Visual Culture: Race, Power, and Visuality

Amcult 601: Graduate Seminar
Winter 2015
Th: 1-4, G634 Haven Hall

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In his recent chronicle of multiculturalism in the U.S., Jeff Chang described the problem of race in America as one that “begins as a visual problem, one of vision and visuality.” This seminar will use this idea as a springboard for discussion, and consider the historical relationship between race, power, and visual culture in the U.S. What are the connections between image-making and power? How have visual technologies and cultural practices contributed to the social construction of race in the U.S.? How have artists and historical actors contested the authority of the visual through performance, reappropriation, and, what Nicholas Mirzoeff calls practices of “countervisuality”?

The course readings center around three ways of understanding the relationship between the visual and the construction of race. First, most obviously, we will consider the meanings of race that are produced by objects of visual culture, from cultural productions to visual technologies. Secondly, drawing from the key concepts of “gaze” and “visuality,” we will unpack what is meant by a racialized way of seeing. And thirdly, the course will turn to how scholars have used theoretical frameworks from performance studies to consider the intersecting relations of race, gender, and sexuality.

Required Texts:

In addition to PDFs of articles and chapters uploaded onto Ctools, we will be reading the following books for the course.


Course Requirements

There are six major obligations in this course:

• The weekly core reading assignments.

• Brief statement of intellectual goals for the course (1-page, single-spaced), due on 1/14, 12 pm.

• Written responses to the weekly readings, comprising a couple of paragraphs (~500 words) to be posted on Ctools no later than Wednesday, 12 pm. Your response can also take the form of questions.

• Leading the discussion in one of the classes. This will involve developing a brief agenda of salient questions to help structure the weekly class discussions. Your questions should incorporate the lines of argument and reflection developed in the week’s Ctools posts.

• A book review essay, and accompanying class presentation, of a recent monograph in the field of visual studies. You will sign up for the due date for this assignment in the second week of class.

• A critical paper, 12-15 pages in length, to be specified in a brief prospectus submitted by March 12.

Semester Schedule

The following schedule is subject to minor changes, depending on where our interests lead us over the course of discussion.

January 8

Introductions

January 15: Whiteness


January 22: Gaze


January 29: Visuality


February 5: Surveillance


February 12: Citizenship


**February 19: Visibility**


**February 26: Exhibition**


**March 5**

**Spring Break**

**March 12: Ethnography**

• Watch: *Bontoc Eulogy* (Dir. Marlon Fuentes, 1995)


**March 19: Empathy**


**March 26: Empire**


**April 2: Performance**


**April 9: Disidentification**


April 16: Digital


