reading that will take the form of various individual essays. These essays will be made available online through blackboard.

**Course Schedule:**

Please Note: The instructor reserves the right to make minor changes to this schedule (such as the replacement/substitution or subtraction of the readings listed). You should expect for this to occur.

Sep. 11: Course Overview and Introductions

An introduction to who is the room, what we will be reading this semester, what I am expecting from you, and what you would like to get out of this course.

September 18th: The Fire This Time: US Democracy in Tumultuous Times

In this session we discuss the roles that race and racism have played in preventing the United States from realizing its full democratic potential. In addition, we will think critically about "democracy" as a shifting, fragile and still-unfinished concept that is in need of renewal. From the slow curtailing of American civil liberties (as manifested in legislation such as the U.S. Patriot Act and the National Security Act); to the escalating militarization of American cities (as evidenced recently by the police presence during the riots of Ferguson, Missouri); to the increasingly plutocratic dimension of the American electoral process----US democracy is arguably in flames: in danger of burning to the ground. Politically speaking, how might we put the fire out? What do race and ethnicity have to do with any or all of this? By probing answers to the aforementioned questions, this issued raised in this session will help us lay the foundation for our future class discussions (later in the semester) about the unique potential of media, arts and expressive culture for responding to various crises in American culture democracy.

Required Reading:

1. Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the War Against Imperialism*
2. Cornel West, “Nihilism in Black America” in *Race Matters (Online)*

Sep. 25th: Approaching the Language of Race in Contemporary America

In this session we will critically interrogate the language of race and racism in contemporary America. More specifically, we will pay close attention to several terms and rhetorical phrases that have become popular "buzzwords" in American media in the post-civil rights era. The terms we will pay particular attention to will be: "colorblindness," "post-racial," and "multiculturalism." To what extent do these phrases congeal more than they reveal? Likewise, to what extent have these terms done more harm than good in terms of advancing the national dialogue on race. Our central premise in this session will be that popular media--particularly news media (whether it be or CNN or MSNBC, Fox News or The New York Times)—plays a critical role in producing the language/vocabulary that Americans use (or misuse?) to describe race and/or racism. Other themes and key concepts to be discussed during this session include intersectionality, neoliberal multiculturalism, hypodescent, and post-intentional racism.

Required Reading:

1. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "The Strange Enigma of Race in Contemporary America" in *Racism without Racists (Online)*
2. Imani Perry, "It Wasn't Me: Post Intent and Correlational Racism" in *More Beautiful, and More Terrible* (Online)

3. Ashley Doane, "The Changing Politics of Colorblind Racism" (Online)

4. Frank Roberts, "Stolen Life: On the Meanings of Trayvon Martin" in *The Huffington Post* (Online)

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On the heels of the previous discussion, in this session we discuss the increased militarization of police culture in the United States and its deleterious effect on the lives of black and brown people, particularly black men.

Required Reading:
1. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*

Media:

In-class Documentary Film Screening: *The House I Live In* (Dir. Eugene Jarecki, 2012)

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Oct. 9: The Meaning of Whiteness

In this session we will discuss the history of whiteness as a U.S. racial category. More specifically, we will discuss one of the key components of white privilege: the privilege of not having to talk about, think about, or be defined by race (as evidenced by oft-made comments such as “I don’t see race, I just see human beings”). In this session we will examine the extent to which “white experiences” are often framed (in media, or in critical public receptions of literature and film, for instance) as “universal” experiences—whereas the experiences of nonwhite people get reduced to racial categorization.

Required Reading:

1. Ross Chambers, “The Unexamined” (Online)
2. George Lipsitz, “Introduction,” to *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Online)
4. Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” (Online)

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Oct. 16: Listening to Latinidad

In this session we will explore the history and ambiguity of “Hispanic” as a term and racial/ethnic category 2) discuss the conceptual differences between “Hispanic” and “Latina/o” as identitarian categories and 3) approach the musical genre of “Reggaeton” as a case study for thinking about how Latina/o communities in the diaspora have used performance and media as embodied sites of sociopolitical critique.

