

Spring 2007
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ETHN 101: [racial] ETHNIC IMAGES ON FILM

“What is Race?

There is a continuous temptation to think of race as an *essence*, as something fixed, concrete, and objective. And there is also an opposite temptation: to imagine race as a mere *illusion*, a purely ideological construct which some ideal non-racist social order would eliminate. It is necessary to challenge both these positions....to understand race as an unstable and ‘decentered’ complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle....*race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies.*” (Omi & Winant, 1994, *Racial Formation in the United States*: pp 54-5).

“North American indigenous peoples have been reduced in terms of cultural identity within the popular consciousness—through a combination of movie treatments, television programming and distorted literature—to a point where the general public perceives them as extinct...Given that they no longer exist, that which *was* theirs—whether land and the resources on and beneath it, or their heritage—can *now* be said, without pangs of guilt, to belong to those who displaced and ultimately supplanted them.” (Churchill, Ward, 1992, *Fantasies of the Master Race*: p. 239).

Course Description

This course draws on critical race studies and cultural studies frameworks to foster analyses of race and representation in U.S. film with emphasis on contemporary film representations of racial minorities. Although we could easily take on all of the media for a subject appropriate to our task, our focus will be on films, of varying genres, that become part of the popular culture and how their racial representations speak to, reflect, reproduce and/or contest contemporary articulations of race and racism. However, we will also examine some independent films and very recent films to assess current trends towards critical race films and/or reproductions of old scripts.

Course Structure

We will meet once a week for film viewings and lecture supplemented by weekly discussion sections led by TAs Hernandez, Kinney, and Smith, who provide consultation and grading support for the course. Students are encouraged to seek assistance or simply

enjoy further discussion of our course matter from both your assigned TA and the Professor. As professor for the course, I welcome your visits to my otherwise boring and lonely office hours! See the times and location listed at the top of this syllabus. Don't feel like you need to be having difficulty or specific questions to come by and visit.

We should all anticipate lively discussions based on the heated nature of racial discourse in society. That said, you are still expected to conform to basic rules of decency (and if you appear unaware of these, it will be my pleasure to provide you further instruction in this regard as complement to the course). Students are also expected to follow the guidelines for academic performance by clearly distinguishing your own ideas from those of others, or to face consequences to be determined in accordance with the severity of your deviation from normative standards (in other words, if you flagrantly cheat in some way you will face sanctions as prescribed by campus guidelines).

Course Objectives

Students with little to no background in race will learn a basic language of race and racism pertaining to representation and to the public discourses on race including racialization, hegemony, race vs. ethnicity, race as social construction, oppositional cultural frameworks, cultural appropriation, colonialism/postcolonialism, related political frameworks (e.g., pluralism, sovereignty, self-determination, integration, assimilation, segregation) and forms of social oppression (sexism, patriarchal oppression, heterosexism and homophobia, class oppression in context of globalization). All students will further expand abilities to analyze racism in the public discourse as critical producers/consumers of culture.

Required Texts

Benshoff, Harry M. and Sean Griffin, 2004. *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*. Blackwell Publishers.

Denzin, Norman, 2000. *Reading Race: Hollywood and the Cinema of Racial Violence*. Sage Publishers.

Xing, Jun and Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, Editors, 2003. *Reversing the Lens: Ethnicity, Race, Gender and Sexuality Through Film*. University Press of Colorado.

Grading

25% Attendance and Participation in weekly discussion sections is a required part of the course

25% each 2 Short Papers: Critical Readings of Race in Film

25% Final Exam Essay reviews of critical race studies & film analysis

Note that your course grade is comprised of three elements: 1) process and participation based on your regular attendance and engagement in discussion sections; 2) your ability to apply the frameworks of critical race studies to readings of race in film; and 3) your performance on an examination of your knowledge of scholarly contributions to our understanding of race in film based on your readings

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, READINGS, FILMS, ASSIGNMENTS

- Week One Race/Ethnicity and Film/Introduction to the Course**
April 2 You as a cultural reader: socially situated gaze
Why bother craft the critical gaze? The politics of Ethnic Studies,
the ongoing significance of race...and representation.
READ: Benschhoff and Griffin, intro to Part 1, Chap 1, 2 , 9, 12, &13.
- Week Two Hollywood Images —Eras of their ways**
April 9 READ: Benschhoff and Griffin, Chap 3, “The Concept of Whiteness and
American Film,” pp. 53-74; Denzin, Chap 1, “The Cinematic Racial
Order,” pp. 17-46; Alquizola and Hirabayashi (Chap. 8 in Xing and
Hirabayashi), “Confronting Gender Stereotypes of Asian American
Women,” pp. 155 – 168.
- Week Three The Colonizer/colonizing Gaze: Native Americans**
April 16 READ: Benschhoff and Griffin chap 5, “Native Americans and American
Film”, pp. 96-115; Ward Churchill (chap 4 in Xing and Hirabayashi),
“American Indians in film: Thematic Contours of Cinematic
Colonization, pp. 43-112.
- Week Four Exoticized Others: Orientalism and Hollywood**
April 23 READ: Benschhoff and Griffin chap 6, “Asian Americans and American
Film,” pp. 116-134;
- Week Five “The White [Story of the] Hood”**
April 30 READ Denzin, Chaps 2-4; Benschhoff and Griffin, Chaps 4 and 7
1st Paper Due
- Week Six Black and Brown Hood: Boyz Rule**
May 7 READ Denzin, Chaps 5-6,
- Week Seven “Reversing the Lens”**
May 14 READ Denzin Chap 7
- Week Eight Hoodified HeLL-A?**
May 21 READ Bernstein (Chap 9 in Xing and Hirabayashi), “Screens and Bars”
2nd Paper Due
- Weeks Nine/Ten New Aesthetic & Critical Eye**
Holiday May 28th: Memorial Day
June 4 READ (in Xing and Hirabayashi) Huaco-Nuzum, Chap 5, “El Espejo/The
Mirror,” and Adeeko, Chap 6, “Mississippi Masala: Crossing Desire and
Interest,” and Stockdill, Park and Pellow (Chap 12 in Xing and
Hirabayashi), “Beyond the Hollywood Hype.”
- FINAL:** June 13th as posted in course schedule

