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# Critical Whiteness Studies

# University of Bielefeld, Seminar 300468, Summer Semester 2021

# Di 10-13h, Do 14-17h, Blockseminar: 22.06 to 22.07

This course offers an introduction to critical whiteness studies. For many Black people and people of color, studying white people has long been a key part of everyday practices of survival and resistance. There is also a long history of research and writing on whiteness by people of color such as W. E. B. Du Bois, James Baldwin, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Toni Morrison, and many others. In mainstream white society and social science, in contrast, discussions of “race” have tended to focus on any and every racialized group except white people. Racism has usually been framed as a problem only for people of color, not for white people. Whiteness has thus often functioned for white people as an unspoken social and epistemological norm. Similarly, public criticism of racism and white supremacy has usually focused on right-wing extremists and other obvious racists, thus neglecting more subtle manifestations of systemic racism. Since the early 1990s, scholars in critical whiteness studies and related fields have tried to address these issues by devoting increased attention to the history, philosophy, and politics of whiteness and white identity. Their work shows that, like “race” itself, whiteness lacks any genetic basis, and yet it has real effects in politics, education, science, and other social contexts. Most work in critical whiteness studies has focused on the United States, but *Kritische Weißseinsforschung* has also become well established in Germany and other countries. Much of this seminar will be devoted to comparing and contrasting the U.S. and Germany with regard to the history, culture, and politics of whiteness and white identity.

The questions we will consider include: How have people conceptualized “race,” racism, antiracism, racialization, and whiteness in different historical and cultural contexts? How does whiteness intersect with class, gender, and other social categories? How have implicit conceptions of whiteness shaped scholarly research? How have they shaped teaching and learning? How do different conceptions of “race” shape policies on the collection of social statistics, and how do they affect public knowledge and attitudes about racism? What has been, and what should be, the role of people socially defined as white in antiracist initiatives?

**Seminar meetings**

The success of this course depends on students completing the assigned reading before each meeting. It also depends on active student participation in class discussions. I will be in Bielefeld during the course, but due to the pandemic we will need to meet on Zoom. We will make use of breakout rooms, discussion questions, worksheets, and other means of stimulating lively and productive meetings. Our class discussions will primarily be in English, but I am also glad to speak with you in German as needed. At our first meeting, I will ask you to share your interests and expectations for the course. Many of the issues that we will address are personally sensitive and politically controversial, and they may affect different people in different ways, so we will also talk about how to ensure that our discussions are mutually respectful, engaging, and productive. If you ever have any questions or concerns about the course, please email me at [mark.brown@csus.edu](mailto:mark.brown@csus.edu)

**Required texts**

Most of the assigned texts will be available as PDFs in the *Lernraum*. A few texts are available online via links in the reading schedule, and some are available both online and as PDFs*.* The texts are from numerous academic disciplines, including philosophy of race, social and political theory, and empirical sociology and political science, and some are short opinion pieces and newspaper or magazine articles; some of the texts are in English and some in German, and the authors themselves are diverse in various ways.

During the first week, in meetings 1 and 2, we will discuss several influential texts that introduce the basic notion of “turning the lens” in the study of racism to focus on white people. Meeting 3 will provide an overview of critical whiteness studies, including some important criticisms of the field. In meeting 4, we will examine different definitions of racism and other key concepts, and we will consider recent debates about proposals to remove the word *Rasse* from the German constitution. Meetings 5, 6, 7 each focus on debates about a key concept in critical whiteness studies: white supremacy, white privilege, and white fragility. In meetings 8 and 9, we will discuss recent empirical studies on white identity politics in the United States, including efforts by some white people to defend white supremacy, and efforts by other white people to dismantle it. In contrast to earlier research that emphasized the invisibility of whiteness to white people, these studies find that many white people today, on both the political left and the right, actively identify as white, but with very different purposes. In meeting 10 we will conclude the seminar by asking, Now what?, in part by discussing recent debates about the possibilities and limits of white antiracist activism.

**Assessment Options**

*Studienleistungen:* Prepare for each class meeting by completing the assigned reading and participate actively in class discussions and activities. Additionally, choose two class meetings, and prepare for class by writing a critical review of about 300 words on at least two of the texts assigned for those meetings. Post your review for other students to read on the course website by 8:00 p.m. on the day before we discuss your chosen texts. To ensure a relatively even distribution of topics, please indicate which texts you will review on the schedule at this [link on Google Docs](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MVythtNw1tq-H6eqQtMkY1SxqRLsw7gzkT1h9mrbMJY/edit?usp=sharing). (It’s fine if some texts are reviewed by multiple students, but ideally every text will find at least one reviewer.) You may write in either German or English. Critical reviews should: (a) carefully summarize a few main points from the texts, (b) critically assess what you consider most significant about the texts, (c) include at least one direct quote from the texts to substantiate your discussion, (d) provide 2-3 interesting questions for discussion in class. Since you will not have room to discuss everything in the texts, try to make generalizations based on your assessment of what's most significant, supported by selected examples. (Emphasize the forest, but include a few trees.) And feel free to share your own perspective, opinions, or confusions about the texts and the issues they raise – that’s what makes it interesting!

