RACE & GENDER IN AMERICAN FILM

Fall 2022
Mondays 4:00pm-5:20pm

Classroom: Engelhard Hall 211 (190 University Ave)
Course Numbers: 21:014:255:02/21:512:226:01 (Topics in American History)
Rutgers University-Newark

Professor: Dr. Lyra D. Monteiro
Email: lyra.monteiro@rutgers.edu
Google Chat: lm660@scarletmail.rutgers.edu
Drop-In Hours: Mondays 1-2pm, Wednesdays 11:30pm-12:30pm (also by appointment in person or on Zoom—message me via Google Chat to set up).
Office: 317 Conklin Hall

Note: This course is not based on Canvas (or any other LMS)—check your Rutgers email for all course materials.

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 2022, 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 racial and sexual trauma, discrimination, and violence; some are also 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—which may at times mean skipping a movie that is too triggering for you. There’s absolutely no need to do work that causes you distress; there are plenty of other ways for you to learn what you, personally, need to learn in this course.

**SPECIAL NOTE ON TAKING COLLEGE COURSES DURING THE PANDEMIC**

One of the realities of this moment is that each of us is undergoing various degrees of stress, uncertainty, and trauma due to our experiences since the coronavirus crisis began—more than 2 ½ years ago, now. Even if you have been fortunate enough not to have lost a loved one, a job, or a home, your lives have been disrupted in innumerable ways, as have the lives of your professors. And even though many aspects of our lives seem to be returning to “normal,” the pandemic is far from over.

It is an entirely valid choice not to enroll in classes at a time like this—but for those of you who do wish to work towards your college degree this semester, I’d like to address some of the ways that you may find the current learning situation more challenging for you. Many people report difficulty concentrating due to even low-level, background anxiety, and so you may find it easier, for example, to watch a movie than to read an article. Your sense of time may be different, as well—you may find it takes you far longer to complete homework, or that the time between classes passes extremely slowly so you forget what we’ve already been discussing. This is not even to mention the general challenges that college students face under pre-coronavirus circumstances, in balancing work, family, and school obligations, covering the costs of school, etc.; or those brought on by changing circumstances, such as more complicated living situations, increased hours at work, and other logistical challenges.

All of this is just a reality of this moment, and we can only be realistic and practice acceptance of what is and isn’t possible right now. What most definitely is not possible is a “normal” college experience—and that, too, is a loss that students are suffering right now, and which I hope you are able to give yourself space to grieve.

As you’ll see described later in the syllabus, I will be grading using a structure that is based on trauma-informed practices for teaching. Basically, this means that I have built a lot of flexibility and choice into the grading structure of the course, in the hopes that you’ll find options which work well with your current learning style and needs. Additionally, I will be designing the assignments for the course based on the results of the Start of Semester Survey (which I sent out via email prior to the start of classes). If, however, you have concerns about earning your desired grade at any point, please do not hesitate to talk to me so we can figure out something else.

The [Start of Semester Survey](#) includes questions about your access to technology and study space in the even that we have to return to remote teaching, as well as your current or anticipated work situation. If this changes at any point in a way that limits your capacity to engage with this course, please do let me know. Additionally, during the required meeting with me during the first three weeks of classes, you’ll be able to check in and let me know about any
personal circumstances or concerns—related to the pandemic, the political violence, or anything else.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**TIME COMMITMENT**

Please plan to be present for class every class session, with your homework, a notebook and a pen.

Additionally, you will need to set aside 4-6 hours each week, outside of our class meetings, in order to watch the film assigned for that week; and also complete short readings and homework assignments (generally due at midnight the night before each class). You do not need to complete all of the homework assignments, however—see more information on homework in the Grading section, below.

Other out-of-class time requirements include: one in-person meeting with Dr. Monteiro during the first three weeks of the semester, and a later meeting to select your presentation topic; attending an “event” of your choice that is related to the course material (either online or in person, depending on developing safety conditions, of course); and creating your presentation.

**COURSE MATERIALS**

There is no textbook to purchase for this course. Instead, Dr. Monteiro will email you the homework for each class, either as attachments or links. However, there may be some instances in which the library cannot provide free access to required films, in which case you may need to rent or purchase them online (from a service like iTunes or Amazon), or access them through a commercial streaming service. Please budget $30 for this purpose. Funds are available to support students who need assistance with these costs.

When the readings are provided in PDF format, you may find that it is helpful to print them out in order to annotate them as you read. If you don’t have a printer, you can print them on campus—if you’re not sure where, ask your classmates.

