

## Syllabus: Race & Gender on the American Stage

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Also available by appt.

Fall 2025  
MWF 11:30-12:45

### Course Description

The American stage has been a vehicle for exploration, subjugation, and liberation since its earliest days. Bound with issues of embodiment, performance, and representation, the American theater is a critical point of convergence for ideas of race and gender. The theater is both “theatron” - the seeing place - and a place for “diologos” - dialogue. In other words, the stage is a place to both view and be viewed, to speak and to listen. In this way, the American stage is a privileged place for engaging in dialogue across differences, for imagining other peoples’ experiences, and for creating connections through storytelling.

So what does this have to do with you if you’re not a theater major? The basic building blocks of human experience are the stories we tell - stories we tell ourselves about ourselves and others, stories told to us, stories we invent to make sense of our experiences. When we interpret data, we are telling stories. When we interpret rhetoric, politics, or history, we are telling stories. The maths and sciences help us to understand the stories of our physical world and its properties. To make any of our disciplines make sense to others, some degree of storytelling is required. By studying a variety of different stories and ways of telling in this course, you will gain the tools to understand, interpret, and create effective stories for yourself and others. No matter what your ultimate professional goals are, storytelling is an essential life skill.

In this course, we will read a variety of modern and contemporary American plays alongside theoretical writings on race, gender, and creativity in order to wrestle with the questions: How do theater and performance reify, subvert, and even create cultural ideas of race and gender? AND What is my role as Christ-following creative in the ongoing kingdom work of justice, diversity, and reconciliation? In alignment with the goals of the Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity GE category, this course will help to equip you to “recognize personal, interpersonal, communal, institutional, and systemic expressions of sin, rebellion, brokenness, and injustice” through the integration of your creative practice and theological frameworks of race, gender, and justice.<sup>1</sup> Using an autoethnographic method, our course will culminate in student generated performances inspired by both your own lived experiences of race and/or gender and the theoretical texts we will study this semester.

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<sup>1</sup>See Course Catalog.

## Student Learning Outcomes

- Westmont “Working Artistically” GE Learning Outcomes
  - Students will demonstrate artistic processes and interpretive understanding in an artistic production.
- Westmont “Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity” GE Outcomes
  - Students will analyze issues of justice and injustice involving race and racism in the United States in biblically and theologically grounded ways.
  - Students will identify Christian responsibilities to pursue justice and reconciliation in diverse relationships, practices, and structures according to the character of God’s loving reign expressed in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

### Course outcomes and corresponding assignments:

Learning Outcome	Assignments
Students will demonstrate artistic processes and interpretive understanding in an artistic production. (Working Artistically, GE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In class rehearsal</li> <li>● Final Performance Project</li> </ul>
Students will analyze issues of justice and injustice involving race and racism in the United States in biblically and theologically grounded ways (JRD, GE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reading and discussion</li> <li>● Critical Questions</li> <li>● Final Performance Project</li> </ul>
Students will identify Christian responsibilities to pursue justice and reconciliation in diverse relationships, practices, and structures according to the character of God's loving reign expressed in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. (JRD, GE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Class discussions</li> <li>● Critical Questions</li> <li>● Reading and Lecture</li> <li>● Final Performance Project</li> </ul>

Students will evaluate the use of theatrical conventions and dramaturgical approaches in engaging with issues of race and gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Class discussions</li><li>• Performance review papers</li><li>• Weekly Critical Questions</li><li>• In class activities</li></ul>
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## Required Materials

- All playtexts in hard copy:
  - *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Handsberry
  - *A View from the Bridge* by Arthur Miller
  - *Fairview* by Jackie Sibblies Drury
  - *Straight White Men* by Young Jean Lee
  - *Yellowface* by David Henry Hwang
  - *What the Constitution Means to Me* by Heidi Schreck
  - *Native Gardens* by Karen Zacarias
  - *Clybourne Park* by Bruce Norris
- Course Reader (includes all supplementary articles and one play)

## How to succeed in this course

This is an upper division course. You are expected to do the reading, take notes, and come to class prepared to share both insights AND questions - both are equally valuable. Come to office hours even though it's not required. Ask the "dumb" question (hint: there's no such thing). Offer the half-formed idea for further exploration. If you are willing to do the work and to enter into conversation, you will get something valuable from this course.

On the practical side, here are some things you can do to ensure your success in the course:

- Consult the syllabus early and often. Make sure you are clear on all deadlines and assignment requirements well before the due date. (the time to ask questions is BEFORE the assignment is due).
- Take notes as you read. Jot down key information alongside any thoughts, reflections, questions, and confusions.
- Communicate about absences, conflicts, or other course complications EARLY, often, and in writing. (see attendance policy for more detail.)
- Bring the "text" to class with you! You must have your book physically in class with you whenever reading is due from the book.

