

AMH4317/4D89
History by Hollywood
Race and Representation in the Western
Fall 2019

Instructor: Louise Newman, Associate Professor
Time: Course meets TR periods 5-6 (11:45-1:40) and 6 (12:50-1:40) Flint 105
Office Hrs: Tuesdays, 1:45-2:45 in Flint 212
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Course Description

This course focuses primarily on six Hollywood westerns, released from 1956 through 2005, which consider racial identities and race conflict, gender roles and sexual behaviors, and major events in U.S. society—and to a lesser extent on four recent television/streaming series (*Deadwood*, *Dr. Quin Medicine Woman*, *Justified*, and *Longmire*) that have adapted the conventions of the western into a new format. The first film we will discuss is John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), a classic historical western; 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. The first contemporary western we will examine is *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 *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; *Thelma & Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991), a film that is infused with a sensibility made possible by second-wave feminism; and *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005), which is also set in the 1960s, but which explores homophobia—both internalized and external variants. The last Hollywood film we will study is *Smoke Signals* (Chris Eyre, 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 "official" versions 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 discuss what makes a Hollywood film or a television series "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 and television westerns draw 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

Articles and Excerpts

Electronic copies (PDFs) of the following articles are available through Course reserves and can be accessed from the course’s website on Canvas. Additional articles may be added as students/instructor identify relevant material.

- **Benshoff, Harry & Griffin, Sean.** “The Evolving Western,” *America on Film*. Wiley, 110-122.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Milch, David.** *Deadwood: Stories of the Black Hills*.
- **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.
- **Pye, Douglas.** “Double Vision: Point of View in the Searchers,” *Book of Westerns*
- **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.
- **Smith, Greg M.** *What Media Classes Really Want to Discuss: A Student Guide*. Routledge, 2011.
- **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 and television series 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.

- *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956)
- *Thunderheart* (Michael Apted, 1992)
- *Thelma & Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991)
- *Lone Star* (John Sayles, 1996).
- *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005).
- *Smoke Signals* (Chris Eyre, 1998).
- *Deadwood* (David Milch, creator, HBO, 2004, 3 seasons)
- *Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman* (Beth Sullivan, creator CBS & Sullivan Co, 1993-1998, 5 seasons) <https://www.drquinnmd.com>
- *Justified* (Graham Yost, creator, FX, 2010-2015, 7 seasons)
- *Longmire* (John Coveney and Hunt Baldwin, creators. A&E, Netflix, 2012-2017)

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

- *American Storytellers* (Kevin Mukherji, 2003).
- *Ethnic Notions* (Marlon Riggs, 1986).

- *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)

- Attendance 100 pts
- 2 Portfolio assignments (200 pts each) 400 pts
- Final assignment 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 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.

- **Preparation:** Students are expected to have completed all reading and writing assignments by the beginning of class on the date specified on the syllabus. Whenever possible, students should bring hard copies of the required readings to class. Students who come to class unprepared to discuss the readings, i.e. without notes, or without the assignments that are due that day, may be dismissed from class and counted as absent.
- **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.
- **Course Evaluations:** Students in this class are participating in the pilot evaluation of the new course evaluation system called GatorEvals. The new evaluation system is designed to be more informative to instructors so that teaching effectiveness is enhanced and to be more seamlessly linked to UF's CANVAS learning management system. Students can complete their evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A_ufl.bluera.com_ufl_d=DwIGaQ&c=sJ6xIWYx-zLMB3EPkvcnVg&r=1qtWVKU2uNohMAWR5pYYVu0F_ty9jxk4wl-DcSEfmKub76k8eaDIYyGQkZMpCQZ6&m=KCQMaruvDccGkQ95LBWWejChKpHpd3olzGps63zo0Ao&s=2ry1lk1Sd2MT9xMTXgaRslOLmzE7-Mky8W2E_HUO3wQ&e= Please note your other classes this semester may be evaluated in the current GatorRater online evaluation system at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu> <<https://evaluations.ufl.edu/>> . Thank you for serving as a partner in this important effort.

All students should observe the University of Florida's standards of academic honesty. <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>

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

- Turning in a paper that was written by someone else or written by you for another course.
- Copying or paraphrasing 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

- 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.

Overview of Topics and Readings

- Week 1. Aug 20, 22 Introduction to Visual Storytelling, Mythic Histories & the Western genre
Readings: Grant, Benshoff, Smith, Rosenstone
- Week 2. Aug 27, 29 The Classical Western: *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956)
Readings: Pye, Henderson, May
- Week 3 . Sept 3, 5 Mixed races, mixed messages in a modern moment:
Thunderheart (Michael Apted)
Readings: Burgoyne, Churchill
- Week 4. Sept 10, 12 White Heroes Reclaimed?: *Lone Star* (John Sayles)
Readings: Sayles, Fregoso & duCille, Magowan
- Week 5. Sept 17, 19 Gender and Genre, Part 1: *Thelma & Louise* (Ridley Scott)
Readings: Greenberg
- Week 6. Sept 24, 26 Gender and Genre, Part 2: *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee,)
Readings: Keller & Jones, Leung
- Week 7. Oct 1-8 No Class Meetings/Jewish holidays & Homecoming
Class meetings resume on Thursday, Oct 10.
Midterm Assignment Due
- Week 8. Oct 10 Revisioning Indians: *Smoke Signals* (Chris Eyre)
Readings: Cobb, Connelly, Klopotek, Mihelich, Freed, West
- Week 9. Oct 15/17 Deromanticizing the West/Deflating Western Myths:
Deadwood and *Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman*
Readings: Milch, *Fresh Air*
- Week 10. Oct 22,24 Buddies and Saviors: *Longmire* and *Justified*
- Week 11. Oct 29/31 Student Presentations
- Week 12. Nov 5/7 Student Presentations

Week 13. Nov 12/14 Student Presentations

Week 14. Nov 19/21 Student Presentations

Week 15. Nov 26-28. Thanksgiving Holiday. No Class Meetings

Week 16. Dec 3 (T) **Final Assignment Due**