

RTE 335: Race, Class, and Gender in American Television

Instructor: Adrien Sebro, Ph.D.

Class: MWF 3-3:50PM in CMA 6.170

Screening: Tuesdays 5-7:30PM in CMA 3.120

Office Hours: Monday 11am-12pm

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Course Description:

Television can be understood as a reflection of the American imaginary. It's a conduit of creative and political expression, a cultural forum that plays a role in defining communities, and a site where ideas about race, ethnicity, class, gender, and citizenship are enacted on a national scale. In this course we explore these various dynamics in scripted television in the United States from the late 1940s through the present day. In addition to studying how racial and ethnic diversity and also class, gender, and sexual orientation have been represented in entertainment television and how various groups have participated in television production and consumption (and in advocacy targeting networks and producers), contemporary debates and negotiations related to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation and televisual representation and authorship will be explored. The history of television studies and a variety of approaches to television criticism rooted in the contemporary humanities, social sciences, and cultural studies also will be surveyed throughout the semester. This course carries UT's Cultural Diversity flag. It focuses on the representation and participation of African Americans, Latina/os, and Asian Americans in scripted television, as well as on American Indians/Alaska natives, Arab/Muslim, Jewish, and European American representation and the construction of "whiteness." In addition, intersections of class, gender, sexual orientation, and citizenship with race and ethnicity in televisual representation will be explored.

This course will often discuss readings and view screenings that address gender, sexuality, race, religion, socioeconomics, etc. This classroom will be a **safe space** for these conscious discussions and opinions. Any prejudices, bigotry, homophobia, transphobia, etc. will not be tolerated. Every student's discussions and opinions can of course be challenged but must be done respectfully.

Readings:

Most of your readings are compiled from multiple sources into a two-volume reading packet, which we'll start using the first full week of class. The rest of the readings will be posted to Canvas or through links posted to Canvas. The course reader is available for purchase at Jenn's Copies, 2518 Guadalupe (on Guadalupe, across the street from the CMA building). A copy of the course packet also will be on reserve for 2-hour checkout in the Perry Castañeda Library (PCL) Reserves.

Course Requirements

This course consists of three 50-minute classes per week, weekly screenings, and several outside assignments. The reading and outside assignments will require a regular allotment of time outside of

class each week. Your progress will be assessed through your participation in class discussions and reading responses, three writing assignments, a midterm exam, and a group research project/paper.

Grading Breakdown:

Participation – 10%. This grade will be based on taking an active part in class and faithful attendance. As you know, this course will explore the representation of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation in U.S. television and popular culture. While there are some facts, research, and scholarly opinions that I'll share with you on these topics, the meanings of such representation are created by all of us and are the subject of ongoing debate. For this reason, everyone's participation is important to what I consider a successful class. I strongly encourage you to share your reactions to the course material in class, as well as any questions that arise. Please also let me or the TA know either in or outside class when the reading is difficult to understand or if you are struggling with sharing your responses.

Respectful listening and treatment of your fellow classmates and the course instructors also is a component of optimal participation in class. Keep in mind that we all come from very different backgrounds and will have similarly different perspectives; in my mind a successful class is one in which we feel comfortable sharing our various viewpoints and learning from one another.

Response Postings - 10%. Beginning the third week of class, by Monday or Wednesday before class every week (based on if you're in Group 1 (A-L last names: Post Mondays) or Group 2 (M-Z last names: post Wednesdays)), you'll be expected to post an entry to our Canvas site responding to a dimension or part of the reading which you found to be of particular interest. These entries can be brief—150-250 words—and should consist of a comment, question, or connection you made based on personal experience. Be sure to respond at least partially to a reading from that week in your entries; you additionally can respond to the week's screening or discuss relevant things you're seeing on television (or television clips on YouTube or other sites) or in the news. When possible, I'll use your postings as jumping off points for class discussion.

If class meets only one day in a week, both groups are expected to post on that day class meets. You do get one "freebie" week of your choosing when you don't have to post, and there are no reading responses due the week of the midterm exam. In all, try to post 10 times during the semester. You'll be graded on a 3-point scale for each post.

Midterm Exam – 20%. This exam will consist of true/false, multiple-choice, and short-answer questions and one essay question and will cover material outlined in the lectures, readings, screenings, and class discussions in roughly the first half of the semester.

Assignments - 35% (three short papers - worth 5, 15, and 15%). The three writing assignments will consist of a Personal Television Memories paper, a television episode critique, and a network or producer critique. Assignment guidelines will be passed out in class well before each assignment is due. If you have difficulties with your writing, I encourage you come to my office hours, the TA's office hours, or to work with someone from the University Writing Center throughout the semester.

