Human & Animal Others: Reading Race, Animals, and Nature

Thursdays 5:45-8:15p 25 West 4th, C-5
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Office Hours: Thursdays 3-5pm or by appointment
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Course Description

Historically, colonization and discourses of species have worked to strategically animalize and dehumanize racialized people in order to “see them as trees walking, or as wild animals infesting the country” (Toynbee qtd. in Mavhunga 151). In this quote, we can see a striking relationship between nonwhite people, nature, and animals unfold, as people are not only being animalized, but also conceived of as part of the natural landscape. Such discourses have created an intimate and tenuous relationship between nonwhite people, animals, and nature. Throughout the course, we will attend to one primary contradiction: on the one hand, histories of dehumanization and animalization compel racialized people to assert distance and differentiation from animals in order to gain agency, political visibility, and human rights. On the other hand, people of color often carry both histories of kinship with animals, as well as worldviews that emphasize respect and interdependence between humans, nonhumans, and nature, contradicting Western instrumentalizations of the natural world. A few primary questions that we will investigate in the course are: How have animality and nature been mobilized to construct race in very specific, strategic ways? How have such discourses of species shaped relationships between racialized people, animals, and the natural world? How are authors, artists, and scholars of color responding to, resisting, and complicating ongoing histories of dehumanization and animalization? In what ways are nonwhite scholars decolonizing the fields of animal studies, environmental humanities, and the natural sciences by articulating their particular relationship to the land and animals?

By situating our discussions of animals within critical race and postcolonial theories, this course intervenes in the largely Western-focus of the field of animal studies. This course examines the relationship between race, species, and the environment alongside gender and sexuality, class, and (dis)ability through a range of contemporary literary and cultural texts. We will investigate how race informs relationships with animals and nature in a variety of contexts—from conservation, extinction, and advocacy to companion animals, kinship, labor, and cultural traditions. We will also read dominant issues within the fields of animal studies and the environmental humanities, such as the Anthropocene, extinction, home, migration, and activism through the lens of race.

Required Texts

All books are on order from NYU Bookstore, posted on NYU Classes, as an ebook through NYU Libraries, or available through other vendors. Please note that all readings are subject to change. You are required to purchase each novel that we will be discussing in paper copy (not as Ebooks).

Toni Morrison *Beloved*
Grading Criteria and Overview

Grading Criteria: This seminar is designed to develop close reading, critical thinking, and conceptual analysis across a range of interdisciplinary subjects and texts. Active participation alongside careful reading and analysis is required to work through assumptions, unpack prior knowledge, and build an awareness of the significance and implications of the course topics. For all assignments (including participation) the grading criteria seeks: comprehension, clarity in presentation and writing, as well as innovative, critical thinking. All written assignments must use current MLA formatting.

1. Participation (20%): I expect substantial, and regular participation in this seminar. As we will be dealing with difficult topics that may challenge your worldview, prioritizing respectful and thoughtful conversation is crucial. Anecdotal, disrespectful, off-topic, or distracting participation will negatively impact your grade. In-class verbal work, such as responding to position papers, participating in our workshop, and generally contributing to class discussions will comprise your participation grade.

2. Short Assignment (10%): Due 9/20. For this assignment, you will be required to go to the Natural History Museum during the week of 9/9 and reflect (in max. 2 pages) on the relationships between race, animals, and nature that you see arising through the exhibits. Think carefully and critically, ask questions about the staging, the descriptions, naming, etc. Don’t forget to consider the lives, histories, stories of the animals throughout the museum. You can make use of the readings assigned for class on 9/12, but this is not required.

3. Position Papers (20%): I will divide the class into three groups, group A, group B, and group C. These groups will take turns writing and presenting short (2 page) position papers twice during the course. Since I will stop reading at two pages, strictly limit your paper to two double-spaced pages. You are not required to, but if you do cite any external sources, include a works cited page, which won’t count toward your page limit. Two weeks before the paper is due, I will post two questions on NYU Classes based on the readings/topics as assigned for the day your paper is due and you will respond to one question. These questions will require you to take a position (not necessarily either/or, yes/no) and, as long as you are engaging thoughtfully with the readings and our focus in the course, there is no “right” position. When your paper is due, you will submit your position paper through NYU Classes before 5pm, bring a hard or digital copy to class, and each member in your group will present their position, thereby sparking brilliant class discussion! The schedule for these assignments is below and I have arranged so that no one will present on the day of our workshop.

