

PLEASE NOTE: THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO REVISION

January 15, 2009 12:10 PM

African American Cinema CTCS 407

Meeting Time: Tuesdays 2-5:50

Course Reserves:

<https://usc.ares.atlas-sys.com/>

Blackboard Site:

Instructors:

Professor Keeling

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Teaching Assistant:

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Course Description

This course surveys the history, theories, debates, and controversies that have characterized African American cinema, with an emphasis on the relationship between African American cinema and American culture and politics more broadly. One of the debates within African American film scholarship has centered on the problems of defining the terrain of African American cinema. This course takes a broad view by including films that have been important to the public discourse about Black existence in America, even if those films were not directed by African Americans. Though our primary focus will be on black independent film, we also will study a couple of landmark television series featuring African Americans and put those into dialogue with the history of African Americans in film.

The primary goals of this class are:

- To provide an historical overview of the development of African American cinema and media culture since the invention of film.
- To analyze selected films within the context of contemporary theories and debates about race and blackness.
- To provide tools and strategies that encourage and support students' on-going critical engagements with and assessments of contemporary media culture's images of African Americans.

All required films and television shows will be screened in class.

Reading and Screening Schedule

Required Readings

Available at the Bookstore:

Diawara, Manthia, Ed. Black American Cinema. Routledge, 1993.

Gray, Herman. Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness. University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

Haggins, Bambi. Laughing Mad: The Black Comic Persona in Post-Soul America. Rutgers University Press, 2007.

Massood, Paula, Ed. The Spike Lee Reader. Temple University Press, 2008.

Robinson, Cedric J. Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film before World War II. The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Smith, Valerie, Ed. Representing Blackness: Issues in Film and Video. Rutgers University Press, 1997.

Stewart, Jacqueline. Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity. University of California Press, 2005.

Available On Electronic Reserve:

Wallace, Michelle, "Oscar Micheaux's *Within Our Gates*: The Possibilities for Alternative Visions" from Eds. Pearl Bowser, Jane Gaines, and Charles Musser. Oscar Micheaux and His Circle: African American Filmmaking and Race Cinema in the Silent Era. Indiana University Press, 2001.

Hall, Stuart, "What is This 'Black' In Black Popular Culture" from Ed. Gina Dent. Black Popular Culture. New Press, 1998.

Cripps, Thomas, "Black Film As Genre: Definitions" from Ed. Michael T. Martin. Cinemas of the Black Diaspora: Diversity, Dependence, and Oppositionality. Wayne State University Press. 1995.

Martin, Michael T., "Framing the 'Black' in Black Diasporic Cinemas" from Ed. Michael T. Martin. Cinemas of the Black Diaspora: Diversity, Dependence, and Oppositionality. Wayne State University Press. 1995.

Acham, Christine, "Respect Yourself: Black Women and Power in *Julia* and *Good Times*" from Revolution Televised: Prime-Time and the Struggle for Black Power. University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

Keeling, Kara, "A Black Belt in Barstool" from The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense. Duke University Press, 2007.

James, David E. Selections from "Minority Cinemas" from The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles. University of California Press, 2005.

hooks, bell, "The Oppositional Gaze" from Black Looks: Race and Representation. South End Press, 1999.

Taylor, Clyde, "Paths to Enlightenment: Heroes, Rebels, Thinkers" from Eds. Phyllis R. Klotman and Janet K. Cutler. Struggles for Representation: African American Documentary Film and Video. Indiana University Press, 1999.

Massood, Paula, "Harlem is Heaven: City Motifs in Race Films from the Early Sound Era" from Black City Cinema. Temple University Press, 2003.

Massood, Paula, "Out of the Ghetto Into the Hood: Changes in the Construction of Black City Cinema" from Black City Cinema. Temple University Press, 2003.

Recommended Readings (Available on Reserve)

"Writing A Film Essay: Observations, Arguments, Research, and Analysis" from Patricia White and Timothy Corrigan, The Film Experience: An Introduction, pages 474-516

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

All texts on the schedule are required

- You will be held responsible for careful readings and analyses of the written texts and films on the syllabus. You are required to read each text by the date it is due to be discussed in class. You are required to screen each film during the class for which it is assigned. Screenings also will be available on reserve. Readings marked “recommended” may be read at your discretion.
- You will be held responsible for all material presented during each class meeting.
- You are required to read the readings outside of class and come to class prepared to discuss them.

Regular attendance and class participation

- You are expected to attend every class meeting on time, and prepared to participate in the work scheduled for that class. If you are absent more than 1.5 times, your final grade drops by 1/3 and it drops by 1/3 for each absence after that. No matter how good your excuse is for being absent, any absence counts and you are always accountable for any work due, even on a day that you are absent from class.
- Being on time means being in the classroom at the time the class is scheduled to begin. If you are more than fifteen minutes late, you will be given half an absence.
- Good class participation involves contributing to the ongoing discussion of the class in an informed and responsible manner, being attentive to that conversation, and being **respectful** of the participants in it. Monopolizing discussion time and/or interacting aggressively with your classmates are examples of disrespectful behaviors. If I have to talk to you regarding problematic behavior in class, you may consider our discussion to be your first warning. Unless your behavior changes, there will be no second warning before you are asked to drop or withdraw from the class. If you are asked to drop or withdraw from the class, you are expected to do so.
- From time to time, you may be asked to write in class on a topic of concern to the course. These in-class writings are required as part of your class participation and they cannot be made up should you miss class.
- It is highly recommended that you keep a screening log for your reference during class discussion of the screenings. The format of the screening log is up to you. For ideas on how to keep a good screening log, see the recommended reading “Writing A Film Essay: Observations, Arguments, Research, and Analysis” from Patricia White and Timothy Corrigan, The Film Experience: An Introduction, pages 474-516. (Available on reserve.)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS, CON'T.

