

Lucas Dietrich  
Contemporary Ethnic Literature

## Portfolio Assignment

This assignment asks students to analyze and reflect upon the role of race and ethnicity in your lives and in the media you encounter on a daily basis. Much in the way that Claudia Rankine and Roxane Gay respond to current events, students should engage with issues of race and ethnicity in the world around them. You might consider the significance of race and ethnicity at Lesley and in Boston, in the U.S. and the wider world, in magazines and music, on television and in the movies, in politics and protests and sports and the news.

Students should select 4 specific texts for analysis. If you want to examine Colin Kaepernick and the NFL protests, for instance, you should find a single article or video or statement on the topic, and build your response from there. The texts themselves can take many forms—a song, a television show, a youtube video, a movie, a tweet, an article, a website, an advertisement, etc.—but they must be cited. Ground your discussion in texts that I can find and view.

Students have two options for approaching the assignment: 1) a *critical* portfolio option and 2) a *creative* portfolio option.

### **Option 1: Critical Portfolio**

For this option, students will produce a critical, nonfiction response to the texts and topics they select. Students should compose a 1-2 page response to each of the 4 texts chosen. What topic is being discussed in the text? Why does it matter? How does the text, for better or worse, participate in conversations about race and ethnicity? How do you view the text in light of our coursework and readings?

### **Option 2: Creative Portfolio**

I also welcome creative responses. This could be in the form of creative writing (autobiography or memoir, pop culture reviews, poetry, fiction) or visual media (drawing, painting, collage). Whatever genre or medium you choose, the portfolio should be inspired by the texts you find and cite. Include a 1-2 page “artist’s statement,” describing how your portfolio attempts to translate or respond to the texts you have selected.

The portfolio is due in the myLesley course site prior to our final class on Wednesday, December 20<sup>th</sup>. It is worth 30% of the overall grade. Students choosing the creative portfolio option can send audiovisual media by email or submit on the final day of class, but should nevertheless submit their “artist’s statement” through the myLesley website.

### A Couple of Suggestions—

- Use Roxane Gay and Claudia Rankine as models for the critical and creative portfolios, respectively.
- Try not to “reach” too far out of your everyday life or the daily news for the sources and texts you examine. Because issues of race and ethnicity infuse U.S. and global culture, it should not be difficult to find relevant texts.
- It may be interesting to use **all** 4 texts to explore a theme such as immigration, black protest or indigenous protest, contemporary music or an artistic sub-culture, ethnic communities, cultural appropriation, etc.
- Along these lines, it might be interesting to develop a creative response with a sense of coherence: a set of reviews of four songs or albums or tv shows; a series of short autobiographical responses that remember events involving race and ethnicity in your own life; “erasure” poetry, that literally transforms the primary text into something new; a series of non-fiction re-tellings of the texts you’ve selected.