Course Description

Nobel-laureate author Toni Morrison tells us that “in matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourse. … [This situation] is further complicated by the fact that the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture” (8-9). With these words, she pushes back against the tendency to ignore the sometimes-thorny subject of race. Because people often consider it the enlightened course to (pretend to) ignore race, and because of the acrimonious feelings discussions of race often arouse, it is tough to understand the true nature and impact of race, though we are clear that its effects are significant and widespread. In this class, we will take up Morrison’s project by attempting to move beyond the discomfort we feel to have a frank discussion about a significant issue in American literature and culture.

Our discussion will be based in a wide variety of media and texts. For example, we will read Morrison’s watershed novel *The Bluest Eye* alongside Gene Yang’s contemporary graphic novel *American Born Chinese*. We will consider movies, cartoons, hip-hop and country music videos, Supreme Court rulings, and anything else that can inform how we understand the way race is created, circulated, and used in American culture.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

This semester, you will be exposed to a wide range of cultural artifacts, as well as a variety of views on race in America. However, as Morrison suggests, it can be difficult to have productive discussion on this issue, and so the objective of this course is not simply to teach you something specific about race and its history. Rather, the goal (in many ways our primary goal) is to give you tools to talk about race in an informed way, making thoughtful arguments, thinking critically, and responding sincerely and sympathetic to the ideas of others. Entrenched opinions and 280-character sound bites take the place of informed dialogue on race for many people; this class is a space to work against that trend while gaining awareness of and appreciation for important works of American literature.

Required Texts

The texts listed below are available for purchase at the USCL Bookstore. Additional required short works and historical documents will be distributed on Blackboard.

- *American Born Chinese* (9781596431522) by Gene Luen Yang
- *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (9781565129757) by Julia Alvarez
- *The Bluest Eye* (9780307278449) by Toni Morrison
- *The Silence of Our Friends* (9781596436183) by Mark Long, Jim Demonakos, and Nate Powell
- *All Souls* (9780807072134) by Michael Patrick MacDonald

Note: some of the texts we study this semester or view in class will contain strong language or references to sex and sexuality. We will consider them thoughtfully, but please be aware if this will make you uncomfortable.
Unit Outline
Below you will find a brief overview of our course units. Each is guided by a particular consideration in our understanding of race, and each will focus an important long work and several shorter works.

Unit 1: Media Stereotypes
**Major work:** *American Born Chinese* by Gene Yang
In this unit, we will look at how negative (and positive) depictions of race in television, newspapers, and music can create unrealistic ideas about the experiences and cultures of racialized people. Often these stereotypes dehumanize members of racial minorities and flavor their interactions with members of other groups. Our primary focus will be on Asian American representations in visual culture, but the issues we discuss are applicable well beyond this field.

Unit 2: Immigration and Racialization
**Major work:** *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* by Julia Alvarez
In this unit, we will turn our attention to the kinds of stories told by people who immigrate to the United States and how those stories reflect on themes of assimilation, racialization, and language. Looking at Alvarez’s important novel as well as other similar short works, we will explore how ethnicity shapes ideas of belonging in the US, and how exclusion casts a dark shadow over such stories. In particular, we will consider the overlaps between immigration and identity.

Unit 3: Bodies and Minds
**Major work:** *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison
Beginning with Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, we will examine how white standards of beauty and family come to be metrics for marginalized and oppressed communities. This demonstrates the insidious ways that racism drives culture and contributes to one’s self-conception. We will also consider the psychological impacts of racism through the works of other authors, such as W.E.B. Du Bois.

Units 4 and 5: Unity and Division in Two Historical Moments
**Major works:**
- *The Silence of Our Friends* by Mark Long, Jim Demonakos, and Nate Powell
- *All Souls* by Michael Patrick MacDonald
For our final two units, we will look at the relationship between race and political activism. Disadvantaged people of different racial groups have often forged coalitions to advance the cause of civil rights. But there is also a history in America of race dividing groups that otherwise might work together to pursue common goals, including slaves and indentured servants rebelling against masters, whites and African-Americans fighting shared poverty, and others. These units will focus on the Civil Rights Movement and Boston Desegregation Busing Crisis to see how this played out in particular cases, but, again, we can extend the insights we generate into other areas.
Course Requirements

In-Class Participation: For this course to succeed in its mission to promote dialogue, we absolutely need active participation from everyone. I will look for you to ask good questions and offer possible answers to those your classmates ask. You should think deeply about our material, respond thoughtfully to what others say, and periodically take a leadership role in discussions. We’ll strive to maintain a respectful environment where people feel safe offering their opinion and exploring new, difficult ideas.

Presentations (1): I will ask everyone to sign up to give a brief presentation this semester. You will prepare to speak for five minutes about important things you noticed in the assigned text, as well as relevant supplementary materials you may consult if you choose (from selections on Blackboard). You will also prepare a list of 3 questions designed to stimulate thought on the subject or text.

Reading Quizzes (10): As a way to jump-start discussion and give credit to those who keep up with the reading, we will have periodic reading quizzes throughout the semester, usually unannounced. They will consist of a small selection of short answer questions and will take ten to fifteen minutes to complete.