## Grading criteria

<b>Total Grade Breakdown:</b> Participation & Attendance: 20% Critical Questions: 15% Performance Review Paper 10% Quizzes: 15% Identity and Embodiment Project: 40%	<b>GRADING SCALE:</b> A+ = 97-100 A = 94-96 A- = 90-93 B+ = 87-89 B = 84-86 B- = 80-83 C+ = 77-79 C = 74-76 C- = 70-73 D+ = 67-69 D = 64-66 D- = 60-63 F = 0-59
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## Course assignments

### Participation (20%)

For this class to work at all, we must be willing to engage in meaningful dialogue with one another. Class will look different each day and so will your participation. At baseline, though, I expect to hear your voice in class - share a thought, ask a question, admit you are confused, wonder aloud about something. This also means making room for all people to have opportunities to speak. You get 1 point for showing up, and up to 2 points for participation each class period. These points are uploaded to canvas in three major chunks so you can keep track of your progress.

### Critical Questions (15%)

Over the course of the semester you will write 7 Critical Questions. These are open-ended discussion questions that engage that particular week's play with a critical or theoretical reading. The purpose of these questions is to think through the ways that plays work as expressions of sociocultural theories and movements. These questions will then be offered for discussion during class. Specific guidelines on Canvas.

### Quizzes (15%)

Quizzes are mainly an accountability measure to help you keep up with the reading and to check your comprehension of the major plot, character, and thematic elements of each play.

### Performance Review Paper (10%)

After attending *Antigonick* at Westmont you will write a short, 1-2 page reflection on the production. Specific guidelines on Canvas.

### Identity and Embodiment Final Project (40%)

This project is part individual, part group, part class project. Using an embodied autoethnographic approach to creative writing, you will reflect on your own identity in the U.S. context. You will create a 2-3 minute performance piece - a monologue, scene, or other performance. These will be created in several phases throughout the semester and will culminate in a class performance which we construct

together and present publicly. We will decide as a class what kind of audience we want to cultivate. Specific guidelines on Canvas.

## Course Policies

- Attendance policy
  - Per Westmont Policy, students receive 3 excused absences per semester. These apply to ANY reason for absence including: athletics, family & other emergencies, illness, etc.
  - Excused absences beyond the mandated 3 are at the instructor's discretion. It is the student's responsibility to **formally request an excused absence via email** and provide valid documentation when necessary. Whenever possible, as a courtesy, please communicate absences in advance.
  - Notifying the instructor about an absence DOES NOT guarantee that the absence will be excused.
- Make-up and late work policy
  - Quizzes and tests **may not be made up** except when: the student arranges for a make up quiz/test **in advance** OR in the case of serious emergency or illness. In any case, students must strive to communicate with the instructor BEFORE the exam. Quizzes & tests not made up within 1 week receive a zero. The 2 lowest quiz grades will be dropped at the end of the semester.
  - Late work is docked 10% per day for the first 2 days. Late work beyond 2 days is not accepted. Extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis at the instructor's discretion.
- **Statement on academic integrity:** When students join our college community, they are expected, as apprentice scholars, to search for truth with integrity and accuracy. This quest requires humility about our abilities, respect for the ideas of others, and originality in our thinking. Since Westmont is a Christian community, the integrity of our scholarship is rooted in the integrity of our faith. We seek to be followers of Christ in the classroom, in the library, and at the privacy of our computers. Violations of academic integrity are a serious breach of trust within the Westmont community because they violate the regard for truth essential to genuine learning and Christian consistency. Such deception also hurts those students who do their work with integrity. Violations of Academic Integrity may consist of cheating (the use of unauthorized sources of information on an examination or other assignment), falsification (misrepresentation of facts in any academic project or obligation) or plagiarism (the use of someone else's words or ideas without giving proper credit). Faculty and students should operate in an environment of mutual trust and respect. Faculty will expect students to act in ways consistent with academic integrity. However, for both scholarly and spiritual reasons, cheating, falsification plagiarism and all other violations of academic integrity will not be tolerated in the Westmont community.
  - Passing off AI generated text as your own work is cheating.
- **Written Work:**
  - Most written work will be turned in on Canvas with the exception of the final project.

- All work for the final project must be written in Google docs as a shared doc with the instructor
- **Sensitive Topics:** During the class, we will discuss many topics that are difficult but important because of their serious impact on people and society. The content may challenge you or even upset you. Please keep this in mind and do your best to contribute to a respectful space; we will establish some ground rules to facilitate this at the start of the class. Through the readings, videos, and discussions you will be exposed to a range of perspectives on race, gender, and performance, some of which might not align with yours (or mine), and which should not be taken as the only correct ones or ones advocated by Westmont. The purpose of this course is to build both knowledge and empathy and to move into closer alignment with God's intention for your life as a person living in community: To love others as Christ first loved us (John 13:34).

