

AMH4317/01B2
History by Hollywood
Race and Representation in the Western (and some other genres)
Fall 2018

Instructor: Louise Newman, Associate Professor
Time: Course meets MWF period 7 (1:55-2:45) in Flint 111
Office Hrs: MW, period 6 (12:45-1:35) in Flint 212
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Course Description

This course focuses primarily on five Hollywood westerns in an effort to understand how that genre has become so important in depicting ideal/idealized racial identities, gender roles and sexual behaviors, and in constructing specific understandings of our nation's history.

However, first we will view and discuss *Zootopia* (2016), an animated film for children, in order to become conversant with filmic tropes and narratives that are commonly used to represent American beliefs about the nature of an ideal(ized) multiracial society. Then we will look to contemporary westerns that use romantic relationships that cross either racial or gender boundaries to capture the impact that history has had on individuals and society. First, we will examine *Thunderheart* (Michael Apted, 1992), a fictionalized treatment of the American Indian Movement's involvement on the Pine Ridge Reservation of the 1970s, comparing it to a documentary, *Incident at Oglala* (Apted, 1992) that the same director made about the same subject. Then we will examine three films that challenge, not always successfully, the trope of white saviors, analyzing *Thelma & Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991), a film that is infused with a sensibility made possible by second-wave feminism; *Lone Star* (John Sayles, 1996), which is set in the 1990s but uses flashbacks to reflect on the 1960s through the trope of an inter-racial romance between an Anglo sheriff and a Chicana schoolteacher, and Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), which is also set in the 1960s, but which explores homophobia—both internalized and external variants. Finally, we will study *Smoke Signals* (1998), a film made by native-American director (Chris Eyre) and script writer (Sherman Alexie) that directly challenges Hollywood's racial constructions of the Indian and representations of U.S. history.

Students will learn how to situate these Hollywood westerns in various historical contexts so as to speculate about how they were understood by audiences at their original release dates, along with what meanings these texts may hold for us today. One of our central concerns will be to ask whether the meanings of these films have changed over time—taking us into the thorny area of how best to interpret cultural texts that are produced in one historical moment (about another historical moment) but continue to circulate in a third historical moment.

We will also explore what makes a Hollywood film “good” from a historical, as opposed to aesthetic, perspective. Is it some correspondence/affirmation of an already-known past, or an ability to offer new insights and perspectives about history? Is it because the film lends itself to competing interpretations or generates meaningful reflection? Or perhaps the historical value of a film lies elsewhere—in the way it changes our understanding of both past and present, as well as how we think about the possibilities for the future.

Course Objectives

- To gain an appreciation for how film draws on popular ideologies to shape our understanding of both past and present
- To complicate conventional understandings of truth, objectivity, causality, reality, facts, evidence, etc.
- To make students better readers and interpreters of cultural texts, especially those texts that purport to be “based on a true story” or offer insight into history
- To further develop students' critical reading, writing, and thinking skills

Required Readings

- **Benshoff**, Harry M. and Griffin, Sean. *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality at the Movies*. (2004, 2009). Either edition.
- **Smith**, Greg M. *What Media Classes Really Want to Discuss: A Student Guide*. Routledge, 2011. (free electronic copy available from Course Reserves)

Articles

Electronic copies (PDFs) of the following articles are available through Course reserves and can be accessed from the course's website on Canvas.

- **Burgoyne**, Robert. "Native America, *Thunderheart*, and the National Imaginary." *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 38-56.
- **Cobb**, Amanda J. "This is What it Means to Say *Smoke Signals*." *Hollywood's Indians: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*. Eds. O'Connor, Peter C. and John E. O'Connor. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998, 206-228.
- **Connelly**, Sherryl. "Two Filmmakers Shatter American Stereotypes." *Indie Magazine*. (July 1998): 30-31, 38.
- **Feraci**, Devin. "Zootopia review: A Muddled Mess of Racial Messaging." (March 2016), available at "<http://birthmoviesdeath.com/2016/03/03/zootopia-review-a-muddled-mess-of-racial-messaging...-and-cute-animals>
- **Fregoso**, Rosa Linda "Reproduction and Miscegenation on the Borderlands," along with Ann DuCille's response, in *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader*. Ed. Arredondo, Gabriela, et. al. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003, 323-353.
- **Grant**, Barry Keith. *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology*, Wallflower Press, 2007, p. 8- 17.
- **Keller**, James R. and **Jones**, Anne Goodwyn. "Brokeback Mountain: Masculinity and Manhood." *Studies in Popular Culture* 30.2 (Spring 2008): 21-36.
- **Klopotek**, Brian. "'I Guess Your Warrior Look Doesn't Work Every Time': Challenging Indian Masculinity in the Cinema." *Across the Great Divide: Cultures of Manhood in the American West*. Eds. Basso, Matthew, Laura McCall and Dee Garceau. New York: Routledge, 2001, 251-273.
- **Leung**, William. "So Queer yet so Straight: Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* and *Brokeback Mountain*." *Journal of Film and Video* 60.1 (2008): 23-43.
- **Madison**, Kelly J. "Legitimation Crisis and Containment: The 'Anti-Racist-White-Hero' Film." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*. 16.4 (December 1999): 399-416.
- **Magowan**, Kim. "'Blood Only Means What You Let It': Incest and Miscegenation in John Sayles' *Lone Star*." *Film Quarterly* 57 (Fall 2003): 20-31.
- **Mihelich**, John. "Smoke or Signals? American Popular Culture and the Challenge to Hegemonic Images of American Indians in Native American Film," *Wicazo SA Review* 16.2 (Autumn 2001): 129-137.
- **Reed**, T.V. "Old Cowboys, New Indians: Hollywood Frames the America Indian." *Wicazo SA Review* (Summer 2001): 75-96.
- **Rosenstone**, Robert. "The Historical Film." *Visions of the Past*, 1995, 45-79.
- **Sayles**, John and Smith, Gavin. *Sayles on Sayles*. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1998, 217-233.
- **West**, Dennis and West, Joan M. "Sending Cinematic Smoke Signals: An Interview with Sherman Alexie." *Cineaste* 23.4 (1998): 28-31.

