

# Race and Gender in American Film

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Spring 2020  
21:014:255:01  
Thursdays 2:30 – 5:20 PM  
LSC 103

Instructor: Bernie Lombardi

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Office: Conklin 246

Office Hours: Thursdays 5:20 – 6:20 PM and by appointment



The focus of this course will be to analyze the ways in which ethnic and gendered identities are represented in American film since the early twentieth century, and to gauge the effects of those representations. Although this course focuses on the traditional interlocked representations of African Americans and European Americans in classic American films, we will also analyze the representation of other ethnic groups so that we may construct a narrative of race in American film, gleaned from a variety of perspectives. Themes covered include: the origins of racial and gendered stereotyping in film, interracial family romance, film and social activism and Civil Rights, representation in film, model minorities, Whiteness, tokenism, coming-of-age, sexuality, labor, and the white savior, among others.

## Course Objectives:

- Learn to distinguish between film representation and historical reality
- Learn the relationship between film theory and film images
- Learn to analyze films as literary and historical narratives
- Acquire specialized vocabulary to discuss and analyze film
- Learn to write a film review
- Improve writing and critical thinking skills

- Sharpen public speaking skills through an oral presentation
- Sharpen skills working as part of a team through a group project
- Interpret the various intersections of race, gender and sexuality
- Develop a rhetoric for discussing race that manifests sensitivity and care

**Note:** This syllabus may be subject to change. The instructor will make students aware of changes via email.

## Course Requirements

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### ➤ Required Texts:

All films and other texts are posted on the course's Blackboard site. You must bring HARD COPIES of any readings to class. I reserve the right to ask any students who show up to class without hard copies of the readings to leave for the day.

### ➤ Office Hours

My office hours are for you. Stop by with any questions you have about assignments, readings, classroom discussions, other pertinent topics, or just drop by to say hello. The only thing I discourage is visiting to cover material from a missed class period; for that, consult fellow classmates. All else is warmly welcomed. This is an open and safe space for continuous dialogue, and there is no such thing as a "stupid" question. If your schedule conflicts with my office hours, we can set up an appointment at a mutually agreeable time.

Regarding emails, I will try and get back to students within 24 hours (many times, sooner) Mondays-Fridays. However, I may not respond to emails on Saturdays and Sundays.

### ➤ Grade Breakdown:

Attendance and Participation: 20%  
 Pop Quizzes: 10%  
 Group Presentation and Essay: 20%  
 Exam: 25%  
 Film Review Essay: 25%

### ➤ Attendance

Students must attend each class meeting having watched the assigned film to its completion, thoroughly read any assigned readings and be prepared to discuss the material in class. Students must **bring printed copies** of readings to class.

Attendance will be taken twice each class. Once at the beginning and once at the end. Therefore, you receive two marks for each class attended in its entirety. You may miss three marks (three attendances) without penalty; this adds up to 1.5 class sessions. Missing more than 1.5 class sessions or three marks (attendances) will negatively impact your final grade. The only exception for missing more than three

attendances is if you can provide proper documentation for all absences. However, these extreme circumstances will require us to meet and discuss your progress in the class. Also, note that you cannot make up quizzes and other assignments that are due on a day you miss class.

### ➤ **Participation**

You are evaluated in part on your contributions to the discussion. This is not only about quantity of participation, but also about thoughtful participation: selective comments that really move discussion forward and suggest careful engagement with the texts and questions under consideration. Active listening is also part of participating. Being present in the classroom, sharing ideas, and doing your best to make the time we have together productive is far more important than recording and memorizing what is said in lectures.

I do expect you to respect and engage with your peers' interests, as they can inform and expand your own in valuable ways. I will take note when you respond thoughtfully to other students, when you are open to different perspectives and points of view, when you call classmates by name, when you contribute to the classroom's energy with alert body language and responsive gestures. Students who routinely contribute to class discussion, show initiative in engaging with the material, and demonstrate their active listening will receive high marks for participation. A critical part of discussions is the posing of thoughtful questions.

Many of the topics this course covers are sensitive and require intellectually mature and respectful participants. Being respectful and open-minded is the best way to learn and grow. Individual and intellectual growth should always be goals while taking courses in college. If you ever feel disrespected or uncomfortable during course discussions, you should not hesitate to contact the instructor.

### ➤ **Pop Quizzes**

You will be given three pop quizzes throughout the term that will count for 10% of your final grade. I will drop your lowest quiz grade; therefore, each quiz is worth 5%. These quizzes are meant to assure you keep up with the course workload. You will not be informed as to when each quiz will be given, and you cannot make up any quizzes that you miss due to an absence or tardiness. If you miss a quiz, it will be counted as your discarded lowest score.