Group Research Project – 25%. In groups of four or five, you will conduct a research project related to race, class, gender, or sexual orientation and television in the last half of the semester. Over a period of a month, your group will explore a research question of your choosing; each person in the group will focus on one aspect of the topic. This project will entail either historical research, taking as a jumping off point one or more readings for this class, or a critique of a

television network or television series, with a focus on race, ethnicity, class, gender, or sexual orientation. Other options could be a study of audience response to a television series or network, an exploration of media advocacy focused on television network or series, or research on web-based series production.

Group assignments will be made by lottery. You'll be asked to turn in a Group Research Worksheet to propose your group's project and research question (a question you'd like to try to answer), and to specify how each person in the group will undertake some aspect of exploring the question. Your group will be asked to create a research blog; each member should make regular posts on the work they are doing and overall progress in attempting to answer the research question. Your group's blog will be checked twice during the five weeks that you'll be gathering information for your project. Groups will make final presentations during the last week of class, when everyone will also turn in a summary of your research projects and findings and a confidential assessment of how everyone in your group contributed. You will receive separate grades based on your individual contributions. More guidelines for this project will be passed out later in the semester.

Class Policies

Grading system: This class will be graded using the following letter grade system: A (93%+), A- (90-92%), B+ (88-89%), B (83-87%), B- (80-82%), C+ (78-79%), C (70-77%), D (60-69%), F (less than 60%).

Late assignments will be penalized ½ a letter grade per day late.

Attendance: Class attendance is mandatory. Excused absences include absences discussed in advance for religious holidays, or absences related to serious illness. Please let me know via email if you ever have to miss a class. If you miss an assignment due to an excused absence you will be given an opportunity to complete it within a reasonable time afterward. Each student is granted two personal leave credits during the semester, meant to be used for emergencies that keep you away from class, after which your participation grade will be lowered by a half letter grade for each unexcused absence. Excessive tardiness also will result in grade sanctions, so be sure to arrive on time and to let me know if you will have to be late for class.

The class screenings are like assigned books in a literature course; for this reason, attendance at screenings is mandatory (unless excused prior to the screening). If you do have to miss a screening, be sure to arrange with Dr. Sebro to watch what you've missed before the next class.

Academic Integrity. Each student is expected to abide by the University of Texas Honor Code: "As a student of The University of Texas at Austin, I shall abide by the core values of the University and uphold academic integrity." Plagiarism is taken very seriously at UT. Therefore, if you use words or ideas that are not your own (or that you have used in a previous class), you must cite your sources. Otherwise you will be guilty of plagiarism and subject to academic disciplinary action, including failure of the course. You are responsible for understanding UT's Academic Honesty and the University Honor Code: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php.

Name and Personal Pronoun Preferences. Class rosters are provided to me with your legal name. I will honor your request to address you by a name that is different from what appears on the official roster, and by the gender pronouns you use (she/he/they/ze, etc). Please advise me of this preference early in the semester.

Writing and Learning Support

Moody College Writing Support Program. <<http://sites.utexas.edu/moodywriting/>>, located in BMC 3.322, offers individualized assistance to undergraduates in Moody College classes seeking to improve their writing. They have specialists in RTF, among other communication fields. You can book half-hour appointments on their website for assistance during all stages of the writing process. Writing coaches also will take drop-ins if they are not working with appointments.

The University Writing Center. <<http://uwc.utexas.edu/>>, at PCL 2.330, on the first floor of the Learning Commons of the Perry Castañeda Library, offers individualized assistance to students who want to improve their writing skills. There is no charge, and students may come in on a drop in or appointment basis.

Please inform me early in the semester if you have a learning difference or other issue that could affect your performance in class or your work outside of class. I will work to accommodate you and will maintain the confidentiality of these discussions. For more information on learning accommodations, contact Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329- 3986 (video phone).

University Resources for Self Care: Taking care of your general well-being is an important step in being a successful student. If stress, test anxiety, racing thoughts, feeling unmotivated or anything else is getting in your way, there are options available for support.

For *immediate* support, visit/Call the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC): M-F 8-5p | SSB, 5th floor | [512-471-3515](tel:512-471-3515) | cmhc.utexas.edu

- CMHC Crisis Line: 24/7 | [512.471.2255](tel:512.471.2255) | cmhc.utexas.edu/24hourcounseling.html
- CARE Counselor in the Moody College of Communication is: Abby Simpson, LCSW
 - M-F 8-5p | CMA 4.134 | [512-471-7642](tel:512-471-7642) (Please *leave a message* if she is unavailable)
- *FREE Services* at CMHC include:
 - Brief assessments and referral services
 - Mental health & wellness articles -cmhc.utexas.edu/commonconcerns.html
 - MindBody Lab - cmhc.utexas.edu/mindbodylab.html
 - Classes, workshops, & groups -cmhc.utexas.edu/groups.html

Title IX Reporting

Title IX is a federal law that protects against sex and gender based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual misconduct, dating/domestic violence and stalking at federally funded educational institutions. UT Austin is committed to fostering a learning and working environment free from discrimination in all its forms. When sexual misconduct occurs in our community, the university can:

1. Intervene to prevent harmful behavior from continuing or escalating.
2. Provide support and remedies to students and employees who have experienced harm or have become involved in a Title IX investigation.

