

UST 251 – THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN IMAGE IN FILM
A Writing Across the Curriculum Course

Instructor : Ronnie Dunn, Ph. D.
Meeting Time : Tues. – Thurs. 12:30 - 1:45 p.m.
Meeting Room : UR 112
Instructor’s Office : UR 314
Phone & Email : 687-5494 or email: r.dunn@csuohio.edu
Office Hours : Tues. & Thurs. 10 am – 12 p.m.

Course Description

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 racially divisive rhetoric of this past presidential election campaign.

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, Baltimore, Charlotte, and Milwaukee, and statistical data which shows significant disparities between African Americans and whites in education, income, deadly encounters with police, incarceration, homeownership, accumulation of wealth, health, and life expectancy. Why is race such a salient characteristic in American society? Has race relations improved or worsened in America since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s? If not, how does race continue to impact our culture? Can the movies and media, among the most powerful shapers of American culture, have played a significant role in the nurturing of racism in the past and in moderating and sustaining it in the present? 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 2017– 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 during 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 is approved as a General Education 08 course meeting the requirements for The African American Experience. It meets the requirements for Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC). Skill areas for this class include Critical Thinking and Information Literacy.

African-American Experience Criteria

1. This course has a primary focus on the contemporary experience of African-Americans and maintains the perspectives, experiences and/or achievements of African-Americans themselves as central to the course.
2. This course provides students with knowledge of how the field of Urban Affairs studies and analyzes the African-American experience.
3. This course provides students with a theoretical and empirical framework for understanding inequality and the distinguishing aspects of the African-American experience.

Skill Area: Critical Thinking Criteria

1. Fifteen percent (15%) of the grade in this course is based on an evaluation of critical thinking.
2. This course requires students to attain skills beyond lower-level knowledge, thereby requiring skills that involve the use of content knowledge (e.g. finding information to solve a problem).

Skill Area: Information Literacy

1. Fifteen percent (15%) of the grade in the course is based on an evaluation of information literacy.
2. Students are required to evaluate the accuracy, authority, currency, objectivity, and reliability of information sources.
3. Students are required to address the ethical and legal uses of information (See policy on Academic Integrity below).

Writing Across the Curriculum Criteria

This course also fulfills the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) requirement. The criteria for meeting the WAC requirement are:

1. This course requires students to write between 3,000 and 5,000 words (10-14 pages, double-spaced, in 12-point font, with 1" margins) in writing assignments, which will include movie critiques.
2. The final term paper must total at least 2,000 words (8 pages but be no more than 10 pages).
3. The course teaches students writing-to-learn strategies that foster students' experiences in learning, and writing-to-communicate strategies that foster students' respect of readers' experiences.
4. Students will be assigned writing complex enough to require substantive revision for most students. Students will be given feedback to assist them in preparing subsequent papers or drafts of papers. This feedback will consist of more than mechanical correction of punctuation and grammar.
5. This course provides instruction in discipline-appropriate forms of texts, arguments, evidence, style, audience, and citation. Students will be required to use the American Psychological Association (APA) style. The CSU Library website lists citation guides including links to the APA style guide: <http://www.ulib.csuohio.edu/research/vrd/citations.html>;
or go to the APA website, <http://www.apastyle.org/>
7. This course will address the needs of students regarding library competency.
8. In order to receive a C or better in the course, students must write at a satisfactory skill level (C or better). If your writing is weak, but shows understanding of the course material, you may be assigned a D, in which case WAC credit will not be received for the course.

Course Requirements and Grading

Grades will be based on:

1. Three 3-page movie critiques from the designated eras of film history covered during the semester will be written. A suggested format is attached to this syllabus (on page 9). The critiques are due on the Tuesday of weeks 4, 9, and 13. The critiques will be worth a total of 20 points (6.66 pts. each).
2. A mid-term exam on Tuesday, October 17th 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 examine the portrayal and transformation of black images in film from early films such as Birth of a Nation through contemporary films such as Fruitvale Station, videos, and other forms of media. Study, compare and contrast the imagery and dialogue from the past with that of today. Have these images of blacks changed or remained the same and if so, how? What do these media presentations say about the state of race relations at the time, and how has it 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 narrative.

