

Race and Gender in American Film
21:014:255

Class Meeting Time: Monday 6-9 p.m.
Class Location: Hill Hall, Room 445

Instructor: Shana A. Russell
Office: 245 Conklin Hall
Office Hours: Monday 2-4 p.m., or by appointment
Office Location: Conklin Hall, Room 255

Course Description

The focus of this course will be to analyze the ways in which ethnic identity is represented in American film over the past 70 years, and to what particular effect. Although this course will focus particularly 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 an American filmic narrative of race gleaned from a variety of perspectives. Themes include family, blackface tropes, black masculinity, labor, constructions of white womanhood, immigration, blaxploitation, and sexuality.

Course Policies

Attendance and Punctuality: I do not have an attendance policy, save for exams. You are free to attend, or not, as you choose. Please make sure to make it to class on time. Late arrivals disrupt the classroom environment. Either way, whether or not you attend class, you are responsible for any information that is transmitted during class time, whether that be a change of exam time, an adjustment to the required reading, and so forth. My advice is to partner with another student whose notes you can borrow in case you must be absent. I will not be responsible for telling any student what they missed during an absence.

Academic Integrity: Plagiarism will not be tolerated under any circumstances. This includes using another's ideas in a written assignment without proper citation, cheating on an exam, or using an assignment that you have written in another class to fulfill the requirements of this one. For more information see the University's Academic Integrity Policy at: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu>

Classroom Courtesy: Please be respectful of the classroom space by minimizing the number of disruptions. This means showing up on time, not having side conversations, and silencing all electronic devices. You are permitted to use electronic devices for the purposes of taking notes and accessing the readings if necessary. Anyone who is caught using a computer for anything other than class work or similarly using your cell phone to talk or text will be asked to leave and your participation grade will be lowered.

This class covers a significant number of controversial ideas and you are all encouraged to disagree with the assigned texts or with each other. This is both healthy and productive. However, you must remain respectful at all times. Failure to do so will result in removal from the classroom and possible a lower grade.

Students with Disabilities: If you are impacted by a documented disability and require special

accommodations please contact me as soon as possible.

Course Requirements

Exams: You shall be required to write two examinations. The first will cover Part One of the course, the second—the final—Parts Two, and Three. There will be no final comprehensive examination. The exam format will be the same in both cases: roughly 10-12 questions requiring detailed and concise answers on all of the required material. The questions will usually involve comparative analysis of two or more films as well as the application of literary or film theory (from the readings) to specific scenes in the films. Your responses must be in full sentences and grammatically correct; points will be taken off for poor grammar. In the case of exceptionally poor grammar, you will receive no points at all.

Final Paper: For each film that we discuss, we will use the frameworks outlined by scholars, namely Donald Bogle, to critically analyze the role of race and gender in the film. For this essay, you will replicate this kind of analysis on a film of your choosing. You must be able to critique both race and gender in the film. Paper topics must be submitted to and approved by me (topics are due in writing on **September 23**). The paper must be 5 pages in length, in MLA format (this includes a proper title and all the required citations, bibliography, etc), and submitted to blackboard via SafeAssign on **December 9th**.

Grading: Grading will be as follows: Midterm exam – 30%, Essay – 30%, Final 40%.

Note on films and required reading: There is one required text for this class that is available for purchase at the bookstore in Bradley Hall. (The text is also on reserve at Dana Library.) All articles will be made available via blackboard. The films are all on reserve at media services on the fourth floor of Dana.

Required Text: Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*, 4th edition.

List of Films

Gone With the Wind (1939)
Imitation of Life (1959)
To Kill a Mockingbird (1962)
West Side Story (1961)
Mississippi Masala (1991)
Coffy (1973)
School Daze (1988)
Pariah (2011)

Schedule of Reading and Assignments

September 9: Introduction to the course and viewing of Marlon Riggs' documentary *Ethnic Notions*

Part 1: The Origins of Racial Representations in American Film

September 16: Discussion of *Ethnic Notions*. Discussion of selected scenes from *Birth of a Nation*.
Required reading: Bogle, Chapter 1.

September 23: Discussion of *Gone With the Wind*. Required reading: Bogle, 82-94. **Paper topics due.**

September 30: Discussion of *Imitation of Life* (1959). Required reading: Bogle, 57-67.

October 7: Discussion *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Required reading: Review of *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Mark Holcomb.

October 14: Comparative analysis of *GWTW*, *IOL*, and *TKAM*. Midterm review.

October 21: **Midterm examination**

Part 2: Citizenship, Nation, and the Immigrant Narrative

October 28: Discussion of *West Side Story*. Required reading: Alberto Sandoval Sanchez, “*West Side Story*: A Puerto Rican Reading of America”

November 4: Discussion of *Mississippi Masala*. Required reading: Bidisha Banerjee, “Exoticized Heroine or Hybrid Woman? Diasporic Female Subjectivity in Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala*”

November 11: Comparative discussion of *West Side Story* and *Mississippi Masala*

Part 3: Black on Black Cinema

November 18: Discussion of *Coffy*. In class screening of selected scenes from *Shaft*. Required reading: Bogle, 231-242

November 25: Discussion of *School Daze*. Required Reading: Bogle, 299-301 and 318-323.

December 2: Discussion of *Pariah*. Required Reading: Nelson George *NYT* review of *Pariah*.

December 9: **Final Paper Due Via Safe Assign**. Exam review.

Final Examination: December 20, 6:20-9:20 p.m.