



Passing, Black, White and Jewish

Prof. Roy Holler
Email: royholler@ufl.edu

Walker Hall 200
Office Hours: Thursday
11:00am – 12:50pm and by
appointment

Tuesday (1:55 - 2:45)
Thursday (1:55 - 3:50)

Aren't we all *passing*? We navigate through various identities daily, changing our personalities and donning masks to present ourselves differently from who we are. In some cases, passing between identities help us to align with the demands of a mainstream culture. In others, it grants us access to opportunities and privileges exclusive to a different group. However, some forms of passing are deemed socially acceptable and understandable, while others are considered taboo. This prompts us to question the innate human drive to pass, leading us to wonder: in a world where we all engage in some form of passing, how do we discern when we've passed too far?

Looking to answer these questions, we will start the course by establishing a solid foundation in the terminology and methodologies of race and racial bias through its American roots. We will analyze the extreme stakes faced by African Americans as white at the turn of the 20th century. We then extend our inquiry across time and disciplines to observe the manifestations of the phenomena in contemporary realities. Our multidisciplinary approach encompasses a spectrum of sources: historical recordings of mulatto slaves; memoirs and narratives of African American passers; poems and literary creations; legal theories surrounding cultural concealment and human right; even a reality TV show about switching races.

In the second phase of our course, we will foster a dialogue that transcends cultural boundaries. Here, we dissect passing as a global phenomenon, acknowledging its utilization by international communities and minority groups around the world. With a specific focus on transnational Jewish identities, we endeavor to reassess our own negotiation of identity and difference within this complex landscape.

Required & Recommended Course Materials (to purchase/rent)

Required: Larsen, Nella. *Passing*. Penguin Classics. ISBN - 9780142437278

Recommended website for writing support: OWL // Purdue Writing Lab @ www.owl.purdue.edu

All other readings and materials will be available on CANVAS. Please be in touch with the professor if you're having trouble accessing them.

List of Graded Work:

Assignment	Description	Requirements	Grade
Journal Responses	In class. Self-reflective responses to assigned readings.	Weekly. Two paragraphs min.	10 each. 30%
In Class Essay	A response paper analyzing course themes through literary analysis of two texts from syllabus, of different cultures.	In Person, in Class	100 Points. 30%
Recorded Project	Podcast segment – a recorded edited submission of a 5-6 minute story, which includes a narrative, at least one interview, and a personal reflection component, discussing the class themes. Students will submit a pitch and then an audio file.	Podcast pitch + Recorded podcast.	Prep: 20 Points Podcast: 80 20%
Participation Preparation	The class is discussion based, meaning you shouldn't expect hour long lectures. The success of our class is based on your active discussion and group work!	Active participation + demonstrated preparation	20%

Writing Grading Rubric(s)

Writing Assessment	SATISFACTORY (Y)	UNSATISFACTORY (N)
CONTENT	Papers exhibit at least some evidence of ideas that respond to the topic with complexity, critically evaluating and synthesizing sources, and provide at least an adequate discussion with basic understanding of sources.	Papers either include a central idea(s) that is unclear or off-topic or provide only minimal or inadequate discussion of ideas. Papers may also lack sufficient or appropriate sources.
ORGANIZATION AND COHERENCE	Documents and paragraphs exhibit at least some identifiable structure for topics, including a clear thesis statement but may require readers to work to follow progression of ideas.	Documents and paragraphs lack clearly identifiable organization, may lack any coherent sense of logic in associating and organizing ideas, and may also lack transitions and coherence to guide the reader.
ARGUMENT AND SUPPORT	Documents use persuasive and confident presentation of ideas, strongly supported with evidence. At the weak end of the Satisfactory range, documents may provide only generalized discussion of ideas or may provide adequate discussion but rely on weak support for arguments.	Documents make only weak generalizations, providing little or no support, as in summaries or narratives that fail to provide critical analysis.
STYLE	Documents use a writing style with word choice appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline. Sentences should display complexity and logical sentence structure. At a minimum, documents will display a less precise use of vocabulary and an uneven use of sentence structure or a writing style that occasionally veers away from word choice or tone appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline.	Documents rely on word usage that is inappropriate for the context, genre, or discipline. Sentences may be overly long or short with awkward construction. Documents may also use words incorrectly.
MECHANICS	Papers will feature correct or error-free presentation of ideas. At the weak end of the Satisfactory range, papers may contain some spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors that remain unobtrusive so they do not muddy the paper's argument or points.	Papers contain so many mechanical or grammatical errors that they impede the reader's understanding or severely undermine the writer's credibility.

