Note: This is a preliminary syllabus, so there may be slight changes to the readings and assignments. No textbook is required; all readings will be uploaded to Canvas. We will cover 30-45 pages on most days. I will share tips in class on how to read efficiently and critically.

COMM 246: Race and Gender in U.S. Mass Media
11-Week Summer Session, May 22-August 4
MW, 5:30-7:25 PM

Instructor: Rachel Stonecipher
Email: rachelst@upenn.edu
Office: 124
Office hours by appointment

Description: Inspired principally by the Black Lives Matter movement and popular discourses of intersectional feminism, this course examines the role of history in how we view media. It explores how representations of race and gender, and opportunities to intervene in those representations, can change across media technologies, genres, and audiences. We take seriously the contested history of U.S. mass media, seeking the relationships among mainstream media production and subcultural creators and audiences, and between commercial and critical representations of self/other. Considering multiple angles on bodily difference, students in this course will gain the language to discuss race and gender in particular as distinct and intersecting forms of social visibility. We will pay particular attention to the production and disruption of bodily “norms” within certain media and genres: how creators and audiences of radio, film, TV, and emerging media have wielded representation in an effort to intervene in misrepresentation. In class, we will analyze historical and contemporary media texts for their horizons of possibility: what could they have done differently? Because we aim to excavate the societal “stakes” in representation and discourse, we will practice discursive intervention: students will critique media via three different genres (history, critical essay, prose reflection) and develop a relationship with an audience of their own.

Course requirements: This is a discussion-based seminar course. Students are expected to do all the readings and participate fully in class discussion. While we will have fun screening TV/movie clips in class and experimenting with virtual reality, these activities don’t comprise an excuse to wander away into the pleasures of pop culture – rather, they are an invitation to think in depth about the world around us, and as such should be folded into discussion thoughtfully and creatively. Note: good participation means demonstrating that you have engaged with in-class content and readings through careful analysis, detailed questions, or legitimate sources of confusion, and are reflecting critically about the presented approaches to race, gender, and representation in the media.

Attendance is required. Up to 3 excused absences may be requested in advance by email.
Students will write two short scholarly papers (4-5 pages, double-spaced) and one prose piece, the latter accompanied by an annotated bibliography:

- The first paper asks students to write a 20th-century history of a medium of their choice (e.g., photojournalism, film, TV) through the lens of representing difference. How have its technological affordances, genre conventions, and imagined audience affected its representations of race and gender? Are those representations changing? Do other differences come into play? How would “intersectionality” figure into your analysis?

- The second paper asks students to visit the website http://blacklivesmatter.com and analyze the site’s intentionally intersectional representation of the movement, evaluating how and why gender, queer, and black identities are made visible and relational.

- The final project asks students to create a 3-page, single-spaced prose description of a postgender and postrace society, detailing what about that society would be “post”: bodies, identities, language? What would bodily difference look and sound like? How would individuals and society experience media? Students must append a 3-page, single-spaced annotated bibliography to their work. This bibliography will cite 7-10 readings from the course and describe how each reading’s interpretation of difference inspired or informed the prose description. The purpose of the prose/bibliography pairing is to ask where our scholarly conversations meet with (real or imagined) visions of the future. Alternatively, if you would like to argue that such a society cannot or should not be our goal, you may turn in a persuasive prose critique of post-identity aspirations (also with annotated bibliography).

- Participation will include weekly engagement with a TV, video game, or alternative-medium fan culture via blog, Twitter, or another social media platform. Students can choose to follow any media text (your favorite?) and should discuss this with me in person.

**Required Texts:** There is no required textbook; all readings will be available on Canvas.

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<td>Participation</td>
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**Key to terms below:** “HW” signals work you should complete BY THE DATE it is listed, so for example, work listed under “June 30” should be brought to class June 30. The same applies to readings.
Theme 1: Contemporary Mass Media: The Difference Difference Makes

Monday, May 22: Visible Identities: Angles on Experience

Readings: Linda Alcoff (2005), Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self, ch. 6 (“The Metaphysics of Gender and Sexual Difference”) and ch. 7 (“The Phenomenology of Racial Embodiment”)

Wednesday, May 24: Diversity or Difference? Angles on Representation


Theme 2: Linking the 19th, 20th, and 21st Centuries (and Who’s Connecting the Dots)

No classes Monday, May 29 – Memorial Day

Wednesday, May 31: Inequality and Analogy in American History

In class: Screening of “Ethnic Notions,” dir. Marlon Riggs (1986)


Monday, June 5: Resonances of the Freak Show: Boundaries are Made to Be Crossed?


Wednesday, June 7: Doing History

**Monday, June 12:** “The Look” and Subject/Object Relations


**Theme 3: Histories of the Mass Media from Below, 1960s to Today**

**Wednesday, June 14:** Radio: The First Live Audience?


*HW: First paper due*

**Monday, June 19:** Motown


**Wednesday, June 21:** “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised”


*HW: Before coming to class, listen to Gil Scott-Heron’s song, “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised,” and Kanye West’s song, “Who Will Survive in America”*

**Monday, June 26:** Television, the Family, and Intersectionality


**Wednesday, June 28:** Challenging Racialization in 1960s Popular Culture

**Theme 4: Commodification and Resistance: When the Movement Goes Viral**

**Monday, July 3:** Postmodernism and Consumption


**Wednesday, July 5:** Sound and Surroundings


**Monday, July 10:** Selling Blackness


**Wednesday, July 12:** Video Games: Identity and Interactivity


**Monday, July 17:** Journalism and “The Story”


**HW: Second paper due**

**Theme 5: The Future**

**Wednesday, July 19:** The Cultural Significance of Will Smith’s Sci-Fi


**Monday, July 24:** Black Optimism and Afrofuturism: Is the Image the Answer?


**Wednesday, July 26:** Evasive Maneuvers


**Monday, July 31:** Virtual Reality: Aesthetic Futures

**In class:** Screenings of “6x9: a virtual experience of solitary confinement” using Google Cardboard

the Blank)?, “Journal of Communication Inquiry

Wednesday, August 2: Queering ____ : Race, Gender Performance, and Political Aesthetics


--FINAL PROJECT DUE by 3pm Friday, August 4--

Course Policies:

Differently-abled Students: Students who are differently abled will be fully included in this course. Please let me know if you need any special accommodations in the curriculum, instruction or assessments of this course to enable you to participate fully. I will make every effort to maintain the confidentiality of the information you share with me.

Student Conduct and Academic Integrity: Students are responsible for adhering to the policies of this course and of the University of Pennsylvania, which includes the Code of Student Conduct. Academic integrity includes cheating, fabrication and plagiarism. A detailed explanation of these policies can be found at http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/. Failure to comply with the policies of this course and of the university will result in disciplinary action. If you have questions about any issue related to plagiarism or scholastic dishonesty, please discuss it with me or Carolyn Marvin, the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies.