

ETHN 101: Ethnic Images in Film  
Destabilizing Black Tropes in Contemporary Film

Lecture - MW 11:00a-1:50p

Discussion – W 2:00p-3:50p

Summer I 2020

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Professor: Dr. Martin L. Boston

TA: Pricila Rodriguez

Location: Zoom (<https://zoom.ucsd.edu>) & Canvas

Office Hours and Location: by appointment via Zoom (<https://zoom.ucsd.edu/>)

Professor Email: [mboston@ucsd.edu](mailto:mboston@ucsd.edu)

TA Email: [brr022@ucsd.edu](mailto:brr022@ucsd.edu)

**Description:** This course will examine representations of Blackness in contemporary film. Attention will be paid to the emergence and transmission of enduring tropes in film and how they relate to the history of Hollywood and Blackness. The course will consider Black peoples' responses to and interpretations of these mediated images. In particular, the films we will view during this course will work to present and challenge the ways Blackness has traditionally been imaged on the screen and how various Black filmmakers and actors have subverted these images to offer us new and exciting Black characters and Black stories.

**By the end of this course, students should be able to:**

1. Describe the central role Blackness plays in the construction Western societies and Hollywood
2. Analyze tropes about Blackness in film
3. Design a subversive film idea that critiques normative tropes in film
4. Effectively communicate, summarize and respond to course readings, materials, and colleagues

**Class Structure:**

Mondays & Wednesdays

- There will be live class sessions every Monday and Wednesday via Zoom during this summer session that will last one-hour (11am – noon). On these days Professor Boston will review the week’s main themes from films, readings and your discussion boards, and foreshadow the week to come. Professor Boston will also field any questions or concerns at this time.
- The rest of the time reserved for lectures and discussions will be used to view the films assigned during each week.

#### Thursday Assignments

- There are only two assignments due on a Thursday during the summer session. The first will be due by 11:59pm on Canvas on Thursday, 7/16, this will be just about a half-page single-spaced paragraph outlining your proposed film for your final (more info in the Assignments section of the syllabus). The second will be your discussion board post for Week 5, which will be due by 11:59pm on Canvas on Thursday, 7/30.

#### Friday Assignments

- Your Week 1-4 Discussion Boards will be due on Fridays on Canvas by 11:59pm. The only Discussion Board not due on Friday is your Week 5 Discussion Board, which is due Thursday, 7/30.
- The assignment due on Friday, 7/31 of Week 5 by 11:59pm on Canvas is your Week 5 Film Review.

#### Saturday Assignments

- Just one assignment is due on a Saturday during our summer session course and that is your Final slide presentation and paper, due Saturday, 8/1 by 11:59pm on Canvas.

#### Sunday Assignments

- Weeks 1-4 Film Reviews are due on Sundays by 11:59pm on Canvas. Week 5’s review is due on Friday, 7/31.

#### **Required Text: (Can be Purchased at UCSD Bookstore)**

1. James Baldwin. *If Beale Street Could Talk* (2006)

#### **Other Course Readings:**

All additional texts and films will be made available in the Library Electronic Course Reserves (<https://library.ucsd.edu/borrow-and-request/course-reserves/index.html>). Any additional texts I assign will put under the “Files” tab on Canvas (canvas.ucsd.edu). However, you will be notified when and if texts will be put on Canvas.

NOTE: To get access to online readings off campus you must have access to the UCSD off-campus VPN. For instructions to set this up go to: <https://library.ucsd.edu/computing-and-technology/connect-from-off-campus/> . If you still have trouble, go to the library and have the staff there help you troubleshoot the issue.

#### **Course Requirements:**

Final grades are based on the successful completion of class requirements as weighted below. Students must complete all assignments to pass the course. No late or make-up assignments will be acceptable without documentation of an emergency. Pass/Fail: passing grade is 70% and above.

**Grade & Grade Distribution:**

- Discussion Boards - 25%
- Film Review Papers - 50%
- Final Subversive Film Slide Presentation and Paper - 25%

Grading focuses primarily on how thoughtfully and insightfully you engage course content, including your ability to understand and articulate arguments made in lecture and in readings.

**Attendance:** You are allowed one absence from live class sessions, no questions asked. These are intended for emergencies, not for those days where you “don’t feel like going to class.” There is no need to email an excuse for these emergencies but feel free to send one if you wish. However, beyond this one excused absence, attendance is mandatory. Missing section will negatively affect your final grade starting on your second absence. **4 absences will result in failing the course.** Only university sanctioned absences (with timely notification) or documented emergencies will be acceptable excuses for missing Monday live sessions.

**NOTE:** Zoom sends a report that tells Professor Boston who was on the live session, what times they signed in and signed off, and how long their main screen was the Zoom session (if you spend the time with Zoom active but surfing the internet in another window, Zoom can detect this). You must be present the whole time to be considered as present for class.

**Discussion Boards:**

Each student will be responsible for going on the discussion board for each week and participating in the discussion based on the prompt provided. These discussion boards should talk mostly about the readings from the week. You can discuss how the readings support your understanding of the week’s films or previous week’s readings, but it should be mainly and mostly about the readings from the week. You can either write your own post or respond to a classmate’s post. However, either way, these must be quality responses and must be at least 250 words. Your TA will tally and grade your responses for each week.

**Film Reviews:** Students will be responsible for completing weekly 2-3page (1” margins, double-spaced, 12pt Times Roman font) critical film analyses based on the “Film Review Film(s)” listed for each week. In addition to the 2-3 pages for the paper, please also add a works cited page. The film review film(s) though are the primary texts to analyze in the film review, they should be situated within an analysis of the additional readings and films assigned that week. Please use a minimum of one additional film and two course readings in your papers.

Film reviews are due by 11:59PM PST to Canvas (there will be a link in each week’s module for film reviews) on the date specified on the Course Schedule. These responses will serve as platforms for students to develop their critical engagement with our texts and, as such, should be analytical/theoretical in nature. While students should engage the central argument and main point of the texts and films, these responses are not meant to be merely summaries of the films and readings. Rather they should engage key discussions and suggestive questions that emerge across the

readings and films, engage with their theoretical/epistemic/historical interventions, and/or assess what the particular film/scene is attempting (and/or how it is doing so) in terms of key elements such as tropes, content, racial and gender codings, argumentation, cultural significance, aesthetics, and/or method.

### **Final Subversive Film Slide Presentation and Paper:**

You will create a subversive film slide presentation where you will outline a revolutionary (non-normative) film. Your film and presentation should consider, confront and subvert the various Black tropes of normative/ traditional Hollywood films that we discussed in class. Your presentation should also talk about your film's plot, setting and characters, and present an analysis of how they and your film more generally confront normative representations in film and subverts these representations.

Examples and templates will be provided closer to the due date, but the basic format will be:

#### Slide Presentation Format:

1. Should have a catchy title for your film
2. A one liner "Premise" for your film
3. Film Synopsis
4. Plot Summary
5. (5) Character Sketches
6. List of tropes you are subverting both in characters and setting, and explain how they do this
7. Any additional info you would like to add

Additionally, part of this grade will include your "Paragraph Explaining Final Film Idea" due Thursday, 7/16 and a final paper. This 3-page paper will be due Saturday, 8/1 by 11:59pm on Canvas, and should describe how 2 films and 2 readings from the summer session inspired, were foundations for, and/or help explain the film you created. More information will be made available closer to the due date.

### **Email Policy:**

Email updates about the course will be sent frequently. **Reading emails sent from Professor and TA are required.** "I did not see the email," "it went to my junk mail," etc. are not viable excuses. Please be sure you have your email linked to your smartphone and that "mboston@ucsd.edu" or [brr022@ucsd.edu](mailto:brr022@ucsd.edu) are not addresses that are sent to your junk mail. Professor Boston and Pricila will also send announcements through Canvas, which you will receive via email as well.

Also, please observe standard email etiquette and formatting. Send all email from your UCSD account. We will do my best to respond to your questions within 24 hours. Email is a good way for you to ask short and/or logistical questions or set up office appointments. If you have questions that require an in-depth answer, please schedule an office hours appointment.

### **Disability Access**

Students requesting accommodations for this course due to a disability must provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) located in University Center 202. Please make arrangements to contact the instructor. Contact the OSD for further information: [disabilities.ucsd.edu](http://disabilities.ucsd.edu)

## **Title IX Compliance**

The Office for the Prevention of Harassment & Discrimination (OPHD) provides assistance to students, faculty, and staff regarding reports of bias, harassment, and discrimination. OPHD is the UC San Diego Title IX office. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is the federal law that prohibits sex discrimination in educational institutions that are recipients of federal funds. Students have the right to an educational environment that is free from harassment and discrimination.

Students have options for reporting incidents of sexual violence and sexual harassment. Information about reporting options may be obtained at OPHD at [ophd.ucsd.edu](http://ophd.ucsd.edu). Students may receive confidential assistance at CARE at the Sexual Assault Resource Center at [care.ucsd.edu](http://care.ucsd.edu) or Counseling and Psychological Services at [caps.ucsd.edu](http://caps.ucsd.edu).

