

RACE & GENDER IN AMERICAN FILM

21:014:255
Mondays 6:00pm-9:00pm
Smith Hall, 244
Fall 2019

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Office Hours: Mondays 2-3pm, Wednesdays 5:30-6:30pm, and by appointment
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

For more than a century, movies have not only entertained Americans, but have also told us who we are and who we are not; who belongs and who does not; who is a valid citizen of the nation, and who is not. Sometimes they teach us these things very explicitly; other times, the lessons are much more subtle, but they are always present.

This course explores the various ways in which films convey messages about identity and difference. We will be focusing on the two forms of social identity that are classified by scholar Linda Martín Alcoff as “visible identities”: race and gender, the two that tend to be less possible to escape for the individual, and that are the target of the outside world when it tries to make sense of who we are, and assess whether our bodies belong in the positions they occupy. Because they are – generally – visible, race and gender lend themselves particularly well to symbolic use in the medium of film. Any movie that has human beings in it (and, in fact, many movies that do not have human characters) presents raced and gendered bodies for its viewers to interpret and make meaning out of.

The course is divided into two parts. In the first unit, we will learn the basics for understanding and analyzing social identity and film. In the second unit, we will apply these skills to the eight films that were nominated for Oscar for Best Picture in 2019, in order to see the wide range of ways that race and gender matter in today’s most successful films.

PLEASE NOTE:

Most of the films on the syllabus depict scenes of trauma, discrimination, or are very scary or gruesome. We will be doing work throughout the course to take care of ourselves and ground ourselves emotionally as we move through these films. However, it is a course requirement that you view the films. If you have any concerns about your ability to do so, please speak to Dr. Monteiro about it.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The primary learning outcomes for this course include:

1. Students will develop the skills to critically analyze films, which they can continue to apply to other movies, TV shows, YouTube videos, and any number of other cultural products, for the rest of their lives
2. Students will gain a grounding in the analysis of social identity categories, with an emphasis on race and gender
3. Students will be able to articulate the role of films in the socialization process, in particular with regards to race and gender
4. Students will gain a nuanced understanding of how race and gender are represented in popular culture, including both stereotypes and seemingly neutral portrayals, and why it matters
5. Students will engage with the work of many of the most celebrated filmmakers of our time, as well as canonical films from the past

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

15% Attendance and Participation

- Attendance is required; see full details under “Policies” below. Students will mark themselves present on Blackboard twice during each class, using the password posted on the board: at the beginning of class (the timing with which you submit this will also be used to measure on-time attendance) and toward the end.
- Each student is expected to contribute regularly during class, engage in group activities, ask and answer questions from peers on Google Classroom, and communicate with Dr. Monteiro as needed during Office Hours or via email. While it is perfectly normal and legitimate to have “peaks and valleys” of participation, total silence and lack of engagement will be taken into account for this portion of the grade. Students who feel particularly comfortable speaking in class are expected to take care not to dominate class discussion. Participation will be graded through a combination of Dr. Monteiro’s assessment, peer evaluation, and self-assessment.

30% Class Preparation Assignments (DUE: Midnight on Sundays)

By midnight the night before each class, students will submit short online assignments that will help them to prepare for our class meeting. These assignments will vary, and will include activities that involve synthesis of the films and readings, building on our in-class conversations, and personal reflections. These are learning exercises, so it is more important that you submit them on time and clearly make an effort to complete them to the best of your ability, than that you do everything perfectly. All work will be graded on a credit/no credit basis, which means that full credit will be given for all work that is complete and submitted on time; and zero credit for incomplete or late work (unless documentation is provided for an excused absence). The assignments will be posted on Google Classroom, along with the required films and readings, and any other materials necessary to complete them.

PLEASE NOTE: These assignments will usually be posted after the previous class, in order to build directly on what we cover in class. If your schedule is such that you need to access and complete the assignments sooner, please let Dr. Monteiro know.

25% Presentation

Students will meet with Dr. Monteiro to develop a topic that is of interest to them, which will deepen our engagement with the film featured in a given week. They will give a brief presentation to the class about their topic, which may be a previous film by the same director, the historical context of a film, connections to other art on the theme, etc.

30% Final Exam: Race & Gender in a Known and an Unknown Film (In class December 9)

The final exam will involve applying all of the analytical skills and knowledge of other films developed throughout the semester to an in-class, open-note engagement with *Black Panther* (2018), as well as another a film that we have not watched as part of this course.