3. Investigate and discipline violations of the university's relevant policies. Faculty members and certain staff members are considered "Responsible Employees" or "Mandatory Reporters," which means that they are required to report violations of Title IX to the Title IX Coordinator. I am a Responsible Employee and must report any Title IX related incidents that are disclosed in writing, discussion, or one-on-one. Before talking with me, or with any faculty or staff member about a Title IX related incident, be sure to ask whether they are a responsible employee. If you want to speak with someone for support or remedies without making an official report to the university, email advocate@austin.utexas.edu For more information about reporting options and resources, visit titleix.utexas.edu or contact the Title IX Office at titleix@austin.utexas.edu. The following recommendations regarding emergency evacuation from the Office of Campus Safety and Security, 512-471-5767, <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/> Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside.

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.
- Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire Department, The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.
- Link to information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: www.utexas.edu/emergency

Important Safety Information: If you have concerns about the safety or behavior of fellow students, TAs or Professors, call BCAL (the Behavior Concerns Advice Line): 512-232-5050. Your call can be anonymous. If something doesn't feel right – it probably isn't. Trust your instincts and share your concerns

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- Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire Department, The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.
- Link to information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: www.utexas.edu/emergency

Scholastic Dishonesty: The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. **By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them.** Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. For more information on scholastic dishonesty, please visit the Student Judicial services Web site at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs>.

Semester Schedule

NOTE: All screenings and assigned readings are subject to change as the semester progresses.

Week 1 / Introductions (1/22-1/24)

Introduction to course

“Moonlight” (2017, Alan Yang/Jay-Z)

Color Adjustment (Marlon Riggs, 1991)

For Monday 1/27, Read “Plastic Representation” by K. Warner

Week 2 / Studying Race, Class, & Gender and Television: Foundational Concepts (1/27-1/31)

Michael Omi and Howard Winant, “Racial Formations;” Aamna Mohdin, “More than a Black Friends”

Gregory Mantsios, “Media Magic: Making Class Invisible”

Screening 1/28: *Friday Night Lights*, “El Accidente” (S1 Ep.6, 2006); *Glee*, Pilot (S1, Ep.1, 2009); *Brown is the New Green: George Lopez and the American Dream* (2007, Phillip Rodriguez)

Week 3 / Foundational Concepts II (2/3-2/7)

Assignment 1 Due

Judith Lorber, “Believing is Seeing: Biology as Identity;” Larry Gross, excerpt, “The Mediated Society”

Ramirez Berg, “Stereotypes in Film;” Mary Beltrán, “Meaningful Diversity”

Screening 2/4: Texaco Star Theater (3/22/49 episode – First 30 minutes), Jack Benny Show “How Jack Found Mary” (1952), Amos ‘n’ Andy: Anatomy of a Controversy (1983, d. Stanley Sheff, sc/p Bob Greenberg, 60 min.)

Week 4 Television’s Inheritance of “American” Ideals of Race, Class, and Gender (2/10-2/14)

Michele Hilmes, “Who We Are: Who We are Not: The Emergence of National Narratives”

Michele Hilmes, “Desired and Feared: Women’s Voices in Radio History;” Susan Murray, “Ethnic Masculinity and Early Television’s Vaudeo Star”

Screening 2/11: *Leave it to Beaver*, “The Grass is Always Greener” (S2 Ep.54, 1958); *Lost in*

Space, “Welcome Stranger” (S1, Ep. 6, 1965); *Julia*, “Homework Isn’t Housework” (S1 Ep.4, 1968)

Week 5 / Ethnicity, Suburbanization, and Early Television Families (2/17-2/21)

George Lipsitz, “The Meaning of Memory: Family, Class, and Ethnicity in Early Network Television Programs;” Mary Beth Haralovich, “Sit-coms and Suburbs: Positioning the 1950s Homemaker”

Aniko Bodroghkozy, “‘Is This What You Mean By Color TV?’ Race, Gender, and Contested Meanings on NBC’s *Julia*”

Screening 2/18: *Room 222*, *Mod Squad*

Week 6 / Civil Rights Activism and Television (2/24-2/28)

