Confronting Eugenics
ENG 298
Spring 2025
Monday & Wednesday
2:00-3:20 pm
Professor Kim Adams

Course Description
The modern science of breeding better humans defined the biomedical concept of race in the twentieth century. Coined in 1883 by Frances Galton, eugenics derives from the Greek roots, *εὐ* (eu) for *good* or *well*, and *γεν* (gen) for *to be born* and *to beget*. American doctors, professors, and politicians, conservative and liberal alike, embraced eugenics as a means to improve the nation. But not everyone agreed. This course examines the responses of writers of color to eugenic ideas of race, from the racial uplift and hybrid eugenics of the New Negro Movement to feminist activism and the Chicana Movement, to science fiction futures of cloning and genetic enhancement. Together we will explore how these responses have shaped the legacies of race science in modern medical practice, from genetic counseling to reproductive justice.

Course Objectives
In this course you should aim to:
- Think critically about the relationship between literature, medicine, and science.
- Question your assumptions about the nature, science, and politics of reproduction.
- Take historical texts on their own terms, as well as from the perspective of our present.
- Speak with confidence, clarity, and rigor. Ask questions demonstrating your knowledge and admitting your ignorance when appropriate.
- Recognize and analyze key terms and concepts in scholarly and creative writing.
- Compose your thoughts in writing, with an awareness of your audience, and your own voice.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of this course, you will be able to:
- Develop reading strategies appropriate to the text at hand, with a cognizance of scholarly conventions and historical difference.
- Forge connections between texts using close reading and critical thinking.
- Think across disciplines, recognizing and negotiating historical boundaries.
- Structure your writing process using abstracts, outlines, drafts, and peer-review.
- Identify strengths and weaknesses in your own writing, the writing of your peers, and the writing of published authors.
- Modify your writing style to meet the expectations of different audiences, mediums, and genres of writing.

Compass Curriculum Attributes: Humanities; Structures of Power and Inequality; Taylor and Lane; WRIT

Please note that this syllabus is a live document, subject to change in response to the class dynamic and the everchanging world in which we are living.

Content
In this course we will be reading and talking about challenging issues across the intersections of race, gender, class, ability, nationality, sexuality, and ethnicity. In the classroom we will approach these issues and each other with intellectual and emotional care and generosity.

Academic Accommodations
Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please contact the Filene Center for Academic Advising, Support & Accessibility Services to register for accommodations as early as possible in the semester. They can be reached at accessibility@wheatoncollege.edu, by phone at 508-286-8215, or through their website: wheatoncollege.edu/academics/academic-advising/accessibility-services/

Attendance
You are permitted two absences for the entire course. More than two absences will count against your final grade. If you must miss class due to illness or religious observance, please let me know *in advance*. True presence involves not only physically being there, but also a strong sense of attention being paid, an absence of electronic devices that disturb others, and a consistent attitude of respect toward your fellow learners. Silence your phone, turn off the alerts on your computer, pay attention to your classmates, and contribute to the discussion.

Academic Integrity & Generative AI
College education is a credentialling exercise that shapes the society in which we live, and our lives within it. If you get ChatGPT or your roommate to write your papers for you, you will not learn how to write them yourself, and at that point, you would do well to consider why you are paying to take this class. Note that all of the writing assignments are structured to emphasize the writing process that leads to the polished result. If you intend to use AI at any point in your writing process, you are required to consult with me first. Academic integrity meant to be a positive thing: the development of habits and character traits that allow us to thrive in our academic lives with integrity. Wheaton has an honor code. Follow it. If you have questions, ask. Do the right thing. It matters.

Assignments:

In-Class Writing
100-200 words per class
At the beginning of each class students will answer a short writing prompt related to the longer reading for the unit. This informal writing will emphasize close reading skills, typically asking you to analyze a specific passage in relation to the larger themes of the class. Writing assignments will be done in a shared GoogleDoc, visible to all students for the purposes of supporting class discussion, and graded on completion.

Reading Report
In-class presentation + written notes
Each student will choose one of the critical texts listed below under "Secondary Readings" for their reading report. You will be expected to read the whole article or assigned book chapter attentively, meet with me to discuss it, and then prepare a presentation, which you will deliver during class. You will be graded on the in-class presentation, your notes for the presentation, and the response from your classmates. The reading reports will be spaced out across the semester, signups will take place in our first class meeting.

Reflection Paper – Due Week 3
500 words
In this short paper, students will expand one of their in-class writing prompts into a slightly larger, formalized reflection on the question. The purpose of this paper is to practice revising and expanding informal writing into a more serious form of scholarly engagement, and to have the opportunity complete a graded writing assignment early in the semester. Students are expected to include at least one citation from the class readings. A detailed assignment sheet will be provided on Canvas in advance of the due date.

Synthesis Paper – Due Week 7
1000 words
For the second paper, students will draw a connection between two or more readings from different disciplines covered on the syllabus. For this paper you are expected to use at least one outside source, in addition to the class readings. We will dedicate some of our in-class writing assignments to preparation for this paper: we will practice making abstracts, outlines, using proper citations, and finding good sources. Students will be graded on the strength of the connections they draw as well as their attention to detail. A full assignment sheet will be provided on Canvas in advance of the due date.

