

Instructor: Susan Pramschufer
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Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description and Objectives:

Narrative films are unique cultural and historical texts that can provide us with important insight into the societies from which and about which they are created. Analyzing specific themes presented in the films or even focusing on the production history will reveal the dynamic nature of culture. In this course, we will be using a variety of American narrative films, both mainstream and independent, as a lens through which to view significant aspects of our own culture, with the goal of recognizing the ways in which American film speaks to and about our diverse society. Specifically, we will be examining how race and ethnic identity, gender, sexuality, socio-economic class, and disability are represented through classic and contemporary American films to gain an understanding of this complex and ever-changing society.

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate a foundational understanding of the historical, social, and cultural construction of particular hegemonic ideologies (specifically those related to race, gender, sexuality, class, and disability).
- Demonstrate an understanding of the shifting representations of the cultural hegemony in American film.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the intersection of film studies and American studies.
- Define key concepts and various foundational theories in film studies and American studies.
- Critically analyze films using terminology appropriate to the fields of film studies and American studies.

Required Texts:

Benshoff, Harry, and Sean Griffin. *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*, 2nd ed. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. (Please note: an e-book copy is available to borrow through lib.umd.edu)

All other required readings will be available on ELMS

Course Keywords:

Visual culture, media studies, class, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, disability

Course Requirements:

Essays-

In this course you are required to write three formal papers. These essays will be of varying length (from two to four pages), depending on the assignment, typed in 12-point standard font (Times New Roman), and double-spaced. Computer errors will not be excused, so please complete your assignments ahead of time. *All essays are due on ELMS prior to 10:00am on the dates noted on the syllabus and late work will not be accepted.* Please let me know well in advance if you are having a problem meeting a deadline: even if you miss a class, you are still responsible for turning the work in by the due date!

Group Project-

For the group project, you will be applying the concepts brought up throughout the course to a film of your group's choosing, creating a nuanced analysis presented in a digital platform. Each group will be presenting their project to the class at the end of the summer session during our final Zoom meeting.

Informal Writing Assignments and Activities-

You will frequently be asked to write short responses to the films you viewed (both during the synchronous online class meetings and for homework), so please prepare for this by taking copious notes while you watch the films. These writing assignments and activities will be used to stimulate class discussion and, at times, to quiz you on the viewings and/or readings. If an informal writing assignment is assigned during class and you are absent, you must provide an acceptable documented excuse (as outlined below) to make up the assignment.

Participation-

To get the most out of this course you must attend our Zoom class discussions regularly and complete film viewings and readings on the dates listed in the schedule below. You are also expected to keep up with the activities listed in the daily course modules on ELMS. I will not accept any make-up work for unexcused absences and I will often assign work to be completed during our Zoom class sessions, so attendance is extremely important. If you miss an in-class assignment as a result of an excused absence, it is your responsibility to email me a note verifying your absence (as detailed below) by the next class and we will create a plan for you to make up the assignment.

Finally, I do expect you to be actively engaged in our class discussions. Please plan to keep your video on (whenever possible) during our Zoom sessions and prepare to readily participate!

Grade Breakdown-

Essay #1: Reflection = 10%

Essay #2: Scene analysis = 15%

Essay #3: Comparative paper = 25%

Group Project = 30%

Informal Writing Assignments and Activities = 20%

Absences:

The University allows absence in particular cases (illness, representing the University at an approved event, religious holidays), *but you must provide adequate documentation*. For a medically necessitated absence from a *single* lecture, you may submit a self-signed note to me by the next class, identifying the date of and reason for the absence, and acknowledging that the information in the note is accurate (in accordance with the Code of Student Conduct). *All major assignments will still be due on the dates assigned*. For any other medically necessitated absences, including those that require missing more than one class session or those that occur during one of the major assignment due dates noted on the schedule, you must provide written documentation of the illness from the Health Center or from an outside health provider.

If you will be missing class for a planned University event or religious holiday, you must let me know on the *first day of class* and provide written documentation so arrangements can be made to make up any missed assignments. For any other excused absences, please let me know ahead of time when possible and be sure to get the assignments from a classmate, as the readings scheduled may be changed. *If you miss an in-class assignment as a result of an excused absence, it is your responsibility to contact me by the next class period to schedule a make up the assignment.*

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty:

Plagiarism is a form of cheating. Make sure that your work is original. Any time you use someone else's work and do not give that person credit, it is plagiarism. Copying the work of another person, whether an essay or answers during a test, is considered plagiarism. If you are uncertain about sharing vs. plagiarism, be sure to ask for clarification before you turn in the assignment. If you are "suspected" of plagiarism, you will bear the burden of proof. You must be able to present rough drafts or related materials and discuss the topic intelligently.

The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized *Code of Academic Integrity*. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism. For more information on the *Code of Academic Integrity* or the Student Honor Council, please visit <http://www.shc.umd.edu>.