Formal Essays (2): This semester, you will be asked write two five-page papers, which will serve as your mid-term and final. These will be formal essays asking you to perform literary analysis and to think deeply about the texts. Information regarding format and specific topics will be available on Blackboard, and we will discuss them extensively in class.

Assessment and Grading

Grades for the required components of the course will be computed based on points. Below are projected totals.

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Point Value</th>
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<tr>
<td>In-Class Participation</td>
<td>75 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>25 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Reading quizzes</td>
<td>100 (10 points each)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Essays</td>
<td>100 (50 points each)</td>
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<td>Projected total number of points:</td>
<td>300</td>
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Final letter grades will break down by percentage of the total number of points:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>90-100%</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
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Course Policies

Absences: USC system-wide policy states that absence from more than 10% of scheduled meetings for a course is considered excessive, no matter the reason. The university does not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. This class will meet 27 times this semester, so more than 3 absences will be considered excessive. Each absence after 3 will result in a participation grade penalty of 1.5 points (0.5% of the course total).

In the case of a medical or family emergency, athletic event, or religious observance that conflicts with class, tell me as soon as possible so that we can make arrangements for you to complete any missed work.

Absence from class does not absolve you from responsibility for work due, assigned, or completed in class that day. It is your responsibility to get in touch with a classmate to get any assignments given or with me to arrange to make up any work you missed.

Academic Integrity: Violations of academic integrity will not be tolerated. Any source you use—whether it has been specifically authorized for the assignment or not—must be given appropriate credit in the work you turn in. All papers will be submitted using SafeAssign, which checks for possible plagiarism.

If you are found to have violated this policy on any assignment, you will receive a zero for the assignment and an official report will be filed with the dean, which may result in further sanctions. A second violation will result in automatic failure for the course.

Blackboard: Many of our readings and a wealth of other resources have been provided on Blackboard. The site will be a major portal for the course where you will submit all of your formal assignments, where I will post required and supplemental content, and where you may participate in online discussions if inclement weather forces us to cancel class. Please check the site regularly for announcements and become familiar with its layout.

Electronic Devices: To promote the kind of engaged dialogue we’re looking for, I ask that you not use electronic devices in class. If you use them, it will negatively affect your participation grade. If you use an electronic device as part of a disability accommodation, please let me know. See below for more on resources for students with disabilities.

Extra Credit: You can earn 3 points of extra credit (1% toward your final grade) for visiting the Academic Success Center to discuss your papers. You can do this once for each paper.

Late Papers: Papers received after 11:59 on the day they are due will be penalized one point immediately and one additional point for each 24 hours that elapses until they are submitted.

MLA Format: All papers must adhere to MLA format for the document and citations. This includes 1-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font, appropriate headers, double-spacing, no excess line breaks, a proper and complete Works Cited page, etc.

Outside Sources: There are no shortcuts to the kind of intellectual skills we’ll be working on in this class. Reference sites and study aids on the Web can give you a ready-made opinion about some of the texts we read, but they can’t teach you how to interpret them. It’s okay to be aware of what has been said about a text before, but it is not okay to submit those ideas as your own or let them take the place of serious work interpreting a source for yourself. I strongly discourage you from visiting these sites. If you visit any site like this you absolutely must cite them as you would any other source from which you borrow an idea, structure, sentence, or concept. Failure to do so likely constitutes plagiarism.
Student Resources
USCL provides many resources to ensure your success. One of the most important things you can do to make steady progress toward your degree is to take advantage of as many opportunities around campus as you can and to reach out for help when you need it. The services listed below may come in handy this semester or in the future.

Academic Success Center: The Academic Success Center (ASC) is located on the second floor of Medford Library and is designed to help students attain academic success by providing a variety of resources to support their academic pursuits, including one-on-one tutoring, computer assisted instruction (CAI), instructional video tapes, supplementary handbooks and texts, and workbooks.

Counseling Services: College can be stressful, and it comes with a lot of new challenges and responsibilities. If you find you are struggling to manage, feeling stressed or overwhelmed, or simply need the support of someone to talk to, please contact Counseling Services. Their Web site is http://www.sc.edu/about/system_and_campuses/lancaster/internal/current_students/counseling_disability_services/personal_counseling_services/index.php.

Medford Library: We may use the research resources available through the Medford Library this semester, but you may want to seek out the librarians on your own for this class or others. They are there to help you connect with valuable information buried in out-of-the-way places. Visit their Web site at https://www.sc.edu/about/system_and_campuses/lancaster/experience/library/index.php.

Office of Disability Services: Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should register with the Office of Student Disability Services in Starr Hall Room 125D. They can devise a plan to make sure you are afforded full access to university resources and support. You can also contact this office through their Web site: http://www.sc.edu/about/system_and_campuses/lancaster/internal/current_students/counseling_disability_services/disability_services/index.php.

USC Office of Academic Integrity: This office provides resources for understanding what is required of students in terms of avoiding plagiarism, cheating, and other violations of the student code. If you are confused or worried about a particular practice, please visit the Web site here, which also describes penalties and rights students have when confronted or charged with academic integrity violations: https://www.sa.sc.edu/academicintegrity/.