Required Reading:

2. Raquel Z. Rivera, Wayne Marshall, and Deborah Pacini Hernandez, “Reggaeton’s Socio-Sonic Circuitry” (Online)

3. Agustin Lao-Montes, “Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York City” (Online)


6. Chimamanda N. Adichie, Brief paragraph handout excerpt from Americanah

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Oct. 23: Class Fieldtrip Film Screening: Dear White People, by Justin Simien

In this session, we will take a trip to the movies to view Justin Simien's new satire, "Dear White People." Winner of the 2014 Sundance Film Festival's Special Jury Award for Breakthrough Talent, "Dear White People" is described as a "sly, provocative satire of race relations in the age of Obama. Writer/director Justin Simien follows a group of African American students as they navigate campus life and racial politics at a predominantly white college."

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Oct 30: Get Me Bodied: Black Women Performers and/in American Popular Media

Whether it be through radio disc jockeys such as Don Imus discussing the "problem" of "nappy-headed hoes," or US congressmen debating the sexuality of black single mothers on welfare, historically, the black female body has been configured as a "problem" within the realm of American popular media. In this session we will explore this enduring legacy and think critically about how contemporary black female performers (ranging from Beyonce to Lauryn Hill) have consciously and/or unconsciously worked through, against, and around these discourses in their media creations.

Required Reading:

1. Shayne Lee, Erotic Revolutionaries: Black Women, Sexuality, and Popular Culture

Media:

To be announced

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Nov: 6: Contemporary Media Debates: Sexuality and the Mainstreaming of "Marriage Equality"

In this session we will discuss the limitations of certain "equality discourses" that have emerged in media debates related to contemporary civil rights and social justice causes. By using the marriage equality/LGBTQ marriage movement as a case study, we will think critically about how certain "civil rights" causes potentially reinscribe the very forms of inequality they purport to stand against. Similarly,
we will think about how the contemporary discourse on LGBTQ "marriage equality" often relies on coded racial analogies (i.e. by making comparison such as "the gay rights movement is 'like' the black civil rights movement of the 1960s," etc). At what price does the push for marriage equality come, and at whose expense? This week is centered on the following inquiry: should the role of “civil rights activism” be to simply ask for “inclusion” into traditional structures (such as “marriage”) or rather, should it be about questioning the validity of the structures that have come to define our lives?

Required Material:

1. Judith Butler, “Critically Queer” in Bodies That Matter (Online)
2. Cathy Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens” in GLQ (Online)
3. Michael Cobb, "Introduction" to Single: Arguments for the Uncoupled (Online)
4. Lisa Duggan, "Preface" (with Richard Kim) and "Beyond Marriage: Democracy, equality, and kinship for a New Century" in A New Queer Agenda (Online)
5. Kenyon Farrow, "After Equality" in A New Queer Agenda (Online)

Recommended Reading:

1. Jack Halberstam, "Introduction," to The Queer Art of Failure
2. Jack Halberstam, "Introduction" to In A Queer Time and Place

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Nov: 13: Gender, Normativity, and Popular Media: Or, Approaching Lady Gaga

In this session we discuss representations of women and feminism in the realm of American popular media. We will also explore two very different articulations of what exactly it means to be engaged in “feminist practice.”

Required Reading:

1. J. Halberstam, Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal

Media:

Documentary Film: Miss Representation, 2011 (85 Minutes) To Be Screened In Class

Nov: 20: Class fieldtrip Screening: Straight White Men, by Young Jean Lee

In this session, we will take a class trip to The Public Theater to witness the production of Young Jean Lee's critically acclaimed new play, "Straight White Men." Set in an American city, the play asks the question: "when identity is the cornerstone of one's worth, and privilege is increasingly problematic, what is the value of being a straight white man?"

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Dec. 4: Listening to Black America: The Rise and Fall of Hip Hop
In this session, we will explore the rise and fall of hip-hop as the unofficial musical “voice” of black youth in America.

