

Reading Film



Instructor Information

Professor: Dr. Frank García

Office Hours: By appointment via Zoom

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Note: Please allow 48 hours for an email response. If you have not received a response within 48 hours, please email me again.

Course Description

Welcome to Introduction to Film! In this class, we will learn to consider film as its own intellectual and cultural “art” that warrants critical attention and scholarly study in its distinct language structure, technology, viewing experience, and social power. In doing so, we will divide this course into two primary units that each focus on paramount components of film analysis: (1) the formal elements of film composition and their implications for the viewing experience, like editing, sound, mise-en-scène, and cinematography and (2) film genres, their poetics, and their various representations of race, gender, and sexuality. Throughout our exploration of film’s genres and its “language system,” we can expect to attend to film historiography and history, film theory and criticism, and several other types of cultural theory, philosophy, and scholarship. Many of the films in this course will cover topics such as: the social role of horror, serial killers (real and fictional), science fiction aliens, fairy tale myths, gender fluidity, racialized masculinity, state apartheid, and the prison industrial complex.

Trigger/Explicit Content Warning: This course features explicit material that can be offensive and triggering for many people, including but not limited to literary and visual representations of violence, rape, and sexual assault. Additionally, many course texts will also contain derogatory language on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and religion. Some films will also

feature nudity. Class sessions may involve discussing and critically engaging this material on the grounds of academic freedom and intellectual development.

Course Texts

Books:

The Film Experience, sixth edition. Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White.

***You may purchase this text at the University Bookstore or directly from the publisher at this link: <https://www.macmillanlearning.com/college/us/product/Film-Experience/p/1319059511>.**

Canvas Readings:

Select PDFs available on Canvas

Films:

American Me (1992) ([Swank](#))

Beauty and the Beast (2017) ([Must Click This Link to Watch](#))

District 9 (2009) ([Swank](#))

Edward Scissorhands (1990) (\$3.99 Amazon/YouTube)

G.I. Jane (1997) ([Must Click This Link to Watch](#))

The Godfather (1972) ([Swank](#))

Monster (2003) (\$3.99 Amazon/YouTube; Free on Vudu)

Moonlight (2017) ([Swank](#))

Pan's Labyrinth (2006) ([Swank](#))

The Revenant (2015) (\$3.99 Amazon/YouTube)

The Silence of the Lambs (1991) ([Swank](#))

***The above are rental prices for the course films when they are not available for free on Swank. Should you decide to rent rather than purchase the films, please make sure to take extensive notes during the films and on the lectures that discuss them.**

Course Assignments

Reading and Viewing Responses (30%): Each week, students must write one-to-two 350-to-500-word responses to the required readings and films. These responses must answer instructor-provided questions available on the class schedule. Unless otherwise noted on the calendar, **students must incorporate, quote, and properly cite the readings in their answers.** When quoting, do **NOT** quote more than four lines of text in your writing. If a quote exceeds four lines, students should paraphrase some of the material. Students should also **NOT** quote extraneously, such as quoting only to define a term. Quoting just to quote when the quote does not contribute to the response will affect the response's grade commensurately. Likewise, quoted material should **NOT** consist of more than 40% of the response. Do **NOT** draw from outside research in your responses. Only draw from the required reading you are responding to. In reading responses, proper citation entails placing a parenthetical citation with the page number at the end of the quote, such as (17). Do not worry about writing a bibliography or mentioning the author's name in a signal phrase. Students should also **NOT** write a ridiculously long heading or title to achieve the word count requirement, as headings and titles will not count towards the word count. Sneaky tactics, such as writing in white font, will result in an automatic zero.

Responses are always due by the beginning of class on their assigned days. Always consult the course calendar for when a response (and which kind) is due. Late responses will only be accepted up to 12 hours late for half-credit. If you know you are going to be absent on a certain day, you must still submit your response in advance. Please submit your response in a Word or PDF file on Canvas. I will not accept submissions in another format. Graded on a 5-point scale. (A = 5, B =4, C = 3, D = 2, F = 1)

Final Exam (30%): The final exam will cover the entire course. Questions will draw from the readings, lectures, and films and will mirror the format of the reading and viewing response questions. I will circulate a study guide prior to the exam, and I encourage you to meet with me in preparation for the exam.