Participation Grading Rubric: (10 points, 20%)

	High Quality	Average	Needs Improvement
Informed: Shows evidence of having done the assigned work.	Student shows convincing range and quality of knowledge, having thoroughly read the assigned material in preparation for class discussion. (9-10 pts.)	Student seems informed on the subject, having done minimal preparation for class discussion. (6-8 pts.)	Student is almost never prepared for class, exhibits very little or no knowledge of the assigned material/topics covered. (1-5 pts.)
Thoughtful: Shows evidence of having understood and considered issues raised.	9 – 10 pts.	6 – 8 pts.	1 – 5 pts.
Considerate: Takes the perspective others into account.	Student listens when others talk, both in groups and in class. Student incorporates or builds off of the ideas of others. (9 – 10 pts.)	Student listens when others talk, both in groups and in class. (6 – 8 pts.)	Student does not listen when others talk, both in groups and in class. Student is distracted, overuses laptops/electronics or interrupts when student speak. (1 – 5 pts.)

Grading Rubric:

A	94 - 100%		C	74 - 76%
A-	90 - 93%		C-	70 - 73%
B+	87 - 89%		D+	67 - 69%
B	84 - 86%		D	64 - 66%
B-	80 - 83%		D-	60 - 63%
C+	77 - 79%		E	<60

See: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>



This course complies with all UF policies. For information on those policies and for a list of campus resources, please see this page: <https://go.ufl.edu/syllabuspolices>.

Tentative Reading/Viewing List – Fall 2025

Week 1

Thu. Aug. 21 Welcome and Course Overview

Week 2: A Chosen Exile.

Tue. Aug. 26 “The Passing of Grandison” (1850)

Thu. Aug. 28 James Weldon Johnson, [*The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*](#)
Selections + Langston Hughes, “[Passing](#)”

Week 3: Nella Larsen

Tue. Sep. 2 Nella Larsen, *Passing*. (Part I, One + Two)

Thu. Sep. 4 Larsen, *Passing* (finish part one and read part two, One + Two)

Week 4: Nella Larsen

Tue. Sep. 9 Zoom Session: Larsen (Three + Four).

Thu. Sep. 11 Larsen, finish novel.

Week 5: Assimilating/Covering/Passing

Tue. Sep. 16 Haney Lopez “The Social Construction of Race”

Thu. Sep. 18 Langston Hughes “Theme for English B” (1949) + Kenji
Yoshino, *Covering* (selections).

Week 6: Trading Races

Tue. Sep. 23 Rosh Hashana (No Class).

Thu. Sep. 25 Ice Cube’s *Black. White.* (watch the first 4 episodes).

Week 7: Jewish Passing in the Diaspora

- Tue. Sep. 30 [Isaac Bashevis Singer. “Yentl the Yeshiva Boy” \(1962\) \(pg. 131 – 160\)](#) + Barbara Streisand. *Yentl* (1983). Selections screened in class.
- Thu. Oct. 2 Yom Kippur (No Class).

Week 8: Jewish Passing in the Diaspora

- Tue. Oct. 7 Orly Castel Bloom – *An Egyptian Novel* (selections)
- Thu. Oct. 9 Kaniuk. *Adam Resurrected*. [Chapter 4, pg. 80 to at least 112](#)

Week 9: The Passing of a Nation

- Tue. Oct. 14 Haim Hazaz, “The Sermon” (1942) (Pg. 233 – 249) + Alain Locke, “The New Negro”
- Thu. Oct. 16 Dahn Ben-Amotz, *To Remember, To Forget*, (1968), (pg. 3-10, 26-59)

Week 10: Passing as a Jew

- Tue. Oct. 21 Kanafani, “Returning to Haifa”
- Thu. Oct. 23 Kanafani, “Returning to Haifa”

Week 11: Trading Places

- Tue. Oct. 28 *My Name is Achmed*
- Thu. Oct. 30 Discussion + In Class Writing Assignment

Week 12: Mizrahi

- Tue. Nov. 4 Orly Castel-Bloom, [“Umi Fi Shurl](#)
- Thu. Nov. 6 Bouzaglo. [Fictitious Marriage.mp4](#).

