Professor Albert Sergio Laguna

Email: albert.laguna@yale.edu

Class Meets: MW 1-4:15pm

Office Location: HQ 318

Office hours: by appointment

***\*\*\*A primary text or two may change before the course begins\*\*\****

**Race and Comedy in the United States**

**Course Description:**

This course exposes students to two areas that do not come together often enough in scholarly conversation: comedy and race. The theoretical foundation of the course is drawn from the large body of “classic” theories of the ludic combined with the work of contemporary scholars working at the intersections of race and comedy studies. The course will ask students to consider comic cultural production as it relates to questions of race and ethnicity and to think critically about form—not only *what* cultural production is saying but *how* it says it. We will be interested in the following questions throughout the semester: What is the formal relationship between race and comedy? Does comedy do more harm than good when addressing questions of race? What does stand-up comedy allow that the novel, for example, does not? How do the strategies employed to construct comic narratives influence reception? Answering these questions will help sharpen critical thinking skills across a range of cultural forms including literature, internet memes, television, and stand-up comedy.

**\*\*Please note: Many of the primary sources in this class utilize offensive language and imagery. Our job as students of race and comedy is to think about how they intersect across historical and political contexts to engage and/or alienate audiences and to produce meaning(s) in the world.**

**Course Requirements and Policies**

***Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism:*** Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course. Students should become familiar with University-wide policies. For a definition of plagiarism, see <http://ctl.yale.edu/writing/using-sources/understanding-and-avoiding-plagiarism/what-plagiarism> If you are in doubt about the proper citation of sources and/or need help with any part of the writing process, I encourage you to get in touch with me or the trained staff at the writing center: <http://ctl.yale.edu/writing>

***Attendance and Participation:*** Rigorous class discussion will serve as the foundation of our seminar meetings.Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the week’s readings and participate in class activities, conversations, and assignments. Because this is a summer class with fewer class meetings, your presence in class is absolutely essential. Missed classes will severely impact your grade. **20%**

***Critical Questions:*** Students must submit two (2) critical questions in response to the day’s readings to the appropriate forum on Canvas by **9pm on the day before class.** In total, you will be responsible for submitting 4 questions a week (2 for Monday, 2 for Wednesday).These questions should be framed by a few explanatory sentences and should demonstrate a close engagement with the readings. They will be used to stimulate conversation in class and will serve as a way for students to organize their thoughts around issues in the readings they found particularly compelling and/or confusing. **25% of grade**

***Sitcom-ing Race*** Easily one of the most durable forms of programming on television, the sitcom (situation comedy) has often relied upon race in order to target audiences and to produce laughs. For this assignment, students will be divided into groups (the studio audience) and will be asked to present on the sitcom of their choice. I will provide more details (including a list of potential sitcoms) on the first day of class. **20% of grade**

**Final Paper Proposal*:*** In preparation for researching and writing the final paper, students will submit a **2-3 doubled-spaced pages**. Bring a hard copy of the paper to Week 3, Class 2 and email me a copy directly. Students will share their proposals with classmates and provide feedback. **10%**

***Final Paper:*** The interdisciplinary nature of this course will provide students with a number of different angles for reading race, ethnicity, representation, and ludic cultural forms. For the final paper, students will explore their own interests in relation to course themes and topics. This paper should draw on the histories, concepts, and modes of analysis discussed throughout the semester but must include outside primary and second sources. Students will be required to submit a paper proposal by week 3, class 1. The required length for the final paper is **6-8 double-spaced pages.** Students should meet with me to brainstorm and refine paper ideas. **25% of grade**

**Grading­**

**Participation: 20%**

**Critical Questions: 25%**

**Sitcom Assignment: 20%**

**Final Paper Proposal: 10%**

**Final Paper: 25%**

**\*Most readings will be available as PDF files on Canvas or via ORBIS in ebooks. I will explain this on the first day of class for those students unfamiliar with the Yale system\***

**Week 1, Class 1: Introduction and Key Terms**

Introduction to the class, objectives, terms.