Participation (40%): Always come to class prepared and having read/viewed the assigned material. This course constructs itself primarily upon a discussion-based bedrock, so your participation in class discussions is essential to the success of the course and development of your learning. Again, this precept means coming to class having read/viewed the material and prepared to discuss each text with your peers. I understand some students may find speaking to and in a classroom full of strangers incredibly intimidating, but learning to communicate your thoughts and ideas verbally remains an integral part of college and an asset that will benefit you both during and after your undergraduate careers. Consequently, I expect each student to contribute multiple times to the conversation at hand during most class sessions, and *I reserve the right to call on students who are particularly quiet during class discussion.*

Participation is graded on a credit/no-credit basis. I should hear from each student multiple times per class session. If you have trouble thinking on your feet, use your daily critical questions/comments to galvanize discussion contributions. If you are the type of student who excessively misses class, speaks up only once every 2 weeks or not at all, or, in general, prefers to be seen but not heard, you should enroll in another course because you will receive a zero for your participation grade.

A Note for Those Who Are Apprehensive About Speaking in Class:

I understand that the reasons many students are hesitant to speak during class discussions stem from how their peers or professor will perceive them. Students often worry about:

- *Stuttering when speaking
- *Sounding or saying “stupid” things
- *Their professor or peers thinking that they are “dumb”
- *Having an accent or speaking a non-standard English dialect
- *Being wrong
- *Being unable to communicate verbally what they are thinking
- *Not having a fully-formed thought or being unsure about what they are about to say
- *Their professor or peers laughing at or making fun of them
- *Their professor or peers disagreeing with them
- *Later backtracking or changing their mind

These fears are reasonable and common, and I myself suffered from many of them during my undergraduate classes and even in graduate school. Rest assured, **I do not care** if you are wrong, stutter, have an accent, disagree with me, take five minutes to convey what you want to say, stumble over yourself, backtrack or change your mind, or have not fully formed your thoughts, and I will never, ever make fun of you, think you are “dumb,” dismiss your contributions, or say your interpretive analyses are wrong—nor will I allow your peers to do any of these actions as well. **If you mess up, that is okay.** The classroom is the place to screw up and make mistakes so that we can learn. I value and welcome all of your contributions to discussions and am eager to learn from your comments—even if you have a different interpretation or opinion than me! I implore you to be vocal during class discussion, even if scared, because doing so will only improve your ability to communicate verbally to large audiences, which is a skill that will benefit you throughout your academic and professional careers, regardless of major.

Classroom Etiquette

Rutgers University, Newark features a diverse student and faculty body, and this class will bring together many persons of various backgrounds, identities, cultures, beliefs, etc. Each and every student will always be mindful of these differences and will treat every student with respect. We will also be engaging in discussions about topics that we feel very passionate about, but we must always make sure to treat opposing points-of-view with courtesy, understanding, and respect. This class has a zero-tolerance policy for belittling, mocking, hostile, and/or discriminatory behavior, and if you behave in this manner towards other students, guest speakers, or the professor or become disruptive whatsoever, you will be dismissed from class, receive an automatic zero on your entire participation grade for the course, and accept whatever absence penalty (both course and university sanctions) accompany the dismissal.

Late Work Policy

Late work will not be accepted under any circumstances without an accommodations letter from the Office of the Dean of Students.

Family Death Policy: Please note that appeals for extensions because of family deaths should be forwarded to the Office of the Dean of Students, not the professor. Should the Office of the Dean of Students provide a student an accommodations letter, the professor will strive to ensure all accommodations outlined in the letter are reasonably met.

Attendance Policy

Your presence and active participation in this course is essential to your success in this course. Attendance at all class sessions is expected. **If you are absent for more than two meetings, you will have your overall participation grade for the course deducted one-third of a letter grade (e.g. a B will become a B-) for each additional absence. If you are more than 5 minutes late you will be marked absent for that day.** If you are absent for the equivalent of three weeks (6 class meetings), you will receive a zero for your participation grade. ***It is your responsibility to know how many absences you have. Do not ask me. I will not give students warnings on how many absences they have.*** The only time I will look at absences is when I calculate grades at the end of the course. If your attendance warrants a grade penalty when I calculate grades, then your grade will be penalized, without warning. Once again, make sure you know how many absences you have.

Please do not email me explaining why you missed class. It's none of my business. If you want to skip to go skiing, then go. If you need to skip because you are ill, then skip. You don't need to tell me.

Excused absences not counted against these totals include religious holidays, University-sponsored events documented with an official letter, or serious illness or family emergency excused with a letter from the Office of the Dean of Students.

Electronics Policy

On the majority of class days, pen and paper will suffice for note-taking, and laptops, tablets, e-readers, etc. will not be permitted during class (unless you are granted an accommodation that is properly documented through Disability Services), as many of our class sessions will involve you focusing on and discussing and interacting with your peers. Because you are required to bring a hard copy of Canvas readings to class, electronic devices are not necessary. At no time should cell phones be used; they should be turned off/silenced and put away during class.