Required Reading:

1. Tricia Rose, *Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop—And Why It Matters*

Media:
   
   To Be Announced

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Dec: 11 Fear of a Brown Planet: "Dark" Comedy and the Art as Racial Critique

In this session, we will think critically about the long and subversive history of comedy as a site of trenchant sociopolitical critique. Drawing from a growing body of critical scholarship in humor studies, we will ask ourselves: what happens when "joking" becomes a way of telling the truth? How have comedians of color historically seized humor as a way of critiquing and exposing systems of inequity? These questions will be explored in the context of our viewing of the critically acclaimed work of stand-up comedian Aamer Rahman---a Bangladeshi Australian artist whose one man show "The Truth Hurts" builds on a rich tradition of "dark comedy" and humor as a site of racial critique.

Required:

1. Glenda Carpio, "Introduction" (only pps. 2-6) of Laughing Fit To Kill

Part II:

Requirements and How You Will Be Graded:

There are three graded requirements for this course, distributed as follows:

A. 50% Critical **verbal in-class participation** and the **weekly submission of two “discussion questions/critical issues”** (drawn directly from the issues raised in the readings) that you’d like to discuss in class.

Your guidelines for the discussion questions/critical issues competent are as follows:
- You are required to come to class every week with two short pre-prepared questions/points (i.e.—they must be typed, not handwritten, and submitted at the beginning of class via hardcopy. You should bring two copies: one for the instructor and one for yourself). It is never guaranteed that your questions will actually make it into our discussions, nonetheless you are required to come to class with them. Moreover, although you are required to submit written copies of your two questions/issues—your verbal participation in class is not limited to these two aforementioned questions/issues. In addition, it is completely acceptable to regurgitate questions/ or points that you raised in your weekly 1 page response paper. In short, your two weekly discussion questions/points should give me a clear idea of what you plan on talking about in class that day.

Your verbal participation grade will be assessed in the following way:

“**A**” Range Participation:
- You came to class every week with two well thought-out, pre-prepared “questions” or “issues” (drawn directly from the readings) that you kept handy.
- Your contributions to our class discussions indicated that you were doing the assigned readings, as opposed to simply coming to class and “improvising” on the assigned topic.
- In the moments that you were called on unexpectedly to discuss a particular topic, you articulated your ideas with clarity.
- In general, you spoke more than once at every session. This standard does not apply in instances where we did not have a class discussion (such as the instances that the class is on a fieldtrip). Nor does it apply in the instances where we ran out of time for class discussion.
- The depth of your insights were roughly in the top 30 percentile of the class (this means that whether or not you will receive an “A” in participation is contingent on the quality of your fellow colleagues’ contributions to class. Your participation grade will be curved in relationship to your peers’ participation. This means: if your peers were consistently making stronger, sharper insights in class than you were—you will receive a lower participation grade than them). “Sharp insights” do not necessarily refer to insights that were same as the professor’s view or the view of author whose work was under review that week. “Sharp insights” simply refers to your ability to breathe life, depth, nuance and wisdom to our classroom conversations.

“**B**” Range Participation (inclusive of any one of these scenarios, or all):
• You met all of the criteria listed above; your contributions were valuable and insightful—but your contributions were not consistent enough to be considered within the top 30% of the class.
• Your written weekly questions were occasionally vague—thus indicating that you probably did not actually do the assigned reading material; or that you did the readings at the last minute and simply attempted to “throw together” your discussion questions in a disingenuous attempt to fulfill the course requirement.
• Your contributions were valuable—but you lacked self-awareness. “Self-awareness” is the ability to discern when it is time to strategically be silent in order to allow your colleagues to speak.
• You raised your hand often—but when called upon, your ideas were either: a) too scattered b) simply a regurgitation of comments that someone else had already made c) lacked depth or insight.
• You were occasionally unattentive. “Unattentive” includes: texting your phone during class; using your laptop in class (prohibited); or having a “side conversation” during class. If you are observed engaging in any of these activities, even once, you will be incapable of receiving an “A” for participation.