**In-Class**: Assign groups for sitcom assignment

**Week 1, Class 2: Theoretical Foundations**

John Morreall, “No Laughing Matter: The Traditional Rejection and the Traditional Theories of Humor” in *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor* **ebook on ORBIS**

Raúl Pérez, “Racist Humor: Then and Now” **Canvas pdf**

“Race” and “Ethnicity” from *Keywords in American Cultural Studies* **Canvas pdfs**

Selections from *Comedy* by Andrew Stott **Canvas pdf**

In-Class: Screening of *Nanette*

**Week 2, Class 1: Whiteness and Class**

*Stuff White People Like* <http://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com/> Read the following entries: “Black Music,” “Knowing What’s Best for Poor People,” “Gentrification,” “Ivy League,” “Being an Expert on Your Culture”

*Keywords for American Cultural Studies* Pamela Perry, WHITE and Eric Lott, CLASS **Canvas pdf**

George Lipsitz, “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness” in *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*. Available as **eBook on ORBIS.**

Screening: *Blue Collar Comedy Tour: One for the Road*

**Week 2, Class 2: Blackface Minstrelsy**

Mel Watkins, “Minstrelsy…the die is cast” **Canvas pdf**

Eric Lott, “Blackface and Blackness: The Minstrel Show in American Culture” **Canvas pdf**

**Screening:** *Bamboozled* (2000), dir. Spike Lee

**Week 3, Class 1: Pryor Takes the Stage**

Screening: *Richard Pryor: Live! In Concert*

Mel Watkins, “Pryor and Thereafter” **Canvas pdf**

**Week 3, Class 2: Final Paper/Research Skills**

Discussion of research methods in the humanities with help from Yale librarian.

In class: Final paper proposal due, workshopping. BRING HARD COPY OF YOUR PROPOSAL TO CLASS.

**Week 4, Class 1: The Sitcom**

Paul Attallah “The Unworthy Discourse: Situation Comedy in Television” in *Critiquing the Sitcom: A Reader* ed. *Joanne Morreale* **Canvas****pdf**

Means Coleman and McIlwain, “The Hidden Truths in Black Sitcoms” eds. Dalton and Linder *The Sitcom Reader* **Available as an eBook through ORBIS**.

Lotz, “Segregated Sitcoms: Institutional Causes of Disparity among Black and White Comedy Images and Audiences” in *The Sitcom Reader* eds. Dalton and Linder **Available as an eBook through ORBIS**.

**In-class Group Sitcom Presentations**

**Week 4, Class 2: Women and the Politics of Stand-up**

Beck Krefting, Introduction *All Joking Aside* **ORBIS**

Margaret Cho, *I’m the One That I Want*, PART 1

*2 Dope Queens*, HBO Series, Episode 2 “Hair”

**In-Class:** Pass out jokebooks for next week’s assignment

**Week 5, Class 1: From Joke Books to Memes**

**\*\*Be prepared to offer comments on jokebooks circulated in the last class**\*\*

McDowell, “Ethnic Jokes Flourish Despite Criticism” **link on Canvas**

Ashton Applewhite, *Being Blanche* **Canvas pdf**

Simon Critchley, “Foreigners are Funny—The Ethnicity and Ethnicity of Humour”

**Canvas pdf**

Limor Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture* (selections), Chapters 4 and 6

André Brock, Jr. *Distributed Blackness: African American Cybercultures*, Chapter 4 “Black Online, Part I,”**Ebook on ORBIS**

Amanda Hess, “The Rise of the Ironic Racist” <https://www.nytimes.com/video/arts/100000005615851/the-rise-of-the-ironic-racist.html>

**\*\* Be prepared for meme “show and tell” in class!** **Post memes/or links to memes that speak to the intersections of race and comedy in your Canvas post (along with your questions)\*\***

**Week 5, Class 2 Final Paper Presentations**

Each student will give a 10-minute presentation on their final paper followed by 5 minutes of Q&A.

**Final paper 6-8 pages, due after final class**