Continual Electronics Policy infractions will result in a 0 for your overall class participation grade, and I reserve the right to penalize you without notifying you of your behavior.

(Dis)ability Accommodations

The professor will strive to ensure that all students are provided equity, access, and support in this course. If you require an academic accommodation due to (dis)ability, please contact the Office of Disability Services and attain a letter of accommodation. After the student provides the professor with a copy of the letter, the professor will work with the student and Office of Disability Services to ensure all accommodations specified in the letter are provided.

Academic Integrity and Documentation

Don't plagiarize. I'll catch you and report you to the university. If you have any questions about potential, accidental plagiarism, just ask me.

COVID-19, Roll, and Mask Mandates

In order to protect the health and wellbeing of all members of the Rutgers-Newark community, masks must be worn by all persons inside campus buildings when in the presence of others, and in buildings in non-private enclosed settings (e.g., common workspaces, workstations, meeting rooms, classrooms, etc.). Masks should conform to CDC guidelines and should securely cover the nose and mouth. Masks must be worn during class meetings. Each day before you arrive on campus or leave your residence hall, you must complete the brief survey on the My Campus Pass symptom checker self-screening app found at myRutgers Portal.

At the beginning of each class session, the professor is required to take roll to assist with contact tracing, should a positive COVID-19 case arise in our class.

Course Calendar & Due Dates

*All readings must be completed before the day we are scheduled to discuss them, and the films should all have been viewed at least once prior to the start of the class week. Even though most Mondays will be based on the readings and Wednesdays based on the films, I will often reference (and may even enter discussion of) the film on Monday.

Week 1: Introduction to Course

Weds 9/1: Syllabus

Week 2: Intro to Film History and Film Studies

Mon 9/6: No Class (Labor Day)

Weds 9/8: Introduction of *Film Experience* (PDF)
Chapter 1 of *Film Experience* (41-46, 50-51, 53-55, 62-66, 71-76)

Week 3: Sound

Mon 9/13: No Class (Frank at pulmonologist)

Weds 9/15: Chapter 6 of *Film Experience*

Due: Viewing response

Viewing Response Question: Watch the following clip of *There Will Be Blood*, identify two types of sound you hear, and analyze how these sounds create meaning and shape your viewing experience. (*You need not quote from the textbook in this response, but you must use the terminology on sound that chapter introduces.*)

Week 4: Mise-en-Scène

Mon 9/20: Chapter 3 of *Film Experience*

Weds 9/22: *Edward Scissorhands*

Due: Viewing Response

Viewing Response Question: Choose two shots (or screengrab stills) from *Edward Scissorhands* and analyze their mise-en-scène to explain the meaning and/or connotations the shots generates. Paste the image of the shot into your document. (*You need not quote from the textbook in this response, but you must use the terminology the book introduces.*)

Week 5: Cinematography

Mon 9/27: Chapter 4 of *Film Experience*

Due: Viewing Response

Weds 9/29: *Pan's Labyrinth*

Viewing Response Question: Watch the following clip of *Birdman*, and explain what types of camera shots, angles, and other cinematographic aspects you identify and how these influence

and shape the meanings/connotations of the scene. (*You need not quote from the textbook in this response, but you must use the terminology the book introduces.*)

Week 6: Editing

Mon 10/4: Chapter 5 of *Film Experience*

Weds 10/6: *The Godfather*

Due: Viewing Response

Viewing Response Question: Watch the following clip of *The Untouchables*, and explain and analyze how the editing creates whatever meanings/connotations you are reading in the sequence. (*You need not cite from the textbook in this response, though you must use the terminology the book introduces.*)

Week 7: Horror

Mon 10/11: Rick Worland “Introduction: Undying Monsters”

“A Short History of the Horror Film: 1945 to the Present”

Film Experience (335-345, 357-359, 364-368)

Due: Reading Response

Weds 10/13: *The Silence of the Lambs*

Due: Viewing Response

Reading Response Question: According to Worland, what “is” a horror film, its major genre characteristics, and the difference between terror and horror?

Viewing Response Question: Choose a “monster” from *The Silence of the Lambs*, and, with attention to the formal elements of cinema and with Worland’s reading and the class lecture on horror in mind, analyze and explain how the film renders this figure “horrific.”