## Student Resources

- **Accessibility and Accommodations:** Westmont is committed to ensuring equal access to academic courses and college programs. In keeping with this commitment under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008, individuals with diagnoses that impact major life activities are protected from discrimination and are entitled to reasonable accommodations. Students who choose to disclose a disability are encouraged to contact the Accessibility Resource Office (ARO) as early as possible in the semester to discuss potential accommodations for this course. Accommodations are designed to ensure equal access to programs for all students who have a disability that impacts their participation in college activities. Email [aro@westmont.edu](mailto:aro@westmont.edu) or see [westmont.edu/accessibility-resources](https://www.westmont.edu/accessibility-resources) for more information.
- ARO: <https://www.westmont.edu/accessibility-resources>
- CAPS: <https://www.westmont.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services>
- Writer's Corner: <https://www.westmont.edu/center-student-success/writers-corner>

**Westmont College Theatre Arts Anti-Racism Statement:** The Westmont college theatre arts department recognizes the historic, ongoing impacts of structural, systemic racism, and the injustices visited on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in North America. The department laments and apologizes for the way the discipline of theatre, and Westmont's theatre arts department, have participated in those systems and injustices. These are imperiled times, and the cries for justice, equity, and inclusion can no longer be ignored. The department dedicates itself to the investigation and embodiment of equity and inclusion for all students, faculty, and staff. The department strives to be anti-racist in speech, actions, work in the rehearsal room, and play choice. Westmont College is animated by a vision of God's dream for God's people and all creation. The department affirms that all people are created in God's image, and works to uphold and encourage that sacred reality. The

fundamental subject of the theatre is Change. Change is impossible without action. Change comes as a consequence of willed, focused, motivated intent – of the spirit moving toward some desired end. The Westmont College Theatre Arts Department recognizes that this is a momentous time in the history of the college and the country, and enacts change toward a more just, inclusive, and equitable department. The department seeks to decentralize white power and privilege from the department’s curriculum, stage, studio, classroom, and seasons. The department has much to do. But it does so with joy and hope, and with the desire that the department will be brave and safe, where all students, faculty and audiences become free to participate in the here and now, where equity and inclusion are discussed and realized.

## Calendar

Wk/Day	Date	Topic	Reading/Viewing to be completed by this date	Assignments due for Class
1 M	Sept. 1	Welcome	Establishing ground rules and building community	
1 W	Sept. 3	What do we mean by “race” and “gender”?	<b>WATCH: Judith Butler: Behavior &amp; Gender</b> <b>READ: &amp; Brennan: Faithful AntiRacism, pgs. 20-32</b>	Introduce yourself on Canvas DUE
1 F	Sept.5	What does this have to do with theater & performance?	READ: “We see you White American Theater” READ: Prescott, <i>Making Art to the Glory of God</i> , pgs. 123-129	
2 M	Sept. 8	Unit 1: Foundations of the American Stage	READ: “Intro” from <i>Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville</i>	Quiz
2 W	Sept. 10	1830-1920: excerpts from vaudeville & Broadway		
2 F	Sept. 12		READ: “Paddy Jumps Jim Crow”	Critical Question #1 DUE
3 M	Sept. 15	<b>Unit 1 cont.</b>	<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> by Lorraine Hansberry (1959)	Quiz

**Commented [1]:** Addresses GE Criteria 3: model Christlike dialogue reflecting God’s desire for justice and reconciled relationships among all image-bearers, especially when confronting challenging or sensitive issues.

we collectively build 3-5 groundrules for respectful discussion. In the past, this activity has generated key guidelines like “we listen without interrupting,” “we approach each other with questions, not judgements”, etc.

**Commented [2]:** pulled from Blake Kent’s JRD course syllabus, this reading gives foundational statistics and grounding for our understanding and orientation towards issues of race is shaped by our own cultural positions, not least of which is our position as Christians.

**Commented [3]:** GE Cert. Criteria 1

**Commented [4]:** JRD SLO 1 & 2

**Commented [5]:** This manifesto written 5 years ago outlines the goals for a new era of anti-racist theater making. Critical to understand the state of the field of theater as it intersects with issues of race and racism and for identifying Christian responsibilities for reconciliation and justice. JRD SLO 2

**Commented [6]:** Prescott’s chapter, “Who do you say I am?” interrogates the intersection of Christian faith, identity, and creative practice. This chapter is the Christ-center of the course as we work towards creating our own performances as faithful creatives at the end of the semester