Extra Credit (due dates vary; no later than Monday, December 2)

Each student has the opportunity to boost their final grade by up to 3% by attending any movie in a theater (submit your ticket), or a relevant lecture, event, or play, submitting a brief reflection paper on it. Dr. Monteiro will highlight appropriate opportunities throughout the semester; and you are welcome to email in advance for approval of any other events or lectures that you would like to attend for extra credit. Students can submit only ONE extra credit assignment, which must generally be submitted within one week of when you watched the movie, etc.

GOOGLE CLASSROOM

In addition to the standard Blackboard page provided for this course, students will use Google Classroom for such things as:

- Accessing assigned readings/ films/links and class preparation assignments due before each class session
- Submitting written work
- Receiving feedback on assignments
- Asking and answering questions with your peers

Please join Google Classroom as soon as possible, because you will need it in order to access the homework assignment for next Monday's class:

1. Visit www.classroom.google.com
2. Mouse over the circle in the top right corner of your screen to make sure that you are signed in using your "scarletmail" account from Rutgers (rather than any other Google or gmail account that you may have)
3. When prompted, enter the class code: **u2mcad**

POLICIES

Academic Integrity

As an academic community dedicated to the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge, Rutgers University is committed to fostering an intellectual and ethical environment based on the principles of academic integrity. Academic integrity is essential to the success of the University's educational and research missions, and violations of academic integrity constitute serious offenses against the entire academic community. The entire Academic Integrity Policy can be found here:

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

Anti-Discrimination Statement

As members of an academic community, we share the responsibility to create a respectful space in which all students may live and learn free from discrimination or harassment based on identity, origin, or ability. Our words and actions do not occur in a vacuum, but are tied to structures of power, privilege, and oppression that are larger than any individual. This means that some members of our community are more vulnerable than others. In this class we commit to actively protecting those members to the best of our ability, at the same time that we treat everyone with care and respect. There are no truly "safe spaces," but we can and must care for the wellbeing of all, especially structurally vulnerable or marginalized community members. If you or I fall short of this responsibility, I hope we will engage honestly, compassionately, and with humility to repair any harm caused and create a better way forward.

Attendance

Students are expected to make every effort to attend class regularly, and to catch up on the material they have missed. Because this class only meets once a week, attendance will be taken twice, and absences counted accordingly.

- Excused absences are defined by the course catalog as:
 - illness requiring medical attention, curricular or extracurricular activities approved by the faculty, personal obligations claimed by the student and recognized as valid, recognized religious holidays, and severe inclement weather causing dangerous traveling conditions.
- In order for an absence to count as excused, you must provide written documentation, ideally emailed to Dr. Monteiro as an attachment (a photograph of your note taken with your phone is ideal).
- Unexcused absences will negatively affect your grade in the course; **students with 5 unexcused absences may fail the course**. Keep in mind that because this is a once-a-week class, this is the equivalent of missing 2 ½ days of class.
- The same policies apply to arriving late to class, which is disruptive to your fellow students and means that you miss valuable course material. Every 3 times you are late to class without an excuse will count as one unexcused absence. This includes if you are late to return after our breaks.
- After any absence—excused or unexcused—students are encouraged to complete the readings and view the film, as well as the class preparation assignment on

Google Classroom (if the absence is excused, you can earn credit for this), and to meet with Dr. Monteiro to get caught up on the material that you missed. Reliable times to do so are during Office Hours, or you can make an appointment.

Communication

Unless it is a truly urgent matter, please do not approach me with questions or concerns prior to the start of class, during the time I need to set up. I may have time after class to talk, but by far the best way to communicate with me outside of class is to come to Office Hours – or, if you are unable to come at those times, email me to set up an appointment. As college students, you are expected to check your email on a regular basis – at least once a day – and are therefore considered responsible for knowing the contents of any messages and updates that your professors send via email. You are likewise welcome to ask me questions via email, as well. **I will respond to emails within 24 hours on weekdays (it may take longer on weekends), so please plan ahead if you have a time-sensitive question related to an assignment.** Also, while you are waiting to hear back from me, I encourage you to doublecheck the syllabus and Google Classroom to make sure that it is not already answered there; and if not, to post your question in the relevant part of Google Classroom, so that your peers can answer.