Student Learning:

Your success in this class is important to me; therefore, if there are circumstances that may affect your performance in this class, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can work together to both meet your needs and the requirements of the course.

Classroom Environment-

Our classroom environment will be built on mutual respect, valuing behaviors such as listening to others before responding, critiquing our peers' ideas rather than our peers themselves, and framing disagreements as opportunities to develop and nuance our own positions. If at any point during the course you feel like I can better facilitate a respectful and productive learning space, please set up a time to talk to me. I would love to hear your ideas.

Support Services-

If you have a registered disability and wish to discuss accommodations with me, please let me know. In order to receive official university accommodations, you will need to register and request accommodations through the Accessibility and Disability Service. ADS provides services for students with physical and emotional disabilities and is located in 0106 Shoemaker on the University of Maryland campus. Information about Accessibility and Disability Service can be found www.counseling.umd.edu/ads. You can also reach ADS by phone at 301-314-7682.

Writing Center-

The Writing Center offers free assistance with any undergraduate writing assignment. To schedule an appointment, visit the Writing Center online at <http://www.english.umd.edu/writingcenter>.

Viewing Films:

All of the films will be available on our course space on ELMS during the dates noted below. Please be aware that several of the films we are viewing will include sensitive material, including nudity and graphic violence, which may be offensive to some viewers.

Questioning the American Dream: Class and the American Identity

Week 1 M	Introduction to the course
T	View: <i>Modern Times</i> (Chaplin, 1936)
	Reading: "Chapter 8: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Class" (<i>America on Film</i> , p. 171-186 in print text / p. 369-398 in e-book)
W	Essay #1: Reflection due on ELMS
	View: <i>The Pursuit of Happyness</i> (Muccino, 2006)
	Reading: "Chapter 2: Moving Up and Moving On" from <i>American Success Myth on Film</i> , p. 21-31 (available on ELMS)
	Recommended Reading: "Chapter 9: Cinematic Class Struggle After the Depression" (<i>America on Film</i> , p. 187-208 in print text / p. 401-442 in e-book)

Constructing Gender and Challenging Representations of Sexuality

Th View:
Double Indemnity (Wilder, 1944)

Readings:
“I Love You Too – Sexual Warfare and Homoeroticism in Billy Wilder’s *Double Indemnity*” by Brian Gallagher (available on ELMS)
“Chapter 11: Exploring the Visual Parameters of Women in Film” (*America on Film*, p. 238-255 in print text, p. 499-535 in e-book)

F **Essay #2: Scene Analysis due on ELMS**

View:
Some Like it Hot (Wilder, 1959)

Reading:
“Chapter 12: Masculinity in Classical Hollywood Filmmaking” (*America on Film*, p. 257-277 in print text / p. 538-577 in e-book)

Week 2 M View:
Rebel Without a Cause (Ray, 1955)

Readings:
“Chapter 14: Heterosexuality, Homosexuality, and Classical Hollywood” (*America on Film*, p. 309-327 in print text / p. 642-679 in e-book)
“Rebel Without a Closet: Homosexuality and Hollywood” by Christopher Castiglia (available on ELMS)

T View:
Moonlight (Jenkins, 2016)

Reading:
“Watching *Moonlight* in the Twilight of Obama” by Menaka Kannan, Rhys Hall, and Matthew W. Hughey (available on ELMS)

Recommended Reading:
“Chapter 4: African Americans and American Film” (*America on Film*, p. 78-100 in print text / p. 182-229 in e-book)

Representing Race in the American Landscape

W View:
Night of the Living Dead (Romero, 1968)

Reading:
“White” by Richard Dyer (p. 6-11 and 59-63, available on ELMS)

Th View:
Get Out (Peele, 2017)

F View:

Better Luck Tomorrow (Lin, 2002)

Readings:

“Chapter 6: Asian Americans and American Film” (*America on Film*, p. 123-141 in print text / p. 274-308 in e-book)

“Case Study 7: *Better Luck Tomorrow*” (*America on Film*, p. 398-9 in print text / p. 825-830 in e-book)

(Dis)ability and Stigma

Week 3 M **Essay #3: Comparative Analysis due on ELMS**

View:

Million Dollar Baby (Eastwood, 2004)

Readings:

“Chapter 16: Cinematic Images of (Dis)Ability” (*America on Film*, p. 363-384 in print text / p. 743-786 in e-book)

“Thoughts on ‘Million Dollar Baby’” by Beth Haller (available on ELMS)

T

View:

The Rider (Zhao, 2017)

Reading:

“Wild Horses: How ‘The Rider’ Became the Breakout Movie of 2018” by Amy Nicholson (available on ELMS)

W

View:

Psycho (Hitchcock, 1960)

Reading:

“Mental Illness in Film” by Naomi Kondo (available on ELMS)

Th

View:

Silver Linings Playbook (Russell, 2012)

F

Final projects due

***Note- Syllabus subject to change based on the needs of the students and instructor’s discretion.