

**Race, Class, and Gender in American Film
Communication 347/Women's Studies 347
Spring 2007
N. Halsey 367
Tuesday & Thursday 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.**

Instructor: Linda Robinson
robinsol@uwosh.edu
920/424-3132 (campus)
773/764-9347 (home)

Office: AC W208
Office Hours: Wed.
1:30 - 3:30 p.m.

This syllabus is only an outline and guide for the course. Assignments and due dates may be changed, added, or deleted during the course of the semester.

Required Text: Harry M. Benshoff & Sean Griffin, *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality at the Movies* (Blackwell Publishing 2004) ("B& G")
Selected articles and chapters on e-reserves ("ER")

Course Description: A study of the problems and issues raised by the historical depiction of minorities, gender, sexualities, and class in American film. Individual sections of the course will analyze the depiction of African-Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Latino Americans, women and femininity, men and masculinity, sexuality, and class struggle and class difference. Emphasis will be on how these categories have been "coded" in Hollywood mainstream film to perpetuate stereotypes and to maintain white patriarchal power. Therefore, full-length screenings in the course will be mainstream Hollywood films, but students so desiring will have the opportunity to examine other films, such as independent productions, produced by members of these categories and offering alternative depictions.

Objectives:

1. To recognize the elements and nature of racial, gender, sexuality, and class categorization, and to examine critically the elements and purposes of the stereotype.
2. To analyze both the obvious and the more subtle methods of gender, racial, and class stereotyping.
3. To become sensitized to issues within minority cultures.
4. To examine the use of aesthetics in film, particularly in the presentation of a character.
5. To examine character construction, and how a character can be made to appear

absurd, pathetic, heroic, or multi-dimensional.

6. To encourage the development of values and standards that will govern minority depiction.

Methods of Instruction: Lecture and discussion

Requirements and Grading:

Attendance/Participation/Pop quizzes/Reading responses	15%
Midterm Exam (3/15/07)	20%
Research Paper	
Thesis paragraph & annotated bibliography (3/6/07)	10%
First draft (4/3/07)	10%
Final paper (5/3/07)	20%
Final Exam (5/10/07)	25%

Attendance Policy: Attendance in class is mandatory. The only excused absences are medical and family emergencies (such as a death in the family), and only when I am notified through proper university channels or when you provide me notice as early as is possible (email is fine), whichever is appropriate under the circumstances. Students may miss **one class** without penalty. Keep in mind, however, that students will not be allowed to make up a pop quiz given in a class they miss. **A student missing two or more classes will have his/her attendance grade lowered.** For example, the attendance grade of a student who misses one class will be lowered from 100 to 94; the grade of a student who misses five classes will be 64. **A student who misses fourteen or more classes will receive an F in the course.**

Pop Quizzes: Short quizzes will be given at the beginning of class on randomly chosen dates. *Quizzes cannot be made up.* The overall grade for these quizzes will be determined by dividing the total number of questions into the total number of correct answers. For example, if a student totals 34 correct answers out of 40 possible questions, he/she will receive an 85. Questions will address key concepts in the readings and will usually be short-answer objective, such as asking students to identify or define persons, events, techniques, concepts, etc. In addition, students may also be assigned short take-home reading responses, in which they will be asked to write a short essay applying some aspect of one of the course readings, which essay will be due at the beginning of the next class.

Research Paper: For the research paper, students are to choose two films, using one of the parameters listed below, and to compare the representation in those films of one of the four categories we examine in this course: race, gender, sexuality, or class. This comparison must consist of (1) a textual analysis of the two films and (2) an analysis of the historical, social, and cultural context in which each film was produced. This latter analysis may be based in part on how the film was marketed, if that information can be determined, and how it was received, as reflected in reviews the film received when it was released. Students may also rely on scholarly or academic books or articles about the two films, but students are not to simply regurgitate the ideas contained in these books or articles. Rather, students are to develop and support an **original thesis** about the differences or similarities between the two films' representation of the chosen category.