Week 13: Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell

- Tue. Nov. 11 Veterans Day (No Class).

Thu. Nov. 13 Yossi and Jagger. (2005)

Week 14: Blacks and Jews

Tue. Nov. 18 Spike Lee. [*Blackkklansman*](#)

Thu. Nov. 20 Cont. discussion + Final Projects

Week 15: Thanksgiving Break

Week 16: Student Presentations

Tue. Dec. 2 Podcasts

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Content: *Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the discipline(s).*

- **Identify, describe, and explain** the concept of *passing* and its historical and literary evolution, based in its African American roots and its contemporary, broad and global occurrences, specifically as illustrated in the Jewish world, with attention to the current fluidity of racial identities. **Assessments:** Class participation, journal entries, comparative papers and final project.
- **Identify and critique** past and present visual biases, the perception of fixed identities, race as a biological/social construct and negotiation of identity/difference in mainstream culture. **Assessments:** Class participation, journal entries, comparative papers and final project.
- **Explore and apply** a unique African American phenomenon in relation to global communities, to better understand the intersection of transnational Jewish/Israeli and Palestinian identities. **Assessments:** Class participation, journal entries, comparative papers and final project.

Critical Thinking: *Students carefully and logically analyze information from multiple perspectives and develop reasoned solutions to problems within the discipline(s).*

- **Analyze and Evaluate** historical and contemporary narratives by and about passing individuals, that depict the experience and help us construct a critical approach to the demands of conforming one's racial/ethnic identities to that of the majority, in local and global settings. Class participation, journal entries, short and comparative papers and Final Project.
- **Connect** the complex relationships between how unique models of international identity structures (black/Jewish) are perceived and enforced today—culture/ethnicity/race/class and gender—and the interpretation of ideas on which they are based through a comparative lens. **Assessments:** Class participation, journal entries, short and comparative papers and Final Project.
- Review how passing between identities help people around the world adjust to certain demands of a mainstream culture and/or gain access to opportunities and benefits that are only available to a different group. **Assessments:** Class participation, journal entries, comparative papers and final project.

Communication: *Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline(s).*

- **Develop and present** their own findings in verbal and recorded form through an experiential project that applies the experience of black/Jewish communities to personal/local narratives. **Assessments:** Class participation and Final Project.
- **Explore** how passing effects the Black/Jewish experience through personal and comparative written assignment which analyzes a work from the syllabus (literature, film, memoir). **Assessments:** Journal entries, short and comparative papers and Final Project.

UF Required Policies

Attendance Policy

Attendance is mandatory, will be taken daily and recorded in the Canvas gradebook. You are allowed two “personal days” for the semester, after which each absence that does not meet university criteria for “excused” will result in a two-point deduction from your final grade.

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Students Requiring Accommodation

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center. See “Get Started With the DRC” Disability Resource Center webpage (<https://disability.ufl.edu/get-started/>). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

UF Evaluations Process

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online. Students can complete evaluations in three ways: [1] The email they receive from GatorEvals; [2] Their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals; or [3] The central portal at <https://my-ufl.bluera.com>. Guidance on how to provide constructive feedback is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/Links to an external site.> Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/Links to an external site.>

University Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. See the UF Conduct Code website (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>) for more information. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with me.

Counseling and Wellness Center

Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

The Writing Studio

The writing studio is committed to helping University of Florida students meet their academic and professional goals by becoming better writers. Visit the writing studio online at <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/Links to an external site.> or in 2215 Turlington Hall for one-on-one consultations and workshops.

In-Class Recordings

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.