**COMMUNICATION**

Due to the extreme amount of uncertainty we all face this semester, maintaining good communication is absolutely essential to the functioning of this course. This means keeping in touch with me and with your classmates, when you are working in small groups.

There are three main technologies that we will use for communication in this course. It is essential that students are set up with and proficient in each one.

**NOTE:** Your professor has determined that Canvas is an unhelpful complication for a course of this nature. While we may occasionally use its features as a resource, it will not serve as the central repository for course info, assignments, submission, etc.

**Email**

Email will primarily be used for homework—not for general questions for Dr. Monteiro, or any other communication (see Google Chat, below). Dr. Monteiro will send you assignment instructions via email, which will include links and attachments, as needed. Unless otherwise indicated in the email with assignment instructions, you will submit your homework by
replying to the assignment email and attaching your completed homework, by midnight the night before each class.

In order to make sure that your homework assignments are not easily lost, I will include “RACE & GENDER IN AMERICAN FILM” at the start of the subject of each message. You can search inside of your email to find the relevant homework. You may also wish to move messages for this course to a folder inside of your email inbox.

**Google Chat**

This will be the primary method of direct, 1:1 communication between you and Dr. Monteiro. If you have questions, want to set up an appointment during drop-in hours or at another time, reach out in this way.

We will also use Google Chat for a group chat/general announcements that I may need to make between classes—including cancellations, clarifications of the homework, etc.—as well as for working in small groups, and sharing possible events to attend.

You will need to download the “Google Chat” app on your phone; make sure that you are logged in with your Rutgers email address; then use the “plus” sign to add: lm660@scarletmail.rutgers.edu, and send me a message that consists of your full name and the name of this course (Race & Gender in American Film). After that, you can also use chat.google.com to access Google Chat from your computer or other device using a web browser; or download the desktop version of Google Chat. Please keep your notifications on for this app (you can selectively mute individual chats if need be) as this is the main form of communication for this course.

**Zoom**

If my in-person drop-in hours don’t work for you, we can set up a time to meet using Zoom—send me a message on Google Chat to make an appointment.

In the event that we need to switch to remote classes at some point during the semester, our class meetings will take place on Zoom.

**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
GRADING
Your grade in this course is based on your engagement with course materials and assignments in a way that makes the most sense for you.

Each of you has made the choice to take classes this semester with full awareness of the challenges you, personally, are currently facing. However, nobody knows what to expect of the semester ahead, but it’s realistic to anticipate that every person in this virtual classroom—including your professor—will be faced with new challenges, related to COVID-19, job loss, evictions, public school closures, protests, the election, etc.

I want to make sure that it remains possible for every student in this course to earn the grade they desire, regardless of any such disruptions and daily challenges.

This means that, if for any reason you have to step away from your work for this course for a time, there will be plenty of opportunities available for you to catch up.

Additionally, given the many ways in which we are all being deprived of choices in so many areas of our lives, this course empowers you to choose which assignments you complete. If a particular assignment does not feel like one you are able to complete, for any reason, then you will have other opportunities to earn credit for towards your final grade, and to engage with that material. For the most part, these alternate methods are already built into the syllabus; but to the extent that they are not, you can ask Dr. Monteiro for more personalized options.

Components of Overall Grade in Course:

15% Attendance and Participation
- Attendance is required; see full details under “Policies” below.
- Each student is expected to contribute regularly during class, engage in group activities, ask and answer questions from peers on Google Chat, and communicate with Dr. Monteiro as needed during Drop-In 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.

25% Class Preparation Assignments (DUE: Midnight each Sunday and Tuesday)
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 distributed via email, the required links to films and readings, and any other materials necessary to complete them.
You can skip four Class Preparation Assignments without it impacting your grade, so if there are periods in the semester that are particularly difficult for you, or films that you find especially triggering, you don’t have to worry about completing the work for that film. If you experience difficulty with more than four Class Preparation Assignments, there are a number of options outlined below for earning substantial extra credit; and if none of those seem realistic to you, please let me know so that we can find a solution together.

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.

10% Take-Home Midterm (Due: October 10)
Students will apply all of the analytical tools we have developed in Unit 1 to one of their favorite films.

20% 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.

10% Building and Supporting Community
This portion of the grade is about applying liberatory, community-building practices as we move through our study of often-traumatic (and usually intense) topics in the midst of the alienating experience of social distancing. Because we are not able to share space together in person, we must be intentional about building a sense of community within this class, and supporting each other. This can take a number of forms, including (but not at all limited to):

- Engaging with classmates in the online component of this class on Canvas & Google Hangouts
- Volunteering to guide classmates through Canvas who are unfamiliar with the technology
- Setting up study groups
- Sharing your access to streaming services with another student
- Taking notes for classmates who may be unable to attend class due to illness or family responsibilities, etc.
- Proposing changes to the course that can build & support community

10% Final Evaluation: Race & Gender in a Known and an Unknown Film (Wednesday, December 14)
- The final evaluation 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 one film that is announced in advance, as well as another a film that is not announced.