*Prüfungsleistung:* In addition to writing two critical reviews, write a research paper of about 20 pages (double-spaced, 5,000 words) on one of the issues examined in the course. Sample topics and additional guidelines will be provided once the course begins.

**Course Schedule and Texts**

**1) June 22: Introduction: Turning the Lens**

Bennett Jr., Lerone. 1966. The White Problem in America. In *The White Problem in America,* ed. The Editors of *Ebony.* Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1-10.

hooks, bell. 1992/1998. Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination*.* In *Black on White: Black Writers on What it Means to Be White*, ed. David R. Roediger. New York: Shocken Books, pp. 38-53.

Eggers, Maureen Maisha, Grada Kilomba, Peggy Piesche, Susan Arndt. 2005. *Mythen, Masken und Subjekte: Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland,* ed. Münster: Unrast Verlag, pp. 7-21.

El-Tayeb, Fatima. 2005. Vorwort. In Eggers et. al. 2005, pp. 7-10.

Eggers et. al. 2005. Konzeptionelle Überlegungen. In Eggers et al. 2005, pp. 11-13.

Piesche, Peggy. 2005. Das Ding mit Dem Subjekt, oder: Wem Gehört die Kritische Weißseinsforschung. In Eggers et al. 2005, pp. 14-17.

Eggers, Maureen Maisha. 2005. Ein Schwarzes Wissensarchiv. In Eggers et al. 2005, pp. 18-21.

Recommended

Du Bois, W. E. B. 1920/1987. The Souls of White Folk. In *Writings,* ed. Nathan Huggins. New York: Penguin, pp. 923-938.

Hyatt, Millay. 2015. Weißsein als Privileg. *Deutchlandfunk*. May 5. <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/critical-whiteness-weisssein-als-privileg.1184.de.html?dram:article_id=315084>

**2) June 24: James Baldwin’s Critique of White Innocence**

Baldwin, James. 1998. Stranger in the Village, My Dungeon Shook, The American Dream and the American Negro, and The White Man’s Guilt. In *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison. New York: Modern Library, pp. 117-129, 291-295, 714-719, 722-727. (26 pages)

Baldwin, James. 2010. The White Problem, and On Being White . . . And Other Lies. In *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, ed. Randall Kenan. New York: Vintage, pp. 88-97, 166-170. (9 pages)

Recommended

Film: Peck, Raoul (dir). 2016. *I Am Not Your Negro*. Online rental: [Amazon.de](https://www.amazon.de/I-Am-Not-Your-Negro/dp/B073BMM8GV/ref=sr_1_1?__mk_de_DE=%C3%85M%C3%85%C5%BD%C3%95%C3%91&dchild=1&keywords=i+am+not+your+negro&qid=1623078034&s=instant-video&sr=1-1), <http://www.iamnotyournegrofilm.com/watch-at-home>

**3) June 29: Promise and Pitfalls of Critical Whiteness Studies in the United States and Germany**

Ignatiev, Noel. 1997. The Point Is Not To Interpret Whiteness But To Abolish It. Talk given at the Conference “The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness.” University of California, Berkeley, April 11-13.

Alcoff, Linda Martín. 2015. *The Future of Whiteness.*Cambridge, UK: Polity, pp. 1-38,

Kerner, Ina. 2013. Critical Whiteness Studies: Potentiale und Grenzen eines wissenspolitischen Projekts. *Feministische Studien* 31 (2): 278-293.

Recommended

Müller, Ulrike A. 2011. Far Away So Close: Race, Whiteness, and German Identity. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 18(6): 620-645.

Piorkowski, Christoph David. 2016. "Critical Whiteness": Die unsichtbare weiße Norm. *Tagesspiegel*. 17. Mai. <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/wissen/critical-whiteness-die-unsichtbare-weisse-norm/13600832.html>

Sullivan, Shannon. 2018. Critical Whiteness Studies. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia: Communication*.