Students are to choose two films that fit within one of these parameters:

1. A Hollywood film and its remake, such as *Imitation of Life* (1934) and *Imitation of Life* (1959); *Stella Dallas* (1937) and *Stella* (1990); *The Nutty Professor* (1963) and *The Nutty Professor* (1996); *The Mummy* (1932) and *The Mummy* (1999). Note that two of our screenings, *Scarface* (1932) and *Showboat* (1936) were remade, and students are free to write about either of these pairs of films, but their papers will need to consist of an original argument not found in course readings or course discussions.

2. Any two Hollywood films that deal with a similar topic (ex: two films about show girls; two films about the relationship between a black man and a white man; two films about a teacher challenged by hostile students; two films about friendships among gay men; two films about a woman suddenly having to make it on her own; two films about women in the workplace; two films about the same person or event, such as two films about Custer or two films about the gunfight at the Okay Corral), so long as EITHER

(A) one film was made in the Classic Hollywood and post-war era (i.e., *before* 1965) and one film was made in the modern or "New Hollywood" era (i.e., *after* 1965); OR

(B) the release dates of the two films are at least 25 years apart.

3. One Hollywood mainstream film that purports to represent a particular minority and one independent film that was acted in, written, directed, and/or produced by members of that minority.

Early in the semester, students will turn in the names of their two films, and I will provide you feedback on your choices to ensure that your two films will serve as the basis for a fruitful analysis.

Academic Integrity:

The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh is committed to a standard of academic integrity for all students. The system guidelines state: "Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work, for the appropriate citation of sources, and for respect of others' academic endeavors." (UWS 14.01, Wisconsin Administrative Code)

Students are subject to disciplinary action for academic misconduct, which is defined in UWS 14.03, Wisconsin Administrative Code. Students on the UW Oshkosh campus have been suspended from the University for academic misconduct.

Students are encouraged to review the procedures related to violations of academic honesty as outlined in Chapter UWS 14, Wisconsin Administrative Code. The system guidelines and local procedures are printed in the *University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Student Discipline Code 2006-2007* and can be found on the Dean of Students website at www.uwosh.edu/dean/conduct.htm.

Specific questions regarding the provisions of Chapter UWS 14 (and institutional procedures approved to implement Chapter UWS 14) should be directed to the Dean of Students' Office.

Reading, Assignment, and Screening Schedule:

- 1/30/07 B&G: Chapter 1 "Introduction to the Study of Film Form and Representation"; Chapter 2 "The Structure and History of Hollywood Filmmaking"
- 2/1/07 B&G: Introduction to Part II "What is Race?"; Chapter 3 "The Concept of Whiteness and American Film"
ER: Richard Dyer, "White," *Screen* 29 (Autumn 1988) 4: 44-65
- 2/6/07 B&G: Chapter 4 "African Americans and American Film"
ER: Charles Ramirez Berg, "Categorizing the Other: Stereotypes and Stereotyping," *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, and Resistance* (Austin: University of Texas Press 2002), pp. 13 -33;
"Stereotypes in Film," pp. 38-56
- 2/8/07 SCREENING: **Showboat** (Whale 1936)
- 2/13/07 B&G: Chapter 5 "Native Americans and American Film";
ER: Excerpts from Ward Churchill, "American Indians in Film: Thematic Contours of Cinematic Colonization," *Reversing the Lens: Ethnicity, Race, Gender, and Sexuality Through Film* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado 2003), pp. 43-111
- 2/15/07 No reading assignment
- 2/20/07 **Research paper: Names of two films due**
B&G: Chapter 6 "Asian Americans and American Film"
ER: Edward Said, "Introduction to Orientalism (1978)," *The Edward Said Reader* (New York: Vintage Books 2000), pp. 63-92
- 2/22/07 No reading assignment
- 2/27/07 B&G: Chapter 7 "Latinos and American Film"
ER: Charles Ramírez Berg, "A Crash Course in Hollywood's Latino Imagery," *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, and Resistance* (Austin: University of Texas Press), pp. 66-86
ER: Christine List, "Self-Directed Stereotyping in the Films of Cheech Marin," *Chicanos and Film: Essays in Chicano Representation and Resistance*, Chon A. Noriega, ed. (New York/London: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1992), pp. 205-217
- 3/1/07 No reading assignment