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 cite the work of other authors the work must be properly referenced 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 and preclude issues regarding plagiarism and the proper use of other’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 – VikingsF17 and Class id – 15943782

- For the current semester, the deadline for dropping a course is September 8, 2017.
- The last day to withdraw from the course is November 3, 2017.
- The final exam week is December 11-16, 2017.

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 to view material with a level of profanity and sexual suggestion in some cases.

Course Materials

There are two textbooks for this course:

Donald Bogle, 2001. *Tooms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Film*. New York: Continuum.

Ronnie Dunn, Donna Whyte, James Hardiman, Mittie Davis-Jones, & Adrienne Hatton, 2016. *Boycotts, Busing, & Beyond: The History & Implications of School Desegregation in the Urban North*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall-Hunt Publishing.

A less expensive electronic version of this text is available through the publisher at:
<https://he.kendallhunt.com/product/boycotts-busing-beyond-history-implications-school-desegregation-urban-north>.

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 ECR system, students must type in the professor's last name (**Dunn**) on the ECR webpage and enter the password for this class: **1317**.

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.

Electronic Device Policy

Cell phones should be turned off or placed on silent/vibrate during class. Students should only use electronic devices or laptop computers, iPads, etc. for class related purposes.

UST 251 Topics and Screening Schedule – Fall 2017

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)
View "The Talk" video clip (under Reference Materials 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: "Birth of A Nation" (cont.) & "Gone with The Wind": (Excerpts) The Civil War and Slavery from the "Plantation Genre" perspective.
Film: "12 Years a Slave," 2013 movie of the year. Steve McQueen (Dir.).

Week 3: Topic: Slavery – A 21st Century Perspective
Film: “12 Years a Slave,” (cont.)

THE JIM CROW ERA

Week 4: Topic: Post Emancipation
Documentary: Slavery by Another Name
Documentary: Why We Laugh: History of Blacks in Comedy & Film
Read: Bogle, Ch. 2
Critique 1 due September 19th

Week 5: Topic: Education & Occupation
Film: “The Great Debaters”
Film: “The Butler”
Read: Dunn, et al., Ch. 1, “The Education of Blacks from the Antebellum to the Jim Crow Era.”

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: Race & the dilemma of “Passing”
Film: “Imitation of Life”
Read: Bogle, Ch. 3. Article (ECR): *White Privilege Shapes the U.S.* (Jensen).
Review: *Colorism & Socialization* website (Maxwell); & *The Rise and Fall of an All-American Catchphrase: ‘Free, White, and 21’* (Heisel) on Blackboard under Reference Materials.

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: Dunn, et al., Ch. 2, Industrialization, Immigration, and the Great Black Migration
Review: *Emmett Till & Tamir Rice, Sons of the Great Migration* on Blackboard.

Note: Mid-Term Exam Tuesday, October 17th

Week 9: Topic: Spike, Denzel, & a New Black Masculinity
Film: “Malcolm X” (1992) Denzel as Malcolm X.
Read: Bogle, Ch. 10
Critique 2 due October 24th

THE POST-CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

- Week 10: Topic: Black Icons of the 60s & 70s
Film: Muhammad Ali: Made in Miami
- Week 11: Topic: Blaxploitation Films
Film: “Badass Cinema”
Read: Bogle, Ch. 7 – 8
- Week 12: Topic: Gender Role Stereotypes of the 1970s
Film: “Super Fly,” or “Foxy Brown”
- 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).
Read: Bogle, “Closing the Era on the Right Note,” pp. 318 – 322.
Critique 3 due November 21st
- Week 14: 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 (Dunn, 2014) The Marginalization & Criminalization of the Black Male Image in Postmodern America.
- Week 15 – 16: Topic: The War on Drugs, Mass Incarceration, & the impact on Urban America
Documentary: 13th (2016)
Documentary: The House I Live In (2012).
Final Review

NOTE: Term paper due Tuesday, November 28th and the Final Exam is on Tuesday, December 12th, 12:30-2:30 pm.

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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. WERE THESE ISSUES RESOLVED? IF SO, HOW?
6. WAS THE STORY MYTHIC, OR REALISTIC?
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 AND HOW ?
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?
12. WHY DID YOU LIKE IT OR NOT?