Additional readings, including film reviews, interviews with directors, and podcasts/websites are also required and appear in the "Readings" and "Additional Activities" sections on Canvas.

Hollywood films to be screened at home

(Listed in the order in which they will be viewed). Some can be accessed through the course website on Canvas, but students may prefer to buy/rent/stream films in order to have a better viewing experience.

- *Zootopia* (2016)
- *Thunderheart* (Michael Apted, 1992)
- *Thelma & Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991)

- *Lone Star* (John Sayles, 1996).
- *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005).
- *Smoke Signals* (Chris Eyre, 1998).
- In addition, students will choose several **additional films** to watch to use in comparative essays and the final project.

Documentaries (some screened at home, some screened in class)

- *American Storytellers* (Kevin Mukherji, 2003).
- *Ethnic Notions*.
- *Incident at Oglala* (Michael Apted, 1992).
- *Reel Injun* (Neil Diamond, Catherine Bainbridge, Jeremiah Hayes, 2009).
- *We Shall Remain: America Through Native Eyes* (Chris Eyre, 2009).

Points Assigned (1000 pts total)

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| • Attendance | 100 pts |
| • Essay on <i>Zootopia</i> & second animated film | 100 pts |
| • 2 Portfolio assignments (200 pts each) | 400 pts |
| • Final assignment (on a non-syllabus film) | 400 pts |

Grading Scale

Overall letter grades for the course will be assigned according to the following scale:

Letter Grade	Total Points	GPA Equivalent
A	950-1000	4.0
A-	900-949	3.67
B+	875-899	3.33
B	850-874	3.0
B-	800-849	2.67
C+	775-799	2.33
C	750-774	2.0
C-	700-749	1.67
D+	675-699	1.33
D	650-674	1.0
D-	600-649	0.67
E	<600	0

Policies and expectations

- **Format:** This course meets two or three times a week and will be conducted in a mixed lecture-workshop-seminar format.
- **Attendance:** Because so much of the course depends on in-class exercises, discussions, and presentations, students' attendance at every scheduled class session is critical. 100 points are allocated to attendance. If you have one absence, you will receive 90 of these 100 points, 2 absences 80 points, 3 absences 70 points. If you are absent more than three times, then you will receive 0 points out of the 100 allocated for attendance, and additional penalties may be applied. If you have five or more absences, you will be asked to withdraw from the course or risk a failing grade.

- **General Courtesy:** Please do not come late to class or leave early. If there are special circumstances that prevent you from being on time, or staying throughout the time period, please let the instructor know in advance of class.
- **Late work** will not be accepted unless there are exceptional circumstances beyond the student's control. Please let the instructor know of any adverse circumstances that may affect your ability to complete assignments on time.
- **Special Accommodations:** Students needing special accommodations must register with the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc> **during the first week of the semester** and have that office communicate with the instructor.

All students should observe the University of Florida's standards of academic honesty.

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/academic.php>

Acts of dishonesty, cheating and plagiarism include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Turning in a paper that was written by someone else (i.e., papers written by another student, a research service, or downloaded off the Internet); or written by you for another course.
- Copying, verbatim, a portion of text from the work of another author without using quotation marks and acknowledging the source through a commonly accepted style of footnoting
- Paraphrasing (i.e., restating in your own words) text written by another author without referencing that author, both within in the text and using a commonly accepted style of footnoting
- Using a unique idea or concept, which you discovered in a specific reading, website, blog, discussion board, etc., without acknowledging the original author and source, both within the text and by using a commonly accepted style of footnoting