Critical Whiteness – Kritisches Weißsein. 2013. Special issue of *Migrazine* 2. <https://www.migrazine.at/ausgabe/2013/2>

**4) July 1: Definitions of Race, Racism, Antiracism**

Shelby, Tommie. 2012. Race. In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*, ed. David Estlund. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kendi, Ibram X. 2019. *How to Be an Antiracist.* New York: One World. Introduction and Chap. 1-3, pp. 3-43.

[Diskussionsentwurf des Bundesministeriums der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz: Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur Ersetzung des Begriffs „Rasse“ in Artikel 3 Absatz 3 Satz 1 des Grundgesetzes](https://www.bmjv.de/SharedDocs/Gesetzgebungsverfahren/Dokumente/DiskE_Ersetzung_Begriff_Rasse.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=3)

[Bundesrechtsanwaltskammer. 2021. Ersetzung des Begriffs „Rasse“ in Art. 3 Grundgesetz: BRAK sieht Änderungspläne skeptisch. *Nachrichten aus Berlin* 4, February 25.](https://brak.de/zur-rechtspolitik/newsletter/nachrichten-aus-berlin/2021/ausgabe-4-2021-v-2522021/ersetzung-des-begriffs-rasse-in-art-3-grundgesetz-brak-sieht-aenderungsplaene-skeptisch/)

Cremer, Hendrik (2020): Das Verbot rassistischer Diskriminierung. Vorschlag für eine Änderung von Artikel 3 Absatz 3 Satz 1 Grundgesetz. Berlin: Deutsches Institut für Menschenrechte. <https://www.institut-fuer-menschenrechte.de/publikationen/detail/das-verbot-rassistischer-diskriminierung>

Roig, Emilia. 2017. Uttering “race” in colorblind France and post-racial Germany. In *Rassismuskritik und Widerstandsformen*, ed. Karim Fereidooni and Meral El. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, pp. 613-627.

Gaul, Simone, und Christian Vooren. 2020. Endlich Sichtbar. *Zeit Online.* June 12. <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2020-06/afrozensus-rassismus-deutschland-aufklaerung-schwarze-community>

Recommended

Balibar, Etienne. 1991. Is There a 'Neo-Racism'? In Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. London: Verso, pp. 17-28. (Skip or skim pp. 17-20.)

Bös, Mathias. 2019. Migration, Ethnizität und „Rasse“: Theoretische Perspektiven in der „race and ethnic relations“-Forschung. In *Handbuch Migrationssoziologie*, ed. Antje Röder and Darius Zifonun. Wiesbaden: Springer VS. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-20773-1_8-1>

Barskanmaz, Cengiz. 2011. Rasse: Unwort des Antidiskriminierungsrechts? *Kritische Justiz* 3: 382-389.

# Sanyal, Mithu. 2019. Suddenly, it’s OK to be German and to talk about race. *The Guardian.* September 18. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/18/germany-race-conversation-afd-openness>

Witting, Volker. 2020. 'Race' has no place in the German constitution — or does it? Deutsche Welle, June 13. <https://www.dw.com/en/race-has-no-place-in-the-german-constitution-or-does-it/a-53790056>

Kelly, Natasha A. 2020. Why Germany Is in Need of a Racial Turn. *Frieze*, September 30. <https://www.frieze.com/article/why-germany-need-racial-turn>

**5) July 6: White Supremacy**

hooks, bell. 1995. Overcoming White Supremacy: A Comment. In *Killing Rage: Ending Racism.* New York: Henry Holt, pp. 184-195.

Mills, Charles W. 2003. White Supremacy as Sociopolitical System: A Philosophical Perspective. In *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*, ed. Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. New York: Routledge, pp. 35-48.

Mills, Charles W. 2007. White Ignorance. In *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 11-38.

Recommended

Chait, Jonathan. 2017. Donald Trump, White Supremacy, and the Discourse of Panic. *New York*. September 24.

Newkirk III, Vann R. 2017. The Language of White Supremacy. *The Atlantic.* October 6. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/10/the-language-of-white-supremacy/542148/>

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. 2017. The First White President. *The Atlantic.* October. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/the-first-white-president-ta-nehisi-coates/537909/>

**6) July 8:** **White Privilege**

McIntosh, Peggy. 1989. White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack. *Peace and Freedom.* July-August: 10-12.

Sullivan, Shannon. 2017. White Privilege. In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Race*, ed. Naomi Zack. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 331-341.

Sullivan, Shannon. 2019. *White Privilege*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, Introduction, and Chap. 2, 3.

