The use of race as the basis for the disparate treatment of blacks has been a pernicious and persistent problem throughout American history. From slavery, through the legalized segregation of the Jim Crow Era, to the present, race has been used as a means of the social control of blacks (Wacquant, 2001; Alexander, 2009). At the dawn of the 20th Century W.E.B. Du Bois made his prophetic statement that the major problem confronting American society during that century would be “the problem of the color line.” Despite the significant racial progress that has been made in America since the time of Du Bois (1868-1963), who passed away on the eve of the historic March on Washington where Dr. Martin Luther King delivered his celebrated “I Have a Dream” speech, as evidenced by the election of the nation’s first African-American president, many of the racial divisions and inequalities that characterized America in the 20th Century are still present today as reflected in the current racial tensions both locally and nationally.

While some political and social commentators had suggested that America had entered an era of post-racialism with the election of Barack Obama, this is juxtaposed against the racial unrest in Ferguson and Baltimore as a result of police-involved shootings of blacks in cities across the nation including here in Cleveland. National socioeconomic data consistently shows significant racial disparities exist between African Americans and whites in academic achievement, income, homeownership, the accumulation of wealth, in health and life expectancy, and within the criminal justice system. Why is race such a salient characteristic in American society? Has America entered an era of post-racialism or have race relations worsened? How does race continue to impact our culture? Can the movies, among the most powerful shapers of American culture, have played a significant role in nurturing and perpetuating racism or in moderating it? These are some of the questions we will seek to examine and answer in this course.
UST 251 – The African-American Image in Film

Fall 2015 – Dr. Ronnie Dunn

Course Goals

1. To provide an historic overview of race relations and racism as seen through the evolution of American cinema.
2. To examine traditional racial perceptions and stereotypes and study how they have changed over time.
3. To see how various films and videos reflect American social and moral thinking at different periods.
4. To explore the treatment of racial issues in current films and documentaries.
5. To promote skills in writing and critical thinking

Course Methods

This course will consist of a film, clip, or videotape to be screened in each of the 15 weeks of the semester. Each screening will then be followed by a discussion of the issues raised in the film and the assigned supplementary readings. Context and artistic style will be analyzed.

General Education Requirements:

This course fulfills both the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and the African American Experience: Race and Racism General Education Requirements.

In order to earn a “C” in the class and meet the WAC requirements each student must write an 8-10 page paper (2000 word minimum) written at a “C” skill level. However, if your writing is weak, yet you demonstrate an understanding of the course material and meet all other course requirements, you may receive at least a “D” grade, but will not receive WAC credit for the course. This paper must be typewritten or word-processed in double-spaced format. Papers must conform to the Manual of Style of the American Psychological Association. Grammar and spelling will be graded.

Course Requirements and Grading

Grades will be based on:

1. Three 3-page movie critiques selected from among the four eras of history covered during the semester will be written. Students may select which film they will critique for each period. A suggested format is attached to this syllabus (on page 9). The critiques are due on the Thursday of weeks 4, 9, 12, and 15. The critiques will be worth a total of 20 points (6.66 pts. each).
2. A mid-term exam on Thursday, October 15th graded at 25 points max.

3. A term paper of between 8-10 pages. This term paper will be graded at 30 points max.
4. A final exam based on all materials covered during the course and will be graded at 25 points max.

This term paper should describe and explain the transformation of the black images in film from early films such as Birth of A Nation through contemporary films such as Fruitvale Station. Compare and contrast the images from the past with those of today. Have these images of blacks changed or remained the same and if so, how? What do these films say about the state of race relations at the time, and how have they changed over time? What social, economic, and/or political events assisted the transformation? How has these racial images impacted the nation socially and politically? You may use up to two pages of pictures, photographs or other media as well as eight pages of text to create an interesting, informative study.

Written Assignment Evaluation: Evaluation of student papers is based on the following criteria:
(1) Focus – The hypothesis or main point of your paper needs to be stated clearly at the beginning of the paper.
(2) Development – Incorporate quotes, paraphrases, examples, inferences, reasoning, and opinions to support your hypothesis.
(3) Organization – The organization/structure of the paper. More specifically, is the paper organized so that the paragraphs proceed from one to another in a logical style using appropriate transitions? Is the paper well organized? Did the student adhere to the APA style format suggested for this course?
(4) Style – Style can be considered in terms of sentence patterns and diction. Are the sentence patterns varied (preferred) or all the same? Variety in style makes for a far more interesting read. Is the diction appropriate (wording, choice of words) for an upper level college assignment?
(5) Mechanics – Refers to the punctuation, spelling, and grammar. Students should make sure they proofread their paper prior to submission. Points will be deducted for inappropriate punctuation, improper use of grammar, and misspelled words. Spell-check your work!

