This class provides an introduction to the recent arguments in critical race theory according to which the modern concept of “race” emerged in the West from the mutually implicated histories of philosophy, colonialism, and slave trade—arguably, the constellation of Western modernity—starting in the mid-1700s. We will open by considering Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s theory of civilizational emergence in *Emile* and the Discourses. We’ll trace Rousseau’s influence on nineteenth-century racial sciences and sexology in Europe, as well as their subsequent migration to the United States. Most of our literary examples are twentieth-century negotiations with this history.

The class does not assume previous familiarity with philosophy or critical race theory. It does require a high tolerance for lengthy readings of difficult texts.

Further requirements: class attendance and participation; response papers; research proposal; and final research paper.

Applicable distribution areas:
- Literature 1660-1900
- Concepts, issues, themes, etc.
- Theory
- English without Borders