Whiteness and Racial Violence in America
Community Classroom Course, University of Arizona
Professor Jennifer Roth-Gordon
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Course Description

This six week online course is designed for people of all backgrounds who are interested in: 1) learning more about racial violence and how it works in conjunction with other forms of structural racism, 2) making connections between past and present experiences/situations of racial inequality, and 3) unpacking the ways that we are constantly bombarded with messages that uphold white superiority and racial hierarchy. The course is focused on a critical examination of whiteness and the role that it plays in shaping American society and all people’s understandings of themselves (often by way of contrast). We explore the various sources of white power and privilege in order to shed light on how situations of severe racial inequality are created and maintained. We will take up an anthropological focus which will offer insight into how to read the cultural messages we are surrounded by through a critical lens. Regardless of whether you have just started to learn more about racial inequality and are hoping to better understand the powerful protests surrounding George Floyd’s brutal murder, or whether you have been living these issues your whole life, this course will offer deeper insight on how race and whiteness structure our world and our daily lives and how you can use this insight in the fight for racial justice.

Weekly Schedule

This will be a flipped classroom! There will be 1 hour’s worth of pre-recorded lecture material and approximately 2 hours of selected readings/videos/podcasts. Then we’ll spend the synchronous session (Thursdays, 4:30-6:00) in a lively discussion/Q&A. A list of additional reading/watching resources will be provided for each class session so that you can dive deeper if you have more time, either during the course or afterwards.

Instructor Bio

Jennifer Roth-Gordon is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Arizona where she has taught racial and social justice classes to thousands of undergraduates. Her first book, Race and the Brazilian Body: Blackness, Whiteness, and Everyday Language in Rio de Janeiro, is based on over 20 years of research on racial inequality in Rio and has been taught in undergraduate classes around the country. Her current book project, entitled Precious White Lives: Middle-Class Parenting and the Protection of Whiteness in Rio de Janeiro, tells the
story of how “good parenting” entails the shoring up of racial privilege through the hyper-
valuation and protection of white life.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Race, Racism, and Racial Hierarchy
October 1

Us. Documentary. [available through Kanopy]


Ibram X. Kendi. 2020. “American Nightmare,” Vox, audio podcast with transcript, June 1, 2020,

Week 2: Whiteness and White Supremacy (without white supremacists)
October 8


Guilford, TX: Lyons Press. 85-98.

Week 3: Racial Violence: From Lynching and Slavery to Police Violence and Mass
Incarceration
October 15

DuVernay, Ava. 2016. 13th: From Slave to Criminal with One Amendment. Netflix. [watch time:
1h 40m]

Dreier, Peter. 2019. “After a Century of Delays, The Senate Finally Votes to Outlaw Lynching.”

The Equal Justice Initiative. “Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror,”
video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=aS61QFzk2tI.
Week 4: Structural Racism: Housing, Health, Education, the Environment, and the Economy
October 22


Week 5: “Karen” and #Wypipo: White Privilege, White Comfort, and the Protection of White Life
October 29


Week 6: From Black Lives Matter to All Lives Matter: Colorblindness, Anti-Racism, and the Backlash to Anti-Racism
November 5