For students with difficulty writing it is suggested that you utilize the Writing Center located in Main Classroom 321.

Special Needs: Students needing special accommodations to take exams or complete assignments must identify themselves to the instructor by the end of the second week of classes. These include accommodations for physical handicaps, learning disabilities, and English as a second language.
Grading

Percentage of possible points:
A   = 94 – 100 %
A - = 90 – 93
B+ = 87 – 89
B   = 83 – 86
B - = 80 – 82
C+ = 77 – 79
C   = 70 – 76
D   = 60 – 69
F    = 59 and below

Grades of “I” and “X”

X – The grade of “X” may be assigned when an attending/participating student has stopped attending/participating without notification and has not completed all assignments for reasons that cannot be determined by the end of the period. An “X” automatically becomes an F if not resolved by the last day of instruction of the following semester. An “X” also will be assigned by the University Registrar when no grade is submitted by the professor.

I – Incomplete. The “I” grade is given when the work in a course has been generally passing, but when some specifically required task has not been completed through no fault of the student.

An “I” grade can be assigned when all three of the following conditions are met:
1. Student is regularly attending / participating in the class and has the potential to pass the course.
2. Student has not completed all assignments and has stopped attending/participating for reasons deemed justified by the professor; and
3. Student has notified the professor prior to the end of the grading period.

University Policies and Deadlines:

Academic integrity is one of the highest values and a basic standard within academia. All work submitted by students, including weekly assignments and the final paper, are expected to be their own and to have been completed to meet the requirements of each specific assignment. Plagiarism is an act of academic fraud and a serious offense which can carry penalties up to expulsion from the university. While it is acceptable and customary to use the work of another author the work must be properly cited in adherence with the appropriate manual of style, which is APA for this class. It is strongly advised that all students familiarize themselves with the policy on Academic Misconduct found in section 3.1.2 of The Student Code of Conduct.
In order to help address issues regarding plagiarism and the proper use of other people’s writings, an online resource Turnitin.com is being utilized and made available to students to check their work before submitting it. An account on the website has been set up for this class. The student password and class id for UST 251 – African American Images in Film are: **Password – vikings*15 (lowercase)** and **Class id – 10357567**

- For the current semester, the deadline for dropping a course is September 4, 2015.
- The last day to withdraw from the course is October 30, 2015.
- The final exam week is December 7-12, 2015.

**Suggestions for Passing the Course**

1. Attend classes & participate in class discussions. Your participation is crucial to the success of the class. We must trust each other not to respond negatively to a classmate even when discussing emotionally charged issues.
2. Hand in your movie critiques and term paper on time. Points will be deducted from late papers and papers with excessive spelling errors.
3. Be prepared in some cases to view material with a level of profanity and sexual suggestion associated with “R” rated films.

**Course Materials**

There is one required textbook for this course:


In addition, students will find copies of supplementary readings provided by the instructor on the Electronic Course Reserve (ECR) of the main Library’s Home Page. In order to access readings using the new ECR system, students must type in the professor’s last name (**Dunn**) on the ECR webpage and enter the password for this class: **7514**.

These readings will amplify the basis for each class discussion, so keep up with the readings. The quality of the discussion will depend as much on the student’s preparation as on the professor’s.

**Attendance Policy**

Students are expected to attend all classes and keep up with all reading assignments. Attendance will be taken near the end of each class.
UST 251 Topics and Screening Schedule – Fall 2015

Electronic Device Policy

Cell phones should be turned off or placed on silent/vibrate during class. Students should not be using electronic devices or laptop computers during class unless otherwise directed to do so as part of the class.

THE CIVIL WAR ERA

Week 1: Topic: America and Its “Birth Defect”
Film: “Birth of A Nation” (1915, D.W. Griffith, 125 minutes). The Civil War, the Ku Klux Klan, and Reconstruction from a Racist Perspective

Read: Bogle, Intro. & Ch. 1;
Articles (ECR): McPherson, James, M. 2007. This Mighty Scourge. Chapter 1 “And the War Came”; Von Drehle, David. 2011. “The Way We Weren’t”; Historical View of Race Relations (on Blackboard)

IAT Exercise: Go to the weblink in Blackboard and click on Implicit Association Test icon (https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/), read the instructions and take the racial preference test. Please record your test results on the discussion board in Blackboard and be prepared to discuss in class. (Do not be too upset by your test results, we all very likely harbor some racial preferences that we are unaware of or may not be comfortable acknowledging.)

Week 2: Topic: Black Archetypes: Servants, Coons, Pickannies, & Bucks
Film: “Gone with The Wind”: (Excerpts) The Civil War and Slavery from a perspective featuring, the “Plantation Genre.”
Film: “12 Years a Slave,” 2013 movie of the year. Steve McQueen (Dir.).