Electronics Policy

Phones must be turned off completely during class, and kept in your bag. If you need access to your phone because of an emergency situation, you must email Dr. Monteiro in advance (if it is an ongoing situation, please meet me in Office Hours to explain). I encourage the use of laptops and tablets in class for the purposes of accessing the films and readings, taking notes, and collaborating on group work. Beyond that, you are all adults and can make your own choices. That said, I encourage you to be considerate of those around you: refraining from checking email, social media, etc., during class will reduce distractions for your fellow students.

“Life Happens” Policy

Unexpected and expected life challenges come up for as many as a third of my students every semester. You might become sick or injured; have an illness in the family which requires you to take on extra hours at work; etc. If you should be unfortunate enough as to have this happen to you this term, please know that, as your professor, I care far more about your wellbeing than I do about your completing the course exactly as outlined on this syllabus. Instead of just disappearing, I encourage you to let me know as soon as you are able to about what is going on – just as you would let your supervisor at work know if you couldn't come to work. Together we can work out a plan for you to complete the work for the course in a way that is realistic given your changing situation; and, if need be, connect you with resources at the university that can offer you additional support (to which you are entitled as a Rutgers student!).

Office Hours

My Office Hours are the times that I set aside every week specifically to meet with students. In other words, those times are for *you*, so please do not be shy about using them. Many students come to ask questions related to the course and assignments; others have questions about majors, grad school, navigating college as a member of a marginalized group, etc. – which are only some of many great ways to use Office Hours. No appointment is necessary; however, you are welcome to make an appointment if you need to come at a specific time during my Office Hours, and I will reserve it for you. Also, my regular Office Hours are *not* the only times I can meet with students – you can email me for an appointment at a time that works for your schedule.

Written Work

All written work must be submitted both in hardcopy in class AND on Google Classroom, unless otherwise specified. I prefer basic 12-point font with one-inch margins. Page and/or word limits must be adhered to – if you've written too much, it is important to learn how to edit your work down to the appropriate size. Late work will be penalized an automatic ½ letter grade reduction for each day (i.e., the maximum grade that can be earned on a paper that is turned in the day after it is due is an A, the following day an A-, etc.), unless an official excuse is provided.

RUTGERS ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Rutgers University Newark (RU-N) is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students and the university as a whole. RU-N has identified the following resources to further the mission of access and support:

For Individuals with Disabilities: The Office of Disability Services (ODS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter barriers due to disability. Once a student has completed the ODS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and reasonable accommodations are determined to be necessary and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be provided. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at ods.rutgers.edu. Contact ODS at (973)353-5375 or via email at ods@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Gender or Sex-Based Discrimination or Harassment: If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking, know that help and support are available. If you wish to report an incident, you may contact the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance at (973)353-1906 or via email at TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu. You may also submit an incident report using the following link: tinyurl.com/RUNReportingForm. If you wish to speak with a staff member who is confidential and does **not** have a reporting responsibility, you may contact the Office

for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance at (973)353-1918 or via email at run.vpva@rutgers.edu.

For Individuals who are Pregnant: The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance is available to assist with any concerns or potential accommodations related to pregnancy. You may contact the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance at (973)353-1906 or via email at TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu .

For Individuals seeking Religious Accommodations: The Office of the Dean of Students is available to verify absences for religious observance, as needed. Contact the Dean of Students at (973)353-5063 or via email at DeanofStudents@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Individuals with temporary conditions/injuries: Students who have experienced a temporary condition or injury that is adversely affecting their ability to fully participate should submit a request via <https://temporaryconditions.rutgers.edu> .

For English as a second language (ESL): Students experiencing difficulty in courses due to English as a second language (ESL) should contact the Program in American Language Studies via email at PALS@newark.rutgers.edu to discuss potential supports.

Extended Absences: Per University Policy 10.2.7, you are responsible for communicating with your instructors regarding absences. The Office of the Dean of Students is available to verify extended absences. Contact the Dean of Students at (973)353-5063 or via email at DeanofStudents@newark.rutgers.edu.