Final Paper – Due Final Exam Week
2000 words + scaffolding
For the final paper, students will write an in-depth analysis of one of the primary sources from our syllabus, with support from secondary sources. Students are expected to cite at least two secondary sources from the list on the syllabus and one outside source. This is not a research paper, in the classical sense, but an in-depth analysis of one literary text, in which you produce an argument supported by your own close reading skills and the words of other scholars. You will be supported in the writing of this paper by a structured process, which includes writing an abstract, outline, and draft, and participating in peer-editing during class. Further details on each component of the assignment will be provided on Canvas.

Grading Breakdown & Scale
In-Class Writing – 20%
Reading Report - 15%
Reflection Paper – 10%
Synthesis Paper – 15%
Final Paper – 20%
Attendance and Participation – 20%

A+	**97-100**	**C**	**73-76**
A	**93-96**	**C-**	**70-72**
A-	**90-92**	**D+**	**67-69**
B+	**87-89**	**D**	**63-66**
B	**83-86**	**D-**	**60-62**
B-	**80-82**	**F**	**59 or below**
C+	**77-79**		

Readings
You need to find a paper copy of the eight books listed below. Most of them are old and pretty cheap! I recommend Better World Books and Bookshop.org if you want to buy them online. You can also buy them in the bookstore on campus, find them in a library, borrow them from a friend, whatever! If you want to listen to them as audio books or read them on your e-reader, that's cool, but you'll need the paper copy for class. **You are required to read the assigned texts before class each week and to have a copy of the text open and available to reference during our class discussion.**

Week 1 – Jan 22 - Introduction
In-Class: "Eugenics," by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson and "Reproduction" by Adrienne Asch, in *Keywords for Disability Studies* ed. Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin. NYU Press, 2015.

Week 2-3 – Jan 27, Jan 29, Feb 3, Feb 5 - In Class Workshop on Working with Secondary Sources Feb 3
W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dark Princess: A Romance,* Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1928.

Week 4 – Feb 10, Feb 12 – **Reflection Paper Due Feb 14**
George Schuyler, *Black No More,* Macaulay Co., 1931.

Week 5-6 – Feb 17, Feb 19, Feb 24, Feb 26
Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint,* Random House, 1969.

Week 7 - 8 – Mar 3 & Mar 5, Mar 17, Mar 19 -- **Synthesis Paper Due Mar 21**
Ntozake Shange, *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf: a choreopoem,* Scribner, 1975.

Week 8-10 –Mar 24, & Mar 26, Mar 31, Apr 2 **--** Abstract for Final Paper Due April 4
Octavia Butler, *Wild Seed,* Doubleday & Company, 1980.

Week 11-12 – Apr 7, & Apr 9, Apr 14, Apr 16,– Outline for Final Paper Due April 15, In Class Workshop on Revision and Peer Response April 16
Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go,* Vintage Press, 2005

Week 13-14 – Apr, 21, Apr 23, Apr 28, Apr 30 – Final Paper Draft Due April 25, Peer Editing 28 and 30
Sylvia Moreno Garcia, *Mexican Gothic,* Penguin Random House, 2020.

Final Paper Due May 9

Secondary Readings
The critical texts listed below will be available in a digital format on the Canvas site for the class. These essays and books will help us situate the fiction and drama listed above within the history of the eugenics movement. These texts are available for you to use in your writing assignments, and you will need to use at least two of them in your final paper. You are also responsible for reading **one** of these texts, in a careful and detailed manner, and presenting it to your classmates in your Reading Report. If you are not giving the Reading Report, your job is to think, listen and engage.

Bederman, Gail. *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States 1880-1917.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. (Selections TBA)

Briggs, Laura. "Debating Reproduction: Birth Control, Eugenics, and Overpopulation in Puerto Rico, 1920-1940," in *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico.* University of California Press, 2003. pp. 74-108.

Davis, Angela. "Racism, Birth Control, and Reproductive Rights" *Women, Race and Class,* Random House, 1981, pp.353-367.

English, Daylanne. *Unnatural Selections: Eugenics in American Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. (Selections TBA)

Gutiérrez, Elena. "The Fertility of Women of Mexican Origin: A Social Constructionist Approach." *Fertile Matters.* University of Texas Press, 2008.

Kevles, Daniel. *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985. (Selections TBA)

Kline, Wendy. "Motherhood, Morality, and the 'Moron': The Emergence of Eugenics in America," in *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom.* University of California Press, 2001. pp. 7-31.

Leonard, Thomas. *Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics, and American Economics in the Progressive Era.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016. (Selections TBA)

Marks, Laura. *Sexual Chemistry: A History of the Contraceptive Pill,* Yale University Press, 2001. (Selections TBA)

Sánchez-Rivera, R. "The Making of 'La Gran Familia Mexicana': Eugenics, Gender, and Sexuality in Mexico," *Journal of Historical Sociology*. 34 (2021): 161-185. doi: 10.1111/johs.12308

Schuller, Kyla. "Birthing a Better Nation: Margaret Sanger and Dr. Dorothy Ferebee." in *The Trouble with White Women: A Counterhistory of Feminism.* New York: Hachette, 2021.

Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics,* vol. 17, no. 2, 1987, pp. 64-81.

Stepan, Nancy Leys. *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991. (Selections TBA)

Stern, Alexandra Minna. "Sterilized in the Name of Public Health: Race, Immigration, and Reproductive Control in Modern California," *American Journal of Public Health* 95, no. 7 (July 2005): 1128-1138 doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2004.041608.

Ziegler, Mary. "Eugenic Feminism: Mental Hygiene, the Women's Movement, and the Campaign for Eugenic Legal Reform, 1900-1935." *Harvard Journal of Law and Gender* 31 (2008): 211-235.