

Spring 2006
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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. The films listed below are subject to change.

Course Structure

This course meets once a week for film viewings, lecture, discussion and in-class writing, supplemented by weekly discussion sections led by TAs Jose Fuste and Theo Verinakis, who also serve provide me 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.

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 have earned a failing grade).

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

30%	In Class:	Weekly responses to film (credit/noncredit)
25% each	2 Papers:	Critical (Social) Readings of Race, Critical Comparisons
20%	Final Exam	On the spot: Film Analysis

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, READINGS, FILMS, ASSIGNMENTS

- Week One** **Race/Ethnicity and Film/Introduction to the Course**
April 6 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: Benshoff and Griffin, intro to Part 1, Chap 1, 2, 9, 12, &13.
VIEW: *The Color of Fear* (excerpt)
- Week Two** **Hollywood Images —Eras of their ways**
April 13 READ: Benshoff 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.
VIEW: *Ethnic Notions, Slaying the Dragon, Bowling for Columbine*

- Week Three The Colonizer/colonizing Gaze: Native Americans**
 April 20 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.
 VIEW: *Dances with Wolves, Smoke Signals*
- Week Four Exoticized Others: Orientalism and Hollywood**
 April 27 READ: Benschhoff and Griffin chap 6, “Asian Americans and American Film,” pp. 116-134;
 VIEW *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon; Rush Hour; Joy Luck Club*
- Week Five “The White [Story of the] Hood”**
 May 4 READ Denzin, Chaps 2-4; Benschhoff and Griffin, Chaps 4 and 7
 VIEW: *Monsters Ball, Grand Canyon, Dangerous Minds*
1st Paper Due
- Week Six Black and Brown Hood: Boyz Rule**
 May 11 READ Denzin, Chaps 5-6,
 VIEW: *Superfly, Boyz N the Hood, American Me, Set it Off, Mi Vida Loca*
- Week Seven “Reversing the Lens”**
 May 18 READ Denzin Chap 7
 VIEW: *Do the Right Thing, Bamboozled, Zoot Suit*
- Week Eight Hoodified HeLL-A?**
 May 25 READ Bernstein (Chap 9 in Xing and Hirabayashi), “Screens and Bars”
 VIEW: *Crash*
2nd Paper Due
- Week Nine New Aesthetic**
 June 1 READ (in Xing and Hirabayashi) Huaco-Nuzum, Chap 5, “El Espejo/The Mirror,” and Adeeko, Chap 6, “Mississippi Masala: Crossing Desire and Interest.”
 VIEW: *Mississippi Masala, Real Women Have Curves*
- Week Ten The Critical Eye (that sees Racism and ????)**
 June 8 READ Stockdill, Park and Pellow (Chap 12 in Xing and Hirabayashi), “Beyond the Hollywood Hype.”
 VIEW: *TBA*
- FINAL: Old and/or New?