Week 8: Science Fiction

Mon 10/18: Lincoln Geraghty “American Science Fiction Culture”

“Hopes and Fears”

Due: Reading Response

Weds 10/20: *District 9*

Due: Viewing Response

Reading Response Question: According to Geraghty, what is science fiction film, its genre characteristics, and what is the genre’s relationship to American history and culture? Are there any other character types, genre characteristics, or further components that you believe defines and helps us understand science fiction film? If so, what?

Viewing Response Question: After reading Geraghty’s chapters, compare and contrast the aliens of *District 9* with those Geraghty outlines. How do the aliens of *District 9* depart from or adhere to the genre’s alien conventions and history?

Week 9: The Disney Fairy Tale

Mon 10/25: Richard Breaux “After 75 Years of Magic: Disney Answers Its Critics”
Lisa Lowe “Imagining Los Angeles in the Production of Multiculturalism”
Film Experience (354-357)

Due: **Reading Response**

Weds 10/27: *Beauty and the Beast* (2017)

Due: **Viewing Response**

Reading Response Question: According to Lisa Lowe, what is multiculturalism, and what are its effects? Secondly, what are some of the past critiques of Disney film, and what is Breaux’s critique of *The Princess and the Frog*?

Viewing Response Question: In an attempt to move beyond its longstanding history of racism, idealization of white beauty, and conservatism on screen, Disney’s recent releases often feature a multicultural and “progressive” agenda. Identify moments where you see this agenda operating in *Beauty and the Beast*, how the film conveys this partisanship, and, despite its ostensibly reformist aims, moments where you feel (and why) the film still adheres to Disney’s controversial history.

Week 10: The Western

Mon 11/1: John Belton “The Making of the West” (243-271)
Film Experience (348-351)

Due: **Reading Response**

Weds 11/3: *The Revenant*

Due: **Viewing Response**

Reading Response Question: According to Belton, what are some of the conventions of the American Western, and how do they normatively materialize in this genre? Moreover, after reading Belton’s article, view the following clip of [3:10 to Yuma](#), and identify any conventions that you believe are a convention of the American Western but that Belton does not cover.

Viewing Response Question: What is Belton’s argument on indigeneity in the Western? After identifying his contentions, analyze the depiction of indigeneity in *The Revenant* and specifically discuss how the film’s portrayals adhere to or depart from (or both) Belton’s argument.

Week 11: Gender and Film

Mon 11/8: Robert Dale Parker “Feminism and Visual Pleasure”
Laura Mulvey “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”
Film Experience (392-393)

Due: **Reading Response**

Weds 11/10: *G.I. Jane*

Judith Halberstam “Looking Butch: A Rough Guide to Butches on Film”

Due: **Viewing Response**

Reading Response Question: What is Laura Mulvey's argument on the depiction of women in film? After identifying her argument, provide a link to a video clip (television show, film, commercial, etc.) where you see her argument materializing, and explain why and how you see her argument applicable in this clip.

Viewing Response Question: After reading Halberstam's "Looking Butch," how does Jordan compare/contrast to the butch characters Halberstam discusses? Which category of "butches in film" that Halberstam outlines would Jordan fall under and why?

Week 12: New Queer Cinema

Mon 11/15: Valerie Solanas *S.C.U.M. Manifesto*
Film Experience (393-394)

Due: Reading Response

Weds 11/17: *Monster*

Due: Viewing Response

Reading Response Question: With direct references from the text, summarize Solanas' argument, and explain your opinions on her position. Despite its satire (?), what contentions do you find valuable, interesting, plausible, worth pursuing, etc.?

Viewing Response Question: Choose your own topic of analysis for this film. You may write on any subject you wish, as long as you produce a critical and fully-developed analysis of a scene (or two).

Week 13: Thanksgiving Break

Week 14: African American Cinema

Mon 11/29: Patricia Hill Collins *Black Feminist Thought* (72-84)

Weds 12/1: *Moonlight*

Due: Viewing Response

Viewing Response Question: You have two options for this response. Either select a scene and analyze and explain (with particular attention to the film's formal elements) how that scene communicates the role of queer sexuality in the space Chiron inhabits, or choose a scene that challenges or re-envision popular conceptions of gay men and explain and analyze how the film creates this reimagining.

Week 15: Latina/o/x Cinema

Mon 12/6: Rosa Linda Fregoso *The Bronze Screen* (122-134)

Weds 12/8: *American Me*

Due: Viewing Response

**This syllabus is subject to change at my discretion.*

García 10

Viewing Response Question: Explain Fregoso's multiple critiques of *American Me*, and, with specific references to Olmos' film, elucidate where and why you do or do not agree with her criticisms.

Week 16: Exam Information

Mon 12/13: Study Guide