

## **FILM, MEDIA & CULTURE** [Eng 381 | Winter 2009 | TR: 2-3:50 | McKenzie 214]

Professor Ovalle

PLC 266 | povalle@uoregon.edu | office hours: TR 4:30-6:00

Research Librarian Elizabeth Peterson

Knight Library | emp@uoregon.edu | office hours: M 3-5 & W 2-3

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"Film, Media & Culture" is an introduction to Hollywood representation through visual and narrative conventions, with a central emphasis on race and ethnicity. The course focuses on mainstream film to identify how the United States has been represented on screen over the past hundred years. Our central question is: What images embody "America" — both yesterday and today? Ultimately, the goal is to expose how the categories of race and ethnicity are socially constructed and deeply intertwined with representations of class, gender, sexuality and/or nationality. The course begins with an introduction to the conventions of Hollywood film that historicizes the traditions of racial representation in the United States. While classroom time will emphasize early Hollywood representations, your final paper will build upon this historical foundation with a contemporary comparative analysis to better explore the impact and evolution of Hollywood representation.

**Methodology:** This is a research-based course. While classroom discussion will be organized around films, course readings and other visual material, you and your classmates will be responsible for organizing and researching the material for these discussions. Each assignment is built to lead into a final analytical paper that is developed independently but contextualized with the research produced in the classroom.

**Please Note:** *This course may screen films that contain graphic violence, explicit sex and adult themes and/or situations. We will be discussing issues in depth and may view difficult scenes or sequences several times. If the subject matter makes you uncomfortable, for whatever reason, please consider whether or not this course is the appropriate choice for you.*

### **Course Objectives**

#### **Students will. . .**

- 1 Learn the basics of formal and cultural film analysis.
- 2 Develop these skills through an understanding of Hollywood representations of race and ethnicity.
- 3 Contextualize and develop analytical writing through research about film and popular culture.
- 4 Practice oral presentation and constructive interrogation skills.

### **Course Requirements**

- 10% Participation & Attendance
- 10% Short Analytical Paper (AP1)
- 20% Group Research Presentation & Discussion
- 20% Mid-Term Exam
- 20% Comparative Analysis Research Paper (CARP, due last day of class)
- 20% Final Exam (Wednesday March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1pm)

### **Assignments**

**Research Presentation & Discussion:** You and 4-5 colleagues will select a week to guide the classroom discussion based on external research and *GUIDELINE QUESTIONS*.

- Unlike a traditional presentation, you will be in charge of producing and sharing research based on the week's topic, film(s) and readings. These materials will be used as the skeleton of an argument brainstorming discussion using the week's key concepts.
- One week before your presentation, you will meet with Elizabeth Peterson, our in-class research librarian to discuss possible research venues. To prepare for this meeting, you will be expected to have screened your film and read your week's materials. It is ideal that you have an outline of the key ideas your group would like to explore so as to make your research meeting more productive.
- The week of your presentation, you will have the opportunity to discuss your reading notes and outline during a small group conference with the professor.
- Materials utilized for annotated bibliographies should be brought into class so I can put them on reserve for the final projects. Materials from Summit should be photocopied for reserves.

### **Course Protocol**

#### Class Conduct & Participation

- Respect for the classroom is key.

- While disagreements or challenging questions may arise during discussion, it is imperative that this classroom remains a space for inquisitive thought and debate.
- Please TURN OFF all cell phones (not vibrate – OFF), etc during class. Text-ing (writing or reading, etc) during lectures and screenings is VERY DISTRACTING. If you have an emergency situation, please let me know. Otherwise, it can wait until after class.
- Please keep a name banner visible throughout the term so I (and your classmates) can address you by name. I will provide materials for this beginning Week 2.

#### Attendance

- More than two unexcused absences may impact your grade by one full letter without notice.
- Absences due to illness, athletic tournaments or extracurricular duties must be officially verified in writing.
- If you are late, it is your responsibility to see me after class or you will be marked absent. More than 3 late arrivals may impact your grade.

#### Assignments

- Hardcopy assignments are due on the day listed and at the start of class.
- I will not accept emailed work.
- ANY AND ALL LATE PAPERS MUST BE ARRANGED ONE-WEEK IN ADVANCE. Group Projects are not eligible for delays. Unless previous arrangements have been made, late assignments will automatically be reduced 1 letter grade for each day late. I reserve the right to refuse requests for late papers.
- Each assignment must be completed to pass this course and all work is due by the end of exam week.
- Plagiarism (intentional or unintentional) is grounds for – at very least – failing this class. This is especially imperative in a research-based course.

