

Contemporary Multiracial Identities
UC Berkeley OLLI: Winter 2026 Session
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Course Description:

Mixed-race people have always existed, but the emergence of “multiracial” as a distinct category of identity is relatively recent. For the first time in 2000, the US Census gave mixed-race Americans the opportunity to check more than one box when asked to define themselves racially. The past 25 years have seen a rise in literature by and about multiracial people, and in this class we will explore some of these cultural expressions. Our close reading of several of these texts, including Danzy Senna’s 1998 satirical essay “The Mulatto Millennium” and Avan Jogia’s 2019 multimedia reflection on multiracial identity *Mixed Feelings*, will be guided by the following questions: What is the political and social significance of claiming a mixed-race identity? How might the term “multiracial” inadvertently reify problematic biological notions of race? How do multiracial people engage with tropes such as the “tragic mulatta” and the “exceptional multiracial”? How, as Michele Elam puts it, might an aesthetics of mixed race “productively reimagine the relationship between race, art, and social justice in the 21st century”?

Course Outline:

Week 1: Introduction to Mixed Race Studies; Black-Native Identities

Week 2: “What Color is Jesus?” by James McBride

Week 3: “Mulatto Millennium” by Danzy Senna & “The World’s First Racial Draft” by Dave Chappelle (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3UBsI8IYzPA>)

Week 4: “I am not Pocahontas” by Elissa Washuta

Week 5: Excerpt from *Crying in H Mart* by Michelle Zauner

Week 6: *Mixed Feelings* by Avan Jogia

Note: PDFs will be available for all readings listed above except *Mixed Feelings* by Avan Jogia, which students are encouraged to purchase or borrow from the library.