Assignment 2 Due

Chon Noriega, “Training the Activists to Shoot Straight”

Bodroghkozy, “Negotiating Civil Rights in Prime Time: A Production and Reception History of CBS’s *East Side/West Side*”

Screening 2/25: *Good Times*, “Michael Gets Suspended” (S1 Ep.3, 1974); *Sanford and Son*, “Fred Sanford, Legal Eagle” (S3, Ep. 15, 1974)

Week 7 / Representation in the Era of “Relevance” (3/2-3/6)

Christine Acham, “This Ain’t no Junk: *Sanford and Son* and African American Humor”

Christine Acham, “Respect Yourself! Black Women and Power in *Julia* and *Good Times*”

No Screening 3/3: Study for next week’s exam

Week 8 / Midterm Exam / Mixed Race, Interracial Romance and Television (3/9-3/13)

Midterm Exam

No response postings this week

Erica Chito Childs, “Shades of Grey: Interracial Romance and Television”
The Jeffersons “Jenny’s Low”

Screening 3/10: *George Lopez*, “George Decides to Sta-Local Where It’s Familia” (S6, Ep.18, 2007); *Jane the Virgin*, “Chapter One” (2014); *Vida*, “Episode 1” (2018)

Week 9 (3/16-3/20)

SPRING BREAK

Week 10 / Latino/as and Television (3/23-3/27)

Response postings start again

Beltrán, “Television” and “Late Invites to the Party”

Pick topics/groups for group research projects

Guillermo Avila-Saavedra, “Ethnic Otherness vs. Cultural Assimilation: Latino Comedians...”

Screening 3/24: *The Cosby Show*, “Theo’s Holiday” (S2, Ep.21, 1986); A Different World, “Ms. Understanding” (S4, Ep.17, 1991); Frank’s Place, “The Bum Out Front” (S1, Ep.14, 1988) *Martin* “Aint Nothin’ Goin on But the Rent”

Week 11 / 1980s-Early ‘90s African American Sitcoms (3/30-4/3) NO CLASS FRIDAY 4/3

Christine Acham, “The Cosby Show: Representing Race”

Submit Group Research Project Proposals online by end of day

Herman Gray, “It’s a Different World Where You Come From”; Richard Campbell and Jimmie L. Reeves, “Television Authors: The Case of Hugh Wilson”

Watch on-line 3/31: *Roseanne*, “Sweet Dreams” (S2, Ep.8 1990); *Ellen*, “The Puppy Episode, Part 1” (S4 Ep.24, 1997)

Week 12 / Expanding Televisual Frontiers of Feminism & Sexual Orientation (4/6-4/10)

Assignment 3 Due

Kathleen K. Rowe, “*Roseanne*: Unruly Woman as Domestic Goddess”

Jennifer Reed, “The Three Phases of *Ellen*: From Queer to Gay to Postgay;” Alfred Martin, “Scripting Black Gayness”

Screening 4/7: *Married, With Children*, “You Better Shop Around, Part 1,” (S5 Ep.19, 1991); *Living Single*, “Five-Card Stud,” S1 Ep.23, 1993); *All-American Girl*, “Take My Family, Please” (S1 Ep.8, 1994)

***First group research blog check: Sunday, 4/12 5pm**

Week 13 / Racial & Ethnic Diversity in 1990s Television (4/13-4/17)

Kristal Brent Zook, “*Living Single* and ‘the Fight for Mr. Right’: Latifah Don’t Play”; Felicia D. Henderson, “*South Central*: Black Writers and the Responsibility and Burden of Creating Black Characters for a Black Audience”

L.S. Kim, “Be the One That You Want: Asian Americans in Television Culture, Onscreen and Beyond”

Screenings 4/14: *Northern Exposure* (Season 1 Episode 1, 1990), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, “The Prom” (S3, Ep.20, 1999) Watch online

Week 14 / Late 90s-early Millennial TV: New Frontiers of Diversity? (4/20-4/24)

4/20: Guest Lecturer, Lily Kunda, RTF Ph.D. Student

Elana Levine, “Buffy and the New Girl Order”

Screening: *Broad City*, *Misadventures of an Awkward Black Girl*, *BFFs*

***Second group research blog check: 5pm, 4/19**

Week 15 / Present & Future Trends (4/27-5/1)

Isabel Molina-Guzmán, excerpt, “Introduction: Latina/os, Hipster Racism, and Post-racial TV”

Christine Acham, “Blacks in the Future: Braving the Frontier of the Web Series”

Screening: *Outta Pocket*, *Giants*, *Master of None*

Week 16 / Presentations & Class Wrap-up (5/4-5/8)

Project Presentations

Project Presentations and Class Wrap up

Group Project Summaries due