



# Full Syllabus



## Course Title

**WHITENESS AND THE STUDY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE**

## Lecturer

Taylor Johnston

## Semester

Spring 2021

## Course description

How does twentieth-century and contemporary literature of the United States represent racial whiteness? And how can critical race theory help us answer this literary question? Since the early 1990s, many race theorists have taken whiteness, rather than People of Color, as an object of study, arguing that doing so opens up a unique perspective on race in the U.S. We will explore their ideas about terms that are now commonly used in popular culture, such as privilege, supremacy, abolition, colorblindness, and fragility. As we move through our theoretical readings, we will constantly ask what new understandings of American literature and film emerge with whiteness critique as our lens, and what these forms have contributed to the critical project. For example, what do we gain from considering racial whiteness from the position of both white and minority (particularly African American) writers? Can economic class play a role in building political solidarity between whites and People of Color? And how has the terror of whiteness, experienced by People of Color at different moments in U.S. history, found expression in literature and film? Toward the end of the course, we will study the relationships that immigrant groups have had with whiteness, including Arab- and Jewish-Americans, and look at recent attempts to map American critical race theory onto identity formation in Israel.

## Course requirements

### REQUIRED TEXTS

Richard Wright, *Native Son* (ISBN-10: 006083756X, ISBN-13: 978-0060929800)

Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (ISBN-10 : 1555976905, ISBN-13 : 978-1555976903)

**Students should obtain copies of these texts as soon as possible.** Selected readings detailed in the schedule below will be made available on the course website.

### ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION

I want you to succeed in this course, and, in order to do so, you need to attend class and participate regularly. Your participation grade will be determined by your attendance and comments during class, including break-out groups. **Webcams must be turned on.**

If you are uncomfortable participating for any reason, please come see me in office hours so we can brainstorm strategies or come up with alternative forms of participation.

Every student has one free, totally excused absence – no need to email for permission. More than one absence will lower your participation grade.

### OFFICE HOURS (Sundays 9:00-10:00 a.m. and by appointment)

I love to work with students individually in office hours. It's a great opportunity for you to get help with this semester's concepts and it's fun, so please come often. If you have an important obligation during office



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