Counseling Services: Counseling Center, Room 101, Blumenthal Hall, (973) 353-5805 or <http://counseling.newark.rutgers.edu/>

Tutoring Services: Rutgers Learning Center, Room 140, Bradley Hall (973) 353-5608 or <https://sasn.rutgers.edu/student-support/tutoring-academic-support/learning-center>

Writing Assistance: Writing Center (tutoring and writing workshops), Room 126, Conklin Hall (973) 353-5847 or nwc@rutgers.edu or <https://sasn.rutgers.edu/student-support/tutoring-academic-support/writing-center>

TOPICS, FILMS, AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

There are no textbooks to purchase for this course; all required readings will be posted as PDFs or links on Google Classroom, or distributed in class. Whenever possible, films will also be posted on Google Classroom. Some may need to be rented, or accessed via a streaming service – in such cases, I will arrange an on-campus screening of the film.

Many of the readings, particularly for Unit 2, are listed as “TBA” (meaning “to be announced”) because scholarly writing about films from last year is only starting to be published, and I would like us to be about to incorporate as much of it as we can. The selected readings will be posted on Google Classroom no later than a week before they are due.

This class only meets once a week, so it is important to budget your time accordingly to prepare for a week’s worth of out-of-class work. Almost every week, the homework will involve the following three things:

1. Watching one required film, taking notes as you do so.
2. Completing the assigned readings.
3. Completing brief Google Classroom assignments regarding the films and the readings.

The films must be watched and the readings must be read by the day that they are listed below.

Bring your readings and notes with you to every class. You will also be asked to bring laptops/tablets from time to time (let me know if you need to borrow one).

Please Note: The instructions for the class preparation assignments – which are due the night before each class session – will be distributed on Google Classroom, which is also where you will submit your work (unless otherwise instructed).

UNIT 1: HISTORICAL AND ANALYTICAL GROUNDING

Monday, September 9

Introductions: Race, Gender, America, Film
(no readings due)

Monday, September 16

Personal identity: Race
WATCH: *Get Out* (2017)

- Beverly Tatum, “The Complexity of Identity: ‘Who Am I?’” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*
- Iris Marion Young, “Five Faces of Oppression” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*
- Selections from Andrea Smith, “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking women of color organizing,” in *The Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology*

Monday, September 23

Basic Elements of Film Criticism

WATCH: *Stagecoach* (1939)

- “Squee from the Margins: Interview with Rukmini Pande” Parts 1 and 2, on Henry Jenkin’s blog, *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*
- Richard Barsam and David Monahan, Ch. 4 “Elements of Narrative,” in *Looking at Movies*

Monday, September 30

Gender, Past and Present

WATCH: *Aladdin* (1992)

- Judith Lorber, “‘Night to His Day’: The Social Construction of Gender,” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*
- Jack Halberstam, Prologue and Chapter 1 in *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*

Monday, October 7

Comparative Analysis

WATCH: *West Side Story* (1961)

- Bobbie Harro, “The Cycle of Socialization,” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*
- Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, “Introduction to the Study of Film Form and Representation” in *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, And Sexuality at The Movies*

Monday, October 14

Documentaries

WATCH: *13th* (2016)

- TBA

UNIT 2: RACE & GENDER IN THE OSCAR NOMINEES FOR BEST PICTURE 2019

Monday, October 21

#OscarsSoWhite

WATCH: *Green Book* (2018)

- Selections from Cheryl I. Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” in *Harvard Law Review*
- TBA

Monday, October 28

Who Tells Your Story?

WATCH: *BlacKkKlansman* (2018)

- Natalie Zemon Davis, Ch. 1 “Film as Historical Narrative” in *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision*
- Selections from Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and heritage in contemporary popular culture*

Monday, November 4

Beyond America

WATCH: *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018)

- TBA

Monday, November 11

Contemporary Politics and Latinx Cultural Production

WATCH: *Roma* (2018)

- TBA

Monday, November 18

White Boys Clubs

WATCH: *Vice* (2018)

- TBA

Monday, November 25

Casual Whiteness

WATCH: *A Star Is Born* (2018)

- Wesley Morris, “For centuries, black music, forged in bondage, has been the sound of complete artistic freedom. No wonder everybody is always stealing it” from *New York Times Magazine’s* The 1619 Project

DUE: Final Exam Preparation

Monday, December 2

Class and Fantasy

WATCH: *The Favourite* (2018)

- TBA

Monday, December 9

IN CLASS: Final Exam