10% Final Reflection Paper (required)
Upon completion of the course, students will write a brief personal reflection paper (2-3 pages) about their experience in the course as a whole.
• This paper is not a research paper, but instead is written in the first person, and reflects your own personal experiences and thoughts about the semester, including the final evaluation.
• The paper is due on December 22, but students who complete coursework prior to that date (by completing enough extra credit assignments to earn their target grade) may submit the paper at an earlier date.

**Extra Credit:**

**Journal: up to 30% boost on Final Grade**

Each student has the opportunity to boost their final grade substantially by keeping a journal throughout the semester. Each journal entry will be worth roughly 1% increase on your final grade, up to a 30% boost to your final grade. This means that if you find journaling to be a better way for you to engage with the course than any of the components that are a regular part of the grade, you can opt to do it instead. Journal entries track your personal experiences throughout the semester—including the course in whatever ways it might seem relevant, but certainly not prioritizing it. During the first two weeks of class, all students will be required to complete at least 2 journal entries (you will get extra credit for these).

**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:

[https://studentaffairs.newark.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/2020-08/Academic%20Integrity%20Policy.pdf](https://studentaffairs.newark.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/2020-08/Academic%20Integrity%20Policy.pdf)

**Attendance**

Regular attendance in class is expected. In general, no notes are required for absences—and you do not need to ask permission or let Dr. Monteiro know before class. You are adults and I trust that you’re making the right choices for you. If you need to miss a large number of classes, please meet with Dr. Monteiro so that we can find alternative ways for you to earn the grade you desire in the course.

**Communication**

You can reach me outside of class via Google Chat. You can message me privately, and I will get back to you as soon as I am able (within 24 hours on weekdays; possibly longer on weekends.) Also, realistically, I may miss your message if it arrives just before or during class or Drop-In Hours, as there is such a flurry of activity around those times (Mondays and Wednesdays, 12pm-5:30pm). If you’ve messaged me then and don’t hear back, please do send another message to make sure I saw your message!
I also encourage you to come to my Drop-In Hours, which are Mondays 1-2pm and Wednesdays 11:30pm-12:30pm, in 317 Conklin Hall. If you’re unable to come at those times, message me to set up an appointment.

If you have a general question about the course, I encourage you to use the all-class group chat that will be set up on Google Chat.

“Life Happens” Policy
Even before the pandemic, unexpected and severe life challenges came 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; lose a family member, 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, when you are ready, 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!).

Coronavirus policy: If you or someone you are close to has the misfortune to contract COVID-19, please do what you need to do to take care of yourself/your loved one. There is no need whatsoever to worry about this course—no matter how much time you need to take off, we can discuss approaches to completing the course with the grade you desire whenever you are able to return.

Insurrection policy: In the event of further attacks on the government, no one will be required to come to class that day. Instead of a regular class, I aim to hold space for anyone who would like to connect for mutual support during our regular class time.

Anti-Black Violence policy: In the event of attacks on Black people by police or vigilantes, or there are any other acts of racist violence, or of such perpetrators being cleared of responsibility for their murders, no one will be required to come to class that day. Instead, I aim to hold space for anyone who would like to connect for mutual support during our regular class time.

Drop-In Hours
My Drop-In 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 Drop-In Hours. No appointment is necessary, first-come, first-served; however, you are welcome to make an appointment if you need to come at a specific time during my Drop-In Hours, and I will reserve it for you. Also, my regular Drop-In Hours are not the only times I can meet with students – you can message me on Google Chat for an appointment at a time that works for your schedule.

Homework
All assignments must be submitted in the manner indicated on the weekly homework email – this will change from class to class. For papers, I prefer basic 12-point font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. Page and/or word limits must be adhered to — if you’ve written too much, it is important to practice editing your work down to the required length.
**RUTGERS ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT SERVICES**

Note: these policies apply to all of your courses here at Rutgers-Newark

**Accommodation and Support Statement**

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 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. Students may contact the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance at (973) 353-1906 or via email at TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu.

**For Absence Verification:** The Office of the Dean of Students can provide assistance for absences related to religious observance, emergency or unavoidable conflict (e.g., illness, personal or family emergency, etc.). Students should refer to University Policy 10.2.7 for information about expectations and responsibilities. The Office of the Dean of Students can be contacted by calling (973) 353-5063 or emailing deanofstudents@newark.rutgers.edu.