### ➤ **Group Presentation and Essay**

Each week, a group of students will introduce an assigned film to the class before we watch it. Presentations will be 10 minutes in length and must cover the following:

1. Historical context: what was going on in the United States at the time the film was released?
2. Reason for making: who made the film? why was the film made? and for what kind of audience?
3. Reception: how was the film received by popular media and news outlets (what kind of press did it get)? Did it receive any awards?
4. Key words: After having researched and watched the film, what are 2-3 key words the class should know before they watch the film? These words

should highlight the film's main themes. Examples include melodrama, interracial marriage, reconstruction, model minority, etc. You will be asked to define each key word for the class.

5. Introduce two discussion questions for the class to think about as they watch the film.

All of these questions require that you watch the film in its entirety and conduct outside research before the day you are presenting. \*Note: each member of the group must speak at one point during the presentation.

Each group is also required to write an analytical essay where they provide in-depth answers to their two discussion questions. Essays should display the group's grasp of the film analysis skills discussed on the first day of class. Be sure to refer to specific scenes to strengthen the analysis ("close reading"). Each group submits one hard copy of the essay in class on the day of their presentation. Make sure each group member's name is listed at the beginning of the essay. The essay should be 4-5 pages (no less than 4 full pages and no more than 5 full pages) and must be written in 12-point Times New Roman or Cambria font, be double-spaced, and have 1 in. margins on all sides.

The group project (presentation and essay) is worth 20% of your final grade. All members of the group will receive the same grade for this assignment (I will make few exceptions). It is the group's responsibility to divvy up the workload as fairly as possible. I highly recommend that groups meet in person once or twice before they present.

I will do my best to assign you to a group presenting on a date/film that appeals to your interests. Email me three choices, including date and film title, stating your preferences for leading class discussion. In selecting your three choices, consider which topics/films most appeal to you and your schedule (i.e. don't select a date when you have a paper due in another class). You may also email me specific dates when you prefer not to present. In order to consider your preferences, **I must receive your choices by Sunday, January 26 at 6:00 PM.** I will do my best to accommodate everyone's preferences, but this will not always be possible. I will assign dates in the order in which I receive your emails.

### ➤ Exam

There will be one in-class exam on **Thursday, April 16.** The exam is worth 25% of the final grade and will consist of short essay questions. All questions will be comparative in nature, and all responses must be written in paragraph form with complete sentences.

**\*\*Note:** The instructor will form exam questions based off of the course's films and readings and class lectures and conversations. It is crucial that when you are absent, you ask your classmates (and not the instructor) what you missed in class. I may show short clips or provide handouts during class, and you are responsible for this information on the final exam. In addition, an exceptional dialogue between students and the instructor may appear in question form on the final exam.

### ➤ Film Review Essay

You are required to write a review of one film assigned on the syllabus. You have the flexibility to choose whichever film you want, but you may not choose the film that you are presenting on with your group.

Reviews are due electronically (as a Word document) at **3:00 PM on Tuesday, May 12**. This review is worth 25% of your final grade. It should be 4-5 pages (no less than 4 full pages and no more than 5 full pages) and must be written in 12-point Times New Roman or Cambria font, be double-spaced, and have 1 in. margins on all sides. Instructions for writing a film review will be given in class on Thursday, April 9.

### ➤ **Notes on Late Assignments, Course Engagement, and Use of Electronics**

In the event that students know an assignment will be late, they should inform the instructor at least three days prior to the assignment due date. If the instructor considers a student's reasoning legitimate, he can choose not to penalize for lateness (this is completely up to the instructor's discretion). If students are ill or unable to complete an assignment due to a serious family matter, they should provide the instructor with appropriate documentation, such as a doctor's note.

Students should have a plan to ensure that they will have access to the internet on a daily basis throughout the semester. Technical problems, failed internet connections, and computer crashes are not excuses for not completing course work or submitting assignments late. You should plan for what you will do if you have any technical problems.

Electronic media is a welcome tool to aid learning in the modern classroom. However, used irresponsibly it can also be detrimental to learning when students lose the ability to focus on lectures or distract other students with it. Use of electronic media is therefore a student privilege, not a right, and may be revoked by the instructor under certain conditions. During class time certain electronic media—laptop computers and tablets, not cell phones—may be used only for the following purposes:

- to read required course texts (E-books or texts posted on Blackboard)
- to type notes on lectures and classroom discussions
- for all in-class exams, provided the student has first downloaded Respondus

Electronic media may NOT be used to browse the internet, answer email, check social media, or for any use that is not directly related to the course. If any student is found to be in violation of the electronics policy—as witnessed by the instructor, the graduate assistant, or as reported by fellow classmates—that student will be banned from using any electronic media for the remainder of the course. If the student continues to use electronic media despite the ban, his or her final grade will be reduced a full letter grade at the conclusion. In extreme cases I reserve the right to ban the student from the classroom altogether. The student will be notified in writing if s/he has lost the privilege of using electronic media. Cell phones must be turned off during class time or set to “vibrate”.