3/6/07 **Research paper: Thesis paragraph and annotated bibliography due**
B&G: "Introduction to Part IV "What is Gender?"; Chapter 10 "Women in Classical Hollywood Filmmaking"
ER: Molly Haskell, "The Women's Film," *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, Sue Thornham, ed. (Washington Square, NY: New York University Press 1999), pp. 20-30

3/8/07 No reading assignment

3/13/07 SCREENING: *Woman of the Year* (Stevens 1942)

3/15/07 **MIDTERM EXAM – Testing Center**

3/18/07 - 3/25/07 SPRING BREAK

3/27/07 B&G: Chapter 11 "Exploring the Visual Parameters of Women in Film"
ER: Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, Sue Thornham, ed. (NY: New York University Press 1999), pp. 58-69; Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun*," *ibid.*, pp. 122-130

3/29/07 No reading assignment

4/3/07 **Research paper: First draft due**

B&G: Chapter 12 "Masculinity in Classical Hollywood Filmmaking"
ER: Joe Fischer, "Clark Gable's Balls: Real Men Never Lose Their Teeth," *You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies and Men*, Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumin, eds. (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd. 1993), pp. 35-51
ER: Steve Cohan, "Tough Guys Make the Best Psychopaths," *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1997), pp. 79 -121

4/5/07 No reading assignment

4/10/07 B&G: Chapter 13 "Gender in American Film Since the 1960s"
ER: Carol J. Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film," *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, Sue Thornham, ed. (NY: New York University Press 1999), pp. 234-250

ER: Ros Jennings, "Desire and Design – Ripley Undressed," *Immortal, Invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image*, Tamsin Wilton, ed. (London & NY: Routledge 1995), pp. 193-206

4/12/07 No reading assignment

- 4/17/07 B&G: Chapter 14 "Heterosexuality, Homosexuality, and Classical Hollywood"
ER: David Croteau and William Haynes, "Active Audiences and the Construction of Meaning," *Media/Society: Industries, Images, and Audiences* (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Pine Forge Press 1997), pp. 229-260
- 4/19/07 No reading assignment
- 4/24/07 B&G: Chapter 15 "Sexualities in Film Since the Sexual Revolution"
ER: Richard Dyer, "Rock – The Last Guy You'd Have Figured?" *You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies and Men*, Pat Kirkland & James Thumin, eds. (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd. 1993), pp. 27-34
ER: Allan Bérubé, "How Gay Stays White and What Kind of White It Stays," *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klineberg, Irene J. Nexica, & Matt Wray, eds. (Durham & London: Duke University Press 2001), pp. 234-265
- 4/26/07 No reading assignment
- 5/1/07 B&G: "Introduction to Part III"; Chapter 8 "Classical Hollywood Cinema and Class"
ER: David E. James, "Introduction: Is There Class in This Text?" *The Hidden Foundation: Cinema and the Question of Class*, David E. James & Rick Berg, eds. (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press 1996), pp. 1-25
- 5/3/07 **Research paper: Final paper due**
SCREENING: *It Happened One Night* (Capra 1934)
- 5/8/07 B&G: Chapter 9 "Cinematic Class Struggle After the Depression"
ER: Lillian S. Robinson, "Out of the Mine and into the Canyon: Working-Class Feminism, Yesterday and Today," *The Hidden Foundation: Cinema and the Question of Class* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press 1996), pp. 172-192
ER: Douglas Kellner, "Poltergeists, Gender and Class in the Age of Reagan and Bush," *The Hidden Foundation: Cinema and the Question of Class* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press 1996), pp. 217-39
- 5/10/07 **FINAL EXAM – Testing Center**