#### Communication & Professionalization

- I will reply to email within 48 hours or less.
- Please put the course title in the subject line so I can easily identify your emails.
- Maintain professional etiquette in all email correspondence — including “Dear Professor Ovalle,” etc. The classroom and our official correspondence should serve as on-the-job training.
- If you have any questions, feel free to talk to me during office hours or via email. I welcome your questions and the chance to meet you outside of class time.
- I reserve the right to change the syllabus (screenings/readings/topics) during the term as needed.

#### Academic Help & Resources

- If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing academic accommodations in this course, please meet with me as soon as possible with a notification letter from Disability Services.
- The University of Oregon Crisis Line offers free, anonymous telephone counseling and referrals for help in dealing with a variety of problems – from academic concerns, suicide concerns, depression, relationship problems, eating disorders, grieving, gay/lesbian/bi-sexual issues, sexual assault and beyond. The Crisis Line is in operation Monday through Friday from 5:00pm to 8:00am and 24 hours a day on the weekends. The Crisis Line number is 346-4488.

<b>wk 1</b>	TUE 1/6	Introduction
		Begin Screening: <i>The Lion King</i> (Allers/Minkoff, 1994) 88 min
	THUR 1/8	Finish Screening: <i>The Lion King</i>
		Discussion: "Introduction to the Study of Film Form and Representation" (1-22)
<b>wk 2</b>	TUE 1/13	Introduction to Cultural Studies & Formal Film Analysis
		Introduction to Research Methods
		Research Meeting: Group 1
	THUR 1/15	Discussion: "The Structure and History of Hollywood Filmmaking" (23-46)
		& <i>The Lion King</i> continued
<b>wk 3</b>	TUE 1/20	Whiteness and The "Human" Race
		Screening: Begin <i>The Jazz Singer</i> (Crosland, 1927) 88 min
		Research Meeting: Group 2      Presentation Meeting: Group 1
		<b>AP1 DUE</b>
	THUR 1/22	Screening: Finish <i>The Jazz Singer</i>
		Discussion: "The Concept of Whiteness and American Film" (47-74) & RP1
		Research Presentation: Group 1
<b>wk 4</b>	TUE 1/27	Blackness and The Racial "Other"

- Screening: *Hallelujah* (Vidor, 1929) 109 min  
 Research Meeting: Group 3      Presentation Meeting: Group 2  
 THUR 1/29 Discussion: "African Americans and American Film" (75-95) & RP2  
 Research Presentation: Group 2
- wk 5** TUE 2/3      Brown-ness and the Hollywood Latino/a  
 Screening: *Bird of Paradise* (Vidor, 1932) 80 min  
 THUR 2/5 Research Meeting: Group 4      Presentation Meeting: Group 3  
 Discussion: "Latinos and American Film" (135-154) & RP3  
 Research Presentation: Group 3
- wk 6** TUE 2/10      **MIDTERM**  
 Screening: *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Hawks, 1953) 95 min  
 THUR 2/12 Research Meeting: Group 5      Presentation Meeting: Group 4  
 Discussion REDUX: "The Concept of Whiteness and American Film" (47-74) & RP4  
 Research Presentation: Group 4
- wk 7** TUE 2/17      Native Americans & The West(ern)  
 Screening: *Stagecoach* (Ford, 1939) 96 min  
 THUR 2/19 Research Meeting: Group 6      Presentation Meeting: Group 5  
 Discussion: "Native Americans and American Film" (96-115) & RP5  
 Research Presentation: Group 5
- wk 8** TUE 2/24      Asian-Americans & Hollywood Film  
 Screening: *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (Brabin, 1932) 67 min  
 THUR 2/26 Research Meeting: Group 7      Presentation Meeting: Group 6  
 Discussion: "Asian-Americans and American Film" (116-134) & RP6  
 Research Presentation: Group 6
- wk 9** TUE 3/3      Arab Terrorisms — Then and Now  
 Screening: *The Sheik* (Melford, 1921) 80 min  
                   *Planet of the Arabs* (Salloum, 2004) 10 min  
 Presentation Meeting: Group 7  
 THUR 3/5 Shaheen, "Introduction" from *Reel Bad Arabs* (1-37) & RP6  
 Research Presentation: Group 7
- wk 10** TUE 3/10      Contemporary Genre Analysis: The Stoner Comedy  
 Screening: "Inside the Actor's Studio" (Dave Chappelle)  
 Discussion:      *Half-Baked* (Davis, 1998)  
                           *Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle* (Leiner, 2004)  
                           Clips from: *Cheech and Chong: Up in Smoke* (Adler, 1978),  
                           *Friday* (Gray, 1995), *Grandma's Boy* (Goossen, 2006)
- THUR 3/12      Concluding Thoughts  
**CAP2 DUE**
- Exam** WED 3/18 @ 1pm

## **Course Assignments**

By the end of this course, I expect that you will understand how to formally and culturally analyze film by using research to contextualize your argument. The assignments for this course are developed as a kind of "on the job" training. Each assignment builds on the previous one, from class discussions to your final paper.