“C” Range Participation (inclusive of any one of these scenarios, or all):
• You rarely participated in class voluntarily.
• When called upon to speak, you refused. (Responding with “I don’t know” or “I don’t have anything to say” constitutes a refusal.)

B. **25% one in-class presentation.** All students will present a 20 minute “lecture” on one of the assigned readings. The purpose of this exercise is for you to master the art of lecturing/presenting/“teaching” on a topic. On the day that you present, you are required to submit a copy (emailed electronically: to NYUGALLATINRACE@gmail.com) of your powerpoint presentation and/or an “overview” of your presentation by midnight on the DAY BEFORE CLASS (i.e. Wednesday night at midnight). You are not required to do a response paper on that day.

In order to receive an A, the guidelines are as follows (adhering to these guidelines does not guarantee that you will actually receive an A; however **NOT** adhering to these guidelines **does guarantee** that you will **NOT** receive an A):

• If you are going to be using media material (i.e. youtube clips, videos, music, etc.) your media material cannot take up more than 5 minutes worth of time. You may show multiple clips, but no one clip can be longer than 5 minutes.
• Your entire presentation must not exceed 20 minutes under any circumstances. The instructor will be obligated to stop you at the 20 minute mark, regardless of whether you have finished.
• Your entire presentation must not be shorter than 15 minutes.
• Do not include a “Question & Answer” period.
• Your presentation format can take a variety of forms. You are given free reign in coming up with your format. Among the formats you can take include: using your twenty minutes to “break down” the author’s argument; expounding upon one of the author’s theories or concepts and applying it to an outside work of art, etc. (this is called the “applying theory” approach); bring in clips/media material that you think best illustrate or contradict the point of view of the author; ask the class to get into small groups to discuss a particular issue than have them “report back” on their findings (if you do this, your small group activity segment must **NOT** exceed 6 minutes). Any of these formats is fine—you may also experiment on a format not listed.
Ultimately, you are being graded on 1) how well you engage the author’s ideas 2) originality, 3) the quality of how well you “teach” the author’s argument (this includes vehemently disagreeing with what she has to say).

C. **25% 10, 1 to 1.5 response papers.** You are required to produce ten, very brief 600 to 800 word “response papers” over the course of the semester. Your response papers will always be due on by 6am on the day of class. Your response papers are similar to the presentations insofar as the papers can serve as an opportunity to “break down” the author’s argument; or simply hone in and/or expound upon one of the theories/major ideas that the author engages. Your papers will NOT be handed back to you, nor will they be graded individually. At the end of the semester you will compile all of your response papers into one packet—alongside a 1,500 word essay where you provide an overview of the key themes, ideas, and theories that have been of interest to you this semester. Your grade for this portion of the course will be determined by the following criteria:

**A-range quality:**
- Your response papers were successfully submitted by 6am on the due date to the instructor’s email address (which will be NYUGALLATINRACE@gmail.com).
- Your response papers consisted of 600 to 800 words of your OWN voice. In other words, a 600 word response paper should not include a quotation that is 300 words.
- Your response papers were not riddled with grammatical errors.
- Your response papers were well written and highly engaging.
- Your response papers directly engaged the author’s argument. This means that before you endorsed or disagreed with the author—you took the time to actually convey the author’s argument.
- Your end-of-the-semester 1,500 word essay “overview/introduction” to your portfolio was well written.
- Your response papers brought in original examples (i.e. something going on in the realm of current affairs; a historical phenomenon, or a personal antidote) that clarified the accuracy OR limitations of the author’s arguments. (You are not required to do this every time.)

**B quality:**
- You deviated from the above criteria.
- You did not successfully submit 10 papers.
- Curve grade caveat: you met the requirements, but the quality of your response papers were inferior to that of the overall quality of the papers submitted by your peers.

**C quality:**
- You deviated from the above criteria in a truly egregious way.