Recommended

Video: Bergman, Sunny. 2017. The Colour White. Film. VPRO. <https://www.vpro.nl/speel~WO_VPRO_8420474~the-colour-white~.html>

**7) July 13: White Fragility**

DiAngelo, Robin. 2011. White Fragility. The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy. 3(3): 54-70. <http://libjournal.uncg.edu/ijcp/article/download/249/116>

Pan, J. C. 2020. Workplace “Anti-Racism Trainings” Aren’t Helping. *Jacobin*. September 9. <http://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/09/workplace-anti-racism-trainings-trump-corporate-america>

Owen, Malloy. 2021. The Unchosen Condition: Robin DiAngelo’s Peculiar Gospel. *The Hedgehog Review.* Spring. <https://hedgehogreview.com/issues/who-do-we-think-we-are/articles/the-unchosen-condition>

Recommended

Lozada, Carlos. 2020. White Fragility Is Real. But ‘White Fragility’ Is Flawed. Washington Post. June 18.

Chait, Jonathan. 2020. Is the Anti-Racism Training Industry Just Peddling White Supremacy? *New York.* July 16.

Hill, T., Mannheimer, A. and Roos, J.M. 2021. Measuring White Fragility. *Social Science Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12985>

**8) July 15:** **White Identity Politics: Protecting Whiteness**

Jardina, Ashley. 2019. *White Identity Politics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, chap. 1, pp. 1-20.

Illing, Sean. 2019. White identity politics is about more than racism. Vox. April 27. <https://www.vox.com/2019/4/26/18306125/white-identity-politics-trump-racism-ashley-jardina>

Painter, Nell Irvin. 2019 What Is White America? The Identity Politics of the Majority. *Foreign Affairs* 98(6): 177-183.

Norton, Michael I., and Samuel R. Sommers. 2011. Whites See Racism as a Zero-Sum Game That They Are Now Losing. Perspectives on Psychological Science6(3): 215-218.

Sommers, Samuel, and Michael Norton. 2016. White people think racism is getting worse. Against white people. Washington Post, July 21. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/07/21/white-people-think-racism-is-getting-worse-against-white-people/>

**9) July 20:** **White Identity Politics: Dismantling Whiteness?**

Knowles, Eric D., Brian S. Lowery, Rosalind M. Chow, Miguel N. Unzueta. 2014. Deny, Distance, or Dismantle? How White Americans Manage a Privileged Identity. *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 9(6): 594-609.

Schildkraut, Deborah J. 2019. The Political Meaning of Whiteness for Liberals and Conservatives. *The Forum* 17(3): 421–446.

Yglesias, Matthew. 2019. The Great Awokening. *Vox*. April 1. <https://www.vox.com/2019/3/22/18259865/great-awokening-white-liberals-race-polling-trump-2020>

Recommended

Foste, Zak, and Susan R. Jones. 2020. Narrating Whiteness: A Qualitative Exploration of How White College Students Construct and Give Meaning to Their Racial Location. *Journal of College Student Development* 61: 2 (March-April): 171-188.

Brown, Mark B. 2021. James Baldwin and the Politics of White Identity. Contemporary Political Theory 20 (1): 1-22. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41296-020-00401-9>

**10) July 22: Now What? Rethinking White Antiracism**

hooks, bell. 1995. Beloved Community: A World Without Racism. In *Killing Rage: Ending Racism.* New York: Henry Holt, pp. 263-272.

Indigenous Action. 2014. Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex. May 4. <https://www.indigenousaction.org/accomplices-not-allies-abolishing-the-ally-industrial-complex/>

Thier, Hadas. 2020. We Need Solidarity, Not White Guilt, to Fight Racism. *Jacobin*. June 17. <http://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/06/racism-george-floyd-racial-justice-protests-privilege>

Ohanwe, Malcolm. 2020. Entdeckt eure innere Kartoffel! *Der Spiegel*. June 9. <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/kritischesweisssein-aufruf-von-malcolm-ohanwe-zur-selbstreflexion-weisser-leute-a-2892bccb-2971-40c7-a272-4224ebe0d48b>

Calderon, JLove, and Tim Wise. 2020. Code of Ethics for White Anti-Racists. *Medium*. June 16. <https://timjwise.medium.com/code-of-ethics-for-white-anti-racists-103914639dd7>

Recommended:

Bundeszentral für Politische Bildung. 2021 Webvideo Projekt: Say My Name. <https://www.bpb.de/lernen/digitale-bildung/bewegtbild-und-politische-bildung/saymyname/>

Interview: Digitale Buchpremiere mit Mohamed Amjahid und Alice Hasters. 2021.

*Der weiße Fleck: Eine Anleitung zu antirassistischem Denken*. March 9. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rw_Bqen7JYs>

# Website: National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAMHC): Being Antiracist. <https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/being-antiracist>