4. Paper proposal, annotated bibliography, and outline (20%): Due 11/8. These three components will form the basis of our workshop on November 21. Two weeks before the workshop, you will submit the following to NYU Classes: a) two-page, double-spaced proposal that could act as a submission to a conference. It will set out your proposed topic (engaging some aspect of race, animals, and nature), your theoretical frameworks, scope, and texts, and explain how your critical project contributes to the field. b) annotated bibliography that includes six external scholarly sources. Each entry should be only a few sentences: identify both the arguments the piece and significant (to your topic) concepts, explain why the text is useful to you. c) a point-form rough outline for the rest of your paper (2-4 pages).
5. **Workshop (5% of participation grade): On 11/21.** This workshop is designed to assist you in writing the final paper. You will submit your workshop materials two weeks before the workshop (11/8). Please note that although I will be marking these materials, I will also share clean copies with the entire class so that everyone will read each other’s work in preparation for the workshop. On the workshop day, having read your colleagues’ materials, you will come prepared to present your proposal, as well as give and receive feedback both in small brainstorming sessions and in larger discussion groups.

6. **Final Paper (30%): Due 12/16.** 12-page paper that builds on your proposed ideas in response to feedback from the workshop and grading. This paper should provide the foundation for either a conference paper or a publication.

**Reading and Assignment Schedule**
*Readings are subject to change throughout the course*

**9/5: Introductions**

**9/12: The Natural History Museum + Race and the Nonhuman**
- Donna Haraway “Simian Orientalism”
- Claire Jean Kim “Animals, Nature, and the Races of Man”

**9/19: Storytelling & Unpacking Whiteness**
- Alexander Macleod “Lagomorph”
- Ross Chambers “The Unexamined”
- Peggy McIntosh “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”

**9/26: Critical Race & Postcolonial Theory**
- Frantz Fanon “The Fact of Blackness” + more TBD

**10/3: Blackness, Animality, & Trees - GROUP A**
- Toni Morrison *Beloved*

**10/10: Multispecies Intimacies, Resilience, & Water – GROUP B**
- Jesmyn Ward *Salvage the Bones*

**10/17: Conservation, Refugees, & Science – GROUP C**
- Amitav Ghosh *The Hungry Tide*

**10/24: Attend Film Screening: Ghost Fleets**

**10/31: Home, Migration, & Belonging - GROUP A**
- Helena Maria Viramontes’s *Their Dogs Came with Them*

**11/7: Transnational Animals and the Global Environment - GROUP B**
- Selected poetry and short stories

*Workshop materials due by end of day 11/8.*
11/14: CLASS CANCELLED

11/21: Workshop

11/28: Fall Break - No Classes

12/5: Indigenous Relationships to the Land & the Politics of Animal Activism – GROUP C
  • Althea Arnaquq Baril Angry Inuk

12/12: Last Class

Final Paper Due 12/16

Course Administration
Students who require accommodation for a disability should consult with the Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at www.nyu.edu/life/safety-healthwellness/students-with-disabilities. If you have any disability or health or family situation that you think I should know about, please come see me in confidence.

Plagiarism results in an automatic failure of the assignment and the class (at the professor’s discretion), and referral to an academic dean. Plagiarism includes: copying sentences or fragments from any source without quotes or references; not citing every source used in your papers; citing internet information without proper citation; presenting someone else’s work as your own; or copying verbatim from any source. You are subject to CAS’s guidelines on plagiarism: cas.nyu.edu/page/ug.academicintegrity.

Attendance: in every class is mandatory. Any unexcused absences may lower your grade.

Email Policy: Other than coming to my office hours, email is the best way to communicate with me. I will respond to emails within two days of receiving them and may take longer over the weekends or holidays.

Late Policy: Late assignments will be subtracted one grade-point for lateness starting immediately after the due date/time.