Timely submission of all writing assignments

- All essays must be typed, double spaced, in a 12 point font, and use MLA style citations.
- On all written work, include your name, the course name, my name, and your TA's name. All written work should have a title and your pages should be numbered.
- All writing assignments will receive a letter grade or credit for completion.

Timely submission of any writing assigned in class at my discretion.

There may be times when I decide it is necessary to require a writing assignment from you that is not on the schedule. These assignments will be no more than 3 pages in length and will receive a letter grade. They will count towards your class participation grade.

Please Note:

All writing assignments are due at the beginning of class. Unless special arrangements have been confirmed with the TA at least two days before the due date, the grade for a late paper will drop a grade each day it is late. This means that an "A" paper becomes a "B" paper a day after it is due, and a "C" paper a day after that. A "B" paper becomes a "C" paper a day after it is due, and so on.

Screening Log:

It is highly recommended that you keep a screening log consisting of notes and reflections made during or immediately after completing a screening. This log may include questions that arise for you while engaging with the film, insights you may have had about the texts, and anything else that comes to you while you are focusing on the material for this course. This log will inform your class participation. You should bring your screening log to each class meeting.

Reading and Screening Schedule

GRADES

Your final grade for the course will be calculated according to the following formula and then adjusted to reflect any penalties due to absences:

Response Assignments:	30%
Midterm Exam:	25%
Final Exam:	30%
Class Participation:	15%
Writing Assignments:	50%
Instructors' evaluation of your participation:	50%

PLAGIARISM AND THE HONOR SYSTEM

In keeping with the Statement of Academic Honesty, all students enrolled in this course are required to submit original work and to cite uses of the work and contributions of others. While you are encouraged to exchange ideas and information about the course material both during the class discussion and in other settings, any ideas expressed in written work for this course that you obtained from someone else must be cited. Please be sure that you understand what constitutes plagiarism. If you have any questions concerning plagiarism in general or the ways that you are bound by the Honor System in this course, be certain that you ask them.

Please note: plagiarism is grounds for automatic failure of this course and violations of the Honor System will be reported.

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Date	Topic	Reading	Screening	Hand in
Jan 13, 2009	Intro to Course Cinematic Constructions of Blackness		Selections from <i>Birth of A Na- tion</i> Edison Shorts	
Jan 20, 2009	Early African American Cin- ema	Robinson, 82- 126 Gaines, "Fire and Desire" from <u>Black American Cin- ema</u> Robinson, 180- 271 (REC)	<i>Within Our Gates</i>	Response #1 Sign up for re- maining written assignments
Jan 27, 2009	Early African American Cin- ema: Specta- torship	Stewart, 93- 186 Wallace, "Within Our Gates" (REC on reserve)	<i>Imitation of Life</i>	
Feb 3, 2009	Theories of Black Film	Lott, "A No- Theory Theory" and Lubiano, "But Compared to What?" from <u>Representing Blackness</u> Hall, "What is This Black" (on reserve) Cripps, "Black Film as Genre: Definitions" from <u>Cinemas of the Black Di- aspora</u> (on re- serve)	<i>Carmen Jones</i>	

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Date	Topic	Reading	Screening	Hand in
Feb 10, 2009	Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness	Gray, "Intro" and Chapter 1 Acham, Chapter 5 of <u>Revolution Televised</u> (reserve)	<i>Julia</i> <i>I Spy</i>	
Feb 17, 2009	Laughing Mad	Haggins, 14-68, 178-236 REC: Haggins, 1-13, 99-131	<i>In Living Color</i> <i>The Chappelle Show</i>	
Feb 24, 2009	How to Eat Your Watermelon in Front of White People and Enjoy It	Keeling, "A Black Belt in Barstool" from <u>The Witch's Flight</u> (reserve) James, 294-306 and 320-336 from <u>The Most Typical Avante-Garde</u> (reserve)	<i>Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song</i> Selections from <i>Shaft</i> , <i>Superfly</i> , <i>Foxy Brown</i>	
Mar 3, 2009	Midterm Exam		<i>Killer of Sheep</i>	
Mar 10, 2009	LA Filmmakers	Selections TBA from <u>Black American Cinema</u> Murashige from <u>Representing Blackness</u>	<i>Bush Mama</i>	
Mar 24, 2009	Black Women and Independent Cinema	Selections TBA from <u>Black American Cinema</u> hooks (reserve)	<i>Daughters of the Dust</i> Selections from <i>She's Gotta Have It</i>	

Date	Topic	Reading	Screening	Hand in
Mar 31, 2009	Spike Lee	hooks, McKelley, and Wallace from <u>The Spike Lee Reader</u>	<i>Do the Right Thing</i>	
Apr 7, 2009	Struggles for Representation: Documenting Blackness	Taylor, "Paths to Enlightenment" (reserve)	<i>Black Is, Black Ain't</i>	
Apr 14, 2009	Ghettocentric Films	Selections from <u>Black City Cinema</u> (reserve)	<i>Boyz in the Hood</i>	
Apr 21, 2009	Black Queer Cinema	Hammonds, Black (W)holes (differences 6.n2-3,1994) Zimmer, "Histories of the Watermelon Woman" (Camera Obscura 68, 23:2)	<i>The Watermelon Woman</i>	
Apr 28, 2009	Film History circa 2000 Review and Wrap Up		<i>Bamboozled</i>	
	Final Exam			Final Exam