**Commented [7]:** JRD SLO 1 & 2

3 W	Sept. 17			
3 F	Sept. 19		READ: Teel "Racism as a Christian Problem", pgs. 1-10	Critical Question #2 DUE
4 M	Sept. 22	Unit 1 cont.	<i>A View from the Bridge</i> by Arthur Miller (1956)	Quiz
4 W	Sept. 24			
4 F	Sept. 26		Read with: "Introduction" from <i>Whiteness of a Different Color</i> (1-12)	Critical Question #3 DUE
5 M	Sept. 29	The Gaze: Theatrical Ways of Looking	<i>Fairview</i> by Jackie Sibbles Drury	Quiz
5 W	Oct. 1			
5 F	Oct. 3		bell hooks - "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators"	Critical Question #4
6 M	Oct. 6		<i>Straight White Men</i> by Young Jean Lee	Quiz
6 W	Oct. 8			
6 F	Oct. 10		"Multiplying Masculinities" in <i>Sex, Gender, and Christianity</i> (117-124)	Critical question #5
7 M	Oct. 13		NO CLASS - FALL FOURDAY	

**Commented [9]:** GE Cert. Criteria 2: Critical Questions are due almost every week. This assignment asks students to construct discussion questions based on the weeks readings. Full description of assignment/assessment in Statement of Rationale.

**Commented [10]:** JRD SLO 1

**Commented [8]:** JRD SLO 1 & 2

**Commented [11]:** GE Cert. Criteria 1

**Commented [12]:** JRD SLO 1 & 2



7 W	Oct. 15	What is auto ethnography	READ: Creative Selves/Creative Cultures (pg. 3-7) READ: Prescott, <i>Making Art to the Glory of God</i> (pgs. 129-141)	
7 F	Oct. 17	Autoethnography & seeds of the final	READ: Composing Performative Autoethnography, pgs. 9-12	Critical Question #6
8 M	Oct. 20	Dramatic Self-Disclosures of race & gender	READ or WATCH: <i>What the Constitution Means to Me</i> by Heidi Schreck (amazon prime video)	
8 W	Oct. 22			First element of final project due (List of experiences)
8 F	Oct. 24	Ethics of autoethnography	READ: Composing Performative Autoethnography, pgs. 16-25	*see <i>Westmont Fall/Spring Show</i>
9 M	Oct. 27		READ: <i>Yellowface</i> by David Henry Hwang WATCH: "Behind the Curtain of Yellow Face" (link on Canvas)	Quiz
9 W	Oct. 29			
9 F	Oct. 31		READ: <i>Making Art to the Glory of God</i> , pgs. 141-158	*see <i>Westmont Fall/Spring Show</i> Second element of final project due – (answer Spry composition question)
10 M	Nov. 3	Musical Interlude	WATCH: <i>Showboat</i> (Youtube)	Quiz
10 W	Nov. 5			Performance Review Paper DUE
10 F	Nov. 7		READ: "Only Make Believe: Performing Race in <i>Showboat</i> "	
11 M	Nov. 10	Musical interlude	WATCH: Hamilton (Disney+)	
11 W	Nov. 12		READ: McCarroll "Back in the narrative"	

**Commented [13]:** JRD SLO 1 - This chapter is read in chunks through the semester and provides the faith grounding for the final performance project.

**Commented [14]:** GE Cert. Criteria 1 - among other questions, students answer "How does your faith intersect with and inform the story you are going to tell?" See addendum I in Statement of Rationale for complete project details

**Commented [15]:** JRD SLO 1

11 F	Nov. 14			Third element of Final Project due ( Adding research element)
12 M	Nov. 17	Borders and Boundaries: Spaces of Race & Gender on Stage	<i>Native Gardens</i> by Karen Zacarias	Quiz
12 W	Nov. 19			
12 F	Nov. 21		READ: Excerpt, "Whiteness as Property" - Harris	Critical Question #7
13 M	Nov. 24		Full draft & workshop of Final projects	Starting to put it together
13 W	Nov. 26		NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING	
13 F	Nov. 28		NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING	
14 M	Dec. 1		<i>Clybourne Park</i> by Bruce Norris	Quiz
14 W	Dec. 3			
14 F	Dec. 5		Work on Final Projects	
15 M	Dec. 8		Rehearsal	
15 W	Dec. 10		Rehearsal	

**Commented [16]:** GE Cert. Criteria 2. Here students put the creative element of their performance project in conversation with sociocultural research on "social norms and systemic practices" related to race and/or gender. See Statement of Rational for full explanation.

**Commented [17]:** JRD SLO 2 - at this stage, students turn from individual performance creation to collaborative practice, identifying Christian role of each artist in the kingdom work of justice, reconciliation and diversity.

15 F	Dec. 12		Rehearsal	
FINALS WEEK			Final performance	

**Commented [18]:** GE Cert. Criteria 3. Public performance of student's autoethnographic performance projects.