American Studies 204: Film and American Culture Studies
Summer 2018, Section YS41
MTWThF 9:00am – 12:00pm, HBK 0302H

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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. 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 critically analyze films using terminology appropriate to the field of study and understand many of the specific ways in which American film speaks to and about our diverse society.

Required Texts:
*All other required readings will be available on ELMS*

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 the beginning of class 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!

Informal Writing Assignments-
You will frequently be asked in class to write short responses to the films you viewed, so please prepare for this by taking copious notes while you watch the films. These in-class writings will be used to stimulate class discussion and, at times, to quiz you on the viewings and/or readings; therefore, if you are absent and cannot provide an acceptable documented excuse (as outlined below) as soon as you return to class you will not be able to make up these points.

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.

Participation-
To get the most out of this course you must attend class regularly and complete film viewings and readings before class on the dates listed on the schedule below. I will not accept any make-up work for unexcused absences and I will often assign work to be completed in class, so attendance is extremely important. If you miss an in-class assignment as a result of an excused absence, it is your responsibility to bring in a note verifying your absence (as detailed below) and schedule a time to make up the assignment by the next class period. Also, please remember to turn off cell phones before class begins and keep them out of sight during class time.
Grade Breakdown -
Essay #1: Reflection = 10%
Essay #2: Scene analysis = 15%
Essay #3: Comparative paper = 25%
Informal Writing Assignments (completed in class) = 20%
Group Project = 30%

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 when you return to 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 time to 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 in the semester you feel like I can better facilitate a respectful and productive learning space, please come and 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.
Writing Center
The Writing Center offers free assistance with any undergraduate writing assignment. For location, hours, or 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

7/9
M Introduction to the course
T View: Modern Times (Chaplin, 1936)
Reading: “Chapter 8: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Class” (America on Film, p. 171-186)

W Essay #1 due on ELMS

View: The Pursuit of Happyness (Muccino, 2006)
Reading: “Chapter 2: Moving Up and Moving On” from American Success Myth on Film, p. 21-31
(available on ELMS)
Recommended Reading: “Chapter 9: Cinematic Class Struggle After the Depression” (America on Film, p. 187-208)

Constructing Gender and Challenging Representations of Sexuality

Th View: Some Like it Hot (Wilder, 1959)
Readings: “Chapter 12: Masculinity in Classical Hollywood Filmmaking” (America on Film, p. 257-277)
“Chapter 11: Exploring the Visual Parameters of Women in Film” (America on Film, p. 238-255)

F Essay #2 due on ELMS

View: Double Indemnity (Wilder, 1944)
Reading: “I Love You Too – Sexual Warfare and Homoeroticism in Billy Wilder’s Double Indemnity” by Brian Gallagher
M View:
*Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005)

Reading:
“Chapter 15: Sexualities on Film Since the Sexual Revolution” (*America on Film*, p. 329-354)

Recommended Reading:
“Case Study 11: *Brokeback Mountain*” (*America on Film*, p. 406-7)

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)

**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)
“Case Study 7: *Better Luck Tomorrow*” (*America on Film*, p. 398-9)

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**(Dis)ability and Stigma**

M Essay #3 due on ELMS

View:
*Rear Window* (Hitchcock, 1958)

Readings:
“Chapter 16: Cinematic Images of (Dis)Ability” (*America on Film*, p. 363-384)

T View:
*Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960)

Reading:
“Mental Illness in Film” by Naomi Kondo (available on ELMS)
W  View:  
*Silver Linings Playbook* (Russell, 2012)

Th  Group meetings (in class)

F  Final projects due
   Presentations

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