**For Individuals with temporary conditions/injuries:** The Office of the Dean of Students can assist students who are experiencing a temporary condition or injury (e.g., broken or sprained limbs, concussions, or recovery from surgery). Students experiencing a temporary condition or injury should submit a request using the following link: https://temporaryconditions.rutgers.edu.

**For English as a Second Language (ESL):** The Program in American Language Studies (PALS) can support students experiencing difficulty in courses due to English as a Second Language (ESL) and can be reached by emailing PALS@newark.rutgers.edu to discuss potential supports.

**For Gender or Sex-Based Discrimination or Harassment:** The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance can assist students who are experiencing any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking. Students can report an incident to the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance by calling (973) 353-1906 or emailing TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu. Incidents may also be reported by using the following link: https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?RutgersUniv&layout_id=7. For more information, students should refer to the University’s Student Policy Prohibiting Sexual Harassment, Sexual Violence, Relationship Violence, Stalking and Related Misconduct located at https://nbtitleix.rutgers.edu/policies-and-procedures.
For support related to interpersonal violence: The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance can provide any student with confidential support. The office is a confidential resource and does not have an obligation to report information to the University’s Title IX Coordinator. Students can contact the office by calling (973) 353-1918 or emailing run.vpva@rutgers.edu. There is also a confidential text-based line available to students; students can text (973) 339-0734 for support.

For Crisis and Concerns: The Campus Awareness Response and Education (CARE) Team works with students in crisis to develop a support plan to address personal situations that might impact their academic performance. Students, faculty and staff may contact the CARE Team by using the following link: tinyurl.com/RUNCARE or emailing careteam@rutgers.edu.

For Stress, Worry, or Concerns about Well-being: The Counseling Center has confidential therapists available to support students. Students should reach out to the Counseling Center to schedule an appointment: counseling@newark.rutgers.edu or (973) 353-5805.

For Emergencies: Call 911 or contact Rutgers University Police Department (RUPD) by calling (973) 353-5111.

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. However, there may be some instances in which the library cannot provide free access to required films, in which case you may need to rent or purchase them online (from a service like iTunes or Amazon), or subscribe to a streaming service for a month. Please budget $30 for this purpose. Funds are available to support students who need assistance with these costs.

The assignments are due on the day that they are listed below—be sure to allow adequate time to watch the films and read the articles AND complete the class preparation assignment, which is due at midnight the night before class.

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.

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).

Assignments are subject to change

UNIT 1: HISTORICAL AND ANALYTICAL GROUNDING

Wednesday, September 7
Introductions: Race, Gender, America, Film
(no readings due)
Monday, September 12
WATCH: Black Panther (2018)

Wednesday, September 14
Socialization and Film
  • Bobbie Harro, “The Cycle of Socialization,” in Readings for Diversity and Social Justice

Monday, September 19
WATCH: Aladdin (1992)

Wednesday, September 21
Race and Film
  • Paul S. Cowen, “A Social-Cognitive Approach to Ethnicity in Films” in Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema
  • Robin DiAngelo YouTube video on white fragility

Monday, September 26
WATCH: West Side Story (2021)

Wednesday, September 28
Orientalism & Sexuality
  • Edward Said, Selections from Orientalism
  • Andrea Smith, “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy”
  • Selected YouTube videos

Monday, October 3
Watch: Dune (2021)

Wednesday, October 5
Gender, Past and Present
  • 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
  • Definitions handout

Monday, October 10
Midterm Due

Wednesday, October 12
Representation
WATCH: Nanette (2018)
UNIT 2: RACE & GENDER IN THE OSCAR NOMINEES FOR BEST PICTURE 2022

Monday, October 17
WATCH: King Richard (2021)

Wednesday, October 19
TBA

Monday, October 24
WATCH: Don’t Look Up (2021)

Wednesday, October 26
TBA

Monday, October 31
WATCH: Licorice Pizza (2021)

Wednesday, November 2
TBA

Monday, November 7
WATCH: Nightmare Alley (2021)

Wednesday, November 9
TBA

Monday, November 14
WATCH: Belfast (2021)

Wednesday, November 16
TBA

Monday, November 21 & 23 NO CLASS
Prep in groups for Final Exam

Monday, November 28
WATCH: Coda (2021)

DUE: Final Evaluation Preparation
Wednesday, November 30
TBA

Monday, December 5
WATCH: Drive My Car (2021)
Wednesday, December 7
TBA

Monday, December 12

Wednesday, December 14
Final Evaluation

Friday, December 16 NO CLASS
Reflection Paper Due