Read: Article (ECR) Harris, David. “The Importance of Research on Race & Policing: Making Race Salient to Individuals and Institutions within Criminal Justice.” Criminology & Public Policy, 6 (1), 5-23.

THE JIM CROW ERA

Week 3: Topic: Post Emancipation
Film: Slavery by Another Name
Film: Why We Laugh: History of Blacks in Comedy & Film
Read: Bogle, Ch. 2;

Week 4: Topic: The Domestic
Film: “The Help”
Film: “The Butler”
Critique 1 due Sept. 17th
Week 5: Topic: Race & the dilemma of “Passing”
Film: “Imitation of Life”
Read: Bogle, Ch. 3. ECR: Bernstein, Margaret. Unfolding Secrets;
Review Colorism & Socialization website (Maxwell) on Blackboard.

Week 6: Fight The Power: Black Cinema
Film: “Midnight Ramble” by Oscar Micheaux. A look at early black-made films.
Read: Bogle, Ch. 4;

Week 7: Topic: The Fight for Democracy
(ECR)

THE BLACK MIGRATION/CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

Week 8: Topic: Black Urbanization
Film: “Raisin In The Sun” Sidney Poitier stars in a script by Lorraine Hansberry.
Read: (ECR) Nicholas Lemann, The Promised Land. Ch. 2.

Note: Mid-Term Exam Thursday, Oct. 15th

Week 9: Topic: Spike, Denzel, & a New Black Masculinity
Film: “Malcolm X” (1992) Denzel as Malcolm X.
Read: Bogle, Ch. 10
Critique 2 due Oct. 22nd

Week 10: Topic: Integration in the City and Interracial Relationships in the 1960s
(Racial and class issues gently explored by Poitier, Hepburn and Tracy). Oscar winner for story and screenplay.
Read: TBA

Week 11: Topic: Black Icons of the 60s & 70s
Film: Muhammad Ali: Made in Miami
Film: “Badass Cinema”
Read: Bogle, Ch. 7 – 8
Week 12: Topic: Blaxploitation Films & Gender Role Stereotypes of the 1970s
Film: “Super Fly,” & “Foxy Brown”
Critique 3 due Nov. 12th

THE POST-CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

Week 13: Topic: Urban Conflict
Film: “Do the Right Thing” (Spike Lee, 1989, 120 min. Depiction of life and a long, hot day in the neighborhood).

Week 14: Topic: Black, Female, & Poor
Film: “Precious” by Lee Daniels. (2009) with Clareece Jones, Mo’Nique and Mariah Carey
Read: Chapter 4 from Elijah Anderson’s “Code of the Street.”
Term paper due Nov. 24th

Week 15: Topic: Young Black Urban Males: Endangered?
Film: “Fruitvale Station” (2013). Ryan Coogler’s film based on the shooting death of Oscar Grant III by a Bay-area transit officer on New Year’s Day 2008.
Read: (ECR) Chapter 3 from Elijah Anderson’s “Code of the Street.”

Week 16: Topic: The Impact of the War of Drugs & Mass Incarceration on Urban America
Film: “The House I Live In” (Eugene Jarecki, 2012).
Critique 4 due Dec. 3rd

NOTE: Term paper due Tuesday, Nov. 24th and Final Exam on Tuesday, Dec. 8th, 12:30-2:30 pm.
UST 251 – The African-American Image on Film

Suggested SAMPLE SCREENING CRITIQUE – Please type your reviews

YOUR NAME _______________________________________________

TITLE OF FILM _______________________________________________

STUDIO/DIRECTOR _____________________________________________

YEAR RELEASED _______________________________________________

1. PLOT (Ideas that drove the film).

2. HISTORICAL SETTING

3. STATUS OF RACE RELATIONS DURING PERIOD

4. RACIAL ISSUES PRESENTED IN FILM

5. HOW WERE THESE ISSUES RESOLVED?

6. WAS THE STORY REALISTIC, OR MYTHIC?

7. HOW WAS THE PROTAGONIST IN THE MOVIE PORTRAYED? IN A NEGATIVE OR POSITIVE MANNER?

8. WERE ANY RACIAL STEREOTYPES OR IMAGES PERPETUATED IN THE MOVIE? IF SO, WHAT WERE THEY?

9. WAS AN IDEOLOGY EXPRESSED?

10. WHAT IS OR COULD BE THE SOCIAL OR POLITICAL IMPACT OF SUCH AN IDEOLOGY?

11. WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THE FILM?

11. WHY DID YOU LIKE IT OR NOT?