### ➤ **Policy on Academic Integrity (Cheating and Plagiarism)**

Rutgers University treats cheating and plagiarism as serious offenses. The standard minimum penalties for students who cheat or plagiarize include failure of the course, disciplinary probation, and a formal warning that further cheating will be grounds for expulsion from the University.

If I find that you have used other people's ideas (e.g., Wikipedia, Amazon reviews, book jacket descriptions, etc.), I will not accept the assignment because I will not be able to consider it your own work. You will get a failing grade (0 points) for that assignment and will not be able to make it up.

You are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the Academic Integrity Policy, available at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers/>. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Any use of the ideas or words of another person without proper acknowledgment of credit will result in penalties up to and possibly including a course grade of F. Likewise for cheating on exams and quizzes. Note that the uncited use of uncopyrighted material such as Wikipedia entries still constitutes plagiarism.

### ➤ **Policy on Disabilities**

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus' disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>. For more information please contact the Office of Disability Services in the Paul Robeson Campus Center, in suite 219, by phone at 973-353-5375 or by email at [odsnewark@newark.rutgers.edu](mailto:odsnewark@newark.rutgers.edu).

### **Course Schedule:**

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**\*\*Note:** Although there are only two reading assignments listed on the course schedule, I will on occasion require that you read an additional review or journal article about the film before we discuss it. On such occasions, I will notify you at least three days before our discussion and post the text on Blackboard.

(We will spend (roughly) the last 45 minutes of each class watching the film assigned for the following week's discussion. You are required to watch the remainder of each film on your own before we discuss it the following week. The times listed next to each film refer to its total run time.)

#### **Thursday, January 23:**

1. Introduction to film, race, gender

#### **Thursday, January 30:**

1. Discuss *Ethnic Notions* (1987) 56 minutes. Come to class having watched the film.
2. Discuss: "Cinematic Techniques" handout (read before class)
3. Begin screening: *Birth of a Nation: Part 2* (1915)

**Thursday, February 6:**

1. Continue discussion of *Birth of a Nation*: Part 2. Come to class having finished watching the film.
2. Discuss: "100 Years Later, What's the Legacy of 'Birth of a Nation'?" (read before class)
3. **Group Presentation #1: *Imitation of Life***
4. Begin screening *Imitation of Life* (1959) 125 minutes

**Thursday, February 13:**

1. Continue discussion of *Imitation of Life*. Come to class having finished watching the film.
2. **Group Presentation #2: *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner***
3. Begin screening *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) 108 minutes

**Thursday, February 20:**

1. Continue discussion of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. Come to class having finished watching the film.
2. **Group Presentation #3: *Mississippi Masala***
3. Begin screening *Mississippi Masala* (1991) 118 minutes

**Thursday, February 27:**

1. Continue discussion of *Mississippi Masala*. Come to class having finished watching the film.
2. **Group Presentation #4: *Gook***
3. Begin screening *Gook* (2017) 94 minutes

**Thursday, March 5:**

1. Continue discussion of *Gook*. Come to class having finished watching the film.
2. **Group Presentation #5: *Mi Familia***
3. Begin screening *Mi Familia* (1995) 126 minutes

**Thursday, March 12:**

1. Continue discussion of *Mi Familia*. Come to class having finished watching the film.
2. **Group Presentation #6: *The Breakfast Club***
3. Begin screening *The Breakfast Club* (1985) 97 minutes

**Thursday, March 19: SPRING BREAK-No Class**

**Thursday, March 26:**

1. Continue discussion of *The Breakfast Club*. Come to class having finished watching the film.
2. **Group Presentation #7: *Moonlight***
3. Begin screening *Moonlight* (2016) 111 minutes

**Thursday, April 2:**

1. Continue discussion of *Moonlight*. Come to class having finished watching the film.
2. **Group Presentation #8: *We the Animals***
3. Begin screening *We the Animals* (2018) 94 minutes

**Thursday, April 9:**

1. Continue discussion of *We the Animals*. Come to class having finished watching the film
2. Discuss Instructions for Film Review Essay
3. Review for Exam

**Thursday, April 16:**

1. **Group Presentation #9: *The Help***
2. **EXAM**

**Thursday, April 23:**

1. Discuss *The Help*. Come to class having finished watching the film.
2. **Group Presentation #10: *Get Out***
3. Begin screening *Get Out* (2017) 103 minutes

**Thursday, April 30:**

1. Continue discussion of *Get Out*. Come to class having finished watching the film.

**Tuesday, May 12:**

1. **FILM REVIEW ESSAY DUE: 3:00 PM via e-mail**