### **Additional Resources:**

- Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD): <http://disabilities.ucsd.edu/about/>
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): <http://caps.ucsd.edu/>
- Writing Center (127 Mandeville): <http://writingcenter.ucsd.edu/>
- Writing + Critical Expression Hub at the Teaching + Learning Commons: <http://commons.ucsd.edu/students/writing/index.html>

## **Course Schedule:**

### **Week 1 – Black Tropes**

Monday (6/29)

#### **Film: Ethnic Notions**

- Donald Bogle. “Introduction” in *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition* (2016)
- Kenneth Goings, “The Birth and Adolescence of Aunt Jemima and Uncle Mose” in *Mammy and Uncle Mose*

Wednesday (7/1)

#### **Film: Hollywood Shuffle**

- Donald Bogle. “Chapter 1 – Black Beginnings: From Uncle Tom’s Cabin to The Birth of the Nation” in *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition* (2016)
- Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, “Chapter 4 - Tropes of Empire” in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*

#### **Film Review Film: Bamboozled**

Week 1 Assignments Due:

Friday, 7/3 – Discussion Board

Sunday, 7/5 – Film Review Week 1

## Week 2 – Coming of Age/ The Urban Experience

Monday (7/6)

**Film: Jinn**

- Jacqueline Bobo, “Chapter 18 – Reading Through the Text: The Black Woman as Audience” in *Black American Cinema*
- Siobhan Somerville, “Chapter 2 - The Queer Career of Jim Crow: Racial and Sexual Transformation in Early Cinema” in *Queering the Colorline: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*

Wednesday (7/8)

**Film: Come Back, Africa**

- “Come Back, Africa Press Kit.”  
[https://comebackafrica.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/come\\_back\\_africa\\_press\\_kit.pdf](https://comebackafrica.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/come_back_africa_press_kit.pdf)
- Paula J. Massood. “**Bush Mama Section** of Chapter 3 – Cotton in the City: The Black Ghetto, Blaxploitation, and Beyond” in *Black City Cinema: African American Urban Experiences in Film* – pps. 107-116
- Paula J. Massood. “Chapter 5 – Out of the Ghetto, into the Hood: Changes in the Construction of Black City Cinema” in *Black City Cinema: African American Urban Experiences in Film*

**Film Review Films: Pariah & Bush Mama**

Week 2 Assignments Due:

Friday, 7/10 – Discussion Board  
Sunday, 7/12 – Film Review Week 2

## Week 3 – Black Love Story

Monday (7/13)

**Film: Queen & Slim**

- James Baldwin. “First Half ~ pps. 3-106” in *If Beale Street Could Talk*

Wednesday (7/15)

**Film: Love Jones**

- James Baldwin. “Second Half ~ pps. 106-197” in *If Beale Street Could Talk*

**Film Review Films: The Photograph & If Beale Street Could Talk**

Week 3 Assignments Due:

Thursday, 7/16 – Paragraph Explaining Final Film Idea  
Friday, 7/17 – Discussion Board  
Sunday, 7/19 – Film Review Week 3

## Week 4 – Black Liberation and Revolt

Monday (7/20)

**Film: Black Panther**

- Manthia Diawara, “Black American Cinema: The New Realism” in *Black American Cinema*

- Janette Dates and William Barlow, “Introduction: A War of Images” in *Split Image: African Americans in the Mass Media*

Wednesday (7/22)

**Film: The Spook Who Sat By The Door**

- Ed Guerrero. “Chapter 3 – The Rise and Fall of Blaxploitation” in *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film*
- Alessandra Raengo, “Chapter 9 - Encountering the Rebellion: liquid blackness Reflects on the Expansive Possibilities of the L.A. Rebellion Films” in *L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema*

**Film Review Film: Sarafina**

Week 4 Assignments Due:

Friday, 7/24 – Discussion Board  
 Sunday, 7/26 – Film Review Week 4

**Week 5 – Defying The White Gaze**

Monday (7/27)

**Film: They’ve Gotta Have Us, Episodes 1 & 2**

- bell hooks, “Chapter 7 - The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*
- Dennis Childs, “Introduction - Inhuman Punishment: The (Un)dead Book of Chattel Carcerality” in *Slaves to the State: Black Incarceration from the Chain Gang to the Penitentiary*

Wednesday (7/29)

**Films: Cry of Jazz & They’ve Gotta Have Us, Episode 3**

- Robin D.G. Kelley, “Introduction” in *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America*
- Stuart Hall. “What is this “black” in black popular culture?” in *Black Popular Culture* (1992)
- Ed Guerrero. “Introduction” in *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film*

**Film Review Film: Get Out**

Week 5 Assignments Due:

Thursday, 7/30 – Discussion Board  
 Friday, 7/31 – Film Review Week 5  
 Saturday, 8/1 – Final Slideshow and Paper

### **Majoring or Minorng in Ethnic Studies**

Many students take an Ethnic Studies course because the topic is of great interest or because of a need to fulfill a social science, non-contiguous, or other college requirement. Often students have taken three or four classes out of interest yet do not realize how close they are to a major, a minor, or even a double major. An Ethnic Studies major is excellent preparation for a career in law, education, medicine, public health, social work, counseling, journalism, government and politics, international relations, and many other careers. If you would like information about the Ethnic Studies major or minor, please contact:

The Ethnic Studies Department

Phone: (858) 534-3276 or E-mail: [ethnicstudies@ucsd.edu](mailto:ethnicstudies@ucsd.edu) or visit [www.ethnicstudies.ucsd.edu](http://www.ethnicstudies.ucsd.edu)