Your first assignment is a **critical response paper** (10%). Using our classroom discussion about *The Lion King*, you will develop your own formal and cultural argument using 1 or 2 points about the film. The 2-3 page paper should be an example of your skills developing a line of argument (from thesis to supporting points) while practicing film writing. The paper will give me a chance to respond to your writing early in the term. This assignment is not research-based.

The **research presentation** (20%) is a collaborative project. In a group of 5-6 people, your team will learn and practice the process of researching film. First, you must brainstorm a series of research questions based on the readings and film. With these questions as a guide, you will learn and practice research methods for film writing. Our in-class librarian, Elizabeth Peterson, will provide training and support throughout the process, but the success of this project will depend upon the kinds of questions you and your team asks — and the kinds of questions you inspire in the classroom when you present your findings. These sessions should be viewed as brainstorming sessions for potential final paper topics.

Each team's research will produce a body of material that can be used by the class as a whole for the **final research paper** (20%). The final paper will ask you to compare one of the films viewed in class with a contemporary film. Because you will write on a different film than the one you researched during the term, it is imperative that each group works hard to produce the best research guides possible and that our group discussions are rigorous about potential arguments that could be produced using each team's research material. The full details of this assignment will be available week 3.

The **midterm exam** (20%) will illustrate your grasp of the course's key concepts and help you practice usage of key terms. The **final exam** (20%) is a cumulative exam that will show how your knowledge of the themes and terms of the readings has grown. Exams will cover vocabulary (definition and use) as well as short-answer questions (fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, etc) based on the readings.

## **Research Team**

The Research Team will be responsible for compiling sources for each week of the course. Using the associated chapter from *America on Film*, each team will collaboratively develop a research agenda that is organized around that week's film and their chapter's key terms and themes. The research agenda should be organized around 2-3 guiding questions.

Areas of inquiry for this research agenda can include, but are not limited to:

- Studio information (history of studio, house styles, etc)
- Star and cast information (biography, persona, etc)
- Historical/Social/Cultural context (historical period, contemporary events, relevant political issues, etc)
- Production & Technical Information (director/crew information, technological trends, etc)
- Publicity, Promotions & Reception (marketing practices, advertising trends, box office, press reviews, academic evaluation, etc)\*

\* Additional critical options available for this category will be discussed week 2.

## **Research Packet**

Each researcher will develop their *findings* into a *bibliography* that compiles 3-5 sources (*scholarly* and *popular*) based on their area of inquiry and the research agenda.

The researcher will select 2 sources from this bibliography — one scholarly and one popular — to develop into *annotated bibliographic entries*. The annotated entries will synthesize the source's information to illustrate how and why it contributes to the research agenda.

In addition to the bibliography, the research packet should include a list of the key terms discussed in the assigned chapter for reference purposes. The research team will compile these terms and all of the bibliographic sources into a *master research packet* and upload it to Bb by the Monday evening (7pm) of the week they present.

Week 2 will provide a mock-up of what will be expected of you this quarter. You will receive a sample research packet the second week of class, with a discussion to follow on Thursday.

### **In-Class Research Presentation**

On Thursdays, the class will have read the assigned chapter and the research packet prepared by that week's research team.

The research team will lead the class through their agenda, explaining what questions they started out with and how these questions evolved with the research findings.

After the research team presents their findings, the class will serve as constructive interrogators. We will ask additional questions of the research team and the research packet (agenda, questions, bibliography, etc). As a group, we will explore potential arguments/theses that can be crafted from the research materials, additional questions that might develop in the process, and the kind of sources that would be needed to support this line of argument.

We will conclude the discussion by bringing in images and clips from the film (brought in by the professor and/or as suggested by the research team) to see how formal analysis supports, challenges or changes the shape of this argument.

### **Sign-Ups & Incentives**

Sign-Ups for Research Groups will begin Tuesday of week 2. Early requests for week 1 will be appreciated.

Team #1 Incentive: As the first group to go up, the first team has the option of delaying the 1<sup>st</sup> paper deadline (AP1) by 1 week.

Team #4 Incentive: Due to the midterm, there will be no additional reading for the week. Instead, the group will be expected to make *full* use of the re-assigned chapter and the film's research options.