Dr. Todd Boyd

CTCS 564 – The Blaxploitation Era (Fall 2019)
Wednesdays 1-3:50 PM (SCA 216) / 4-6:50 PM (Screening in SCA 112)

Dr. Boyd (tboyd@cinema.usc.edu)
Office Hours: Wednesday/Thursday 12:00-12:45 (Office hours appointments are to be made through the Cinema and Media Studies office: mediastudies@cinema.usc.edu/213-740-3334)

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will explore the often misunderstood, highly contested, yet no doubt compelling and influential urban film movement from the 1970s commonly known as Blaxploitation (“Black Exploitation”). Beginning in the late 1960s, focusing on the historic success of iconic actor Sidney Poitier and the emergence of the ideology often referred to as “black power,” the course will chart the changes taking place in Hollywood and in American society that eventually lead to the birth of a new style of black cinema in the 1970s. From here, the course will focus on a number of significant films that come to define the genre in question during the period immediately following the landmark Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. The course will study the films in question as an opportunity to gain a broader understanding of the historical, political, social, cultural, and stylistic issues that defined America during a significant transitional period, roughly from the late 1960s through the late 1970s. In addition, the course will connect the films to other examples of 1970s popular culture (music, sports, television, comedy) in the interest of defining the period as an overall era. Finally, the course will analyze the resurgence of Blaxploitation beginning in the late 1980s and its influence on contemporary popular culture.

COURSE READINGS:

Christine Acham, Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle For Black Power (University of Minnesota Press, 2005)

Donald Bogle, Toms, Coons, Mammies, Mulattoes, and Bucks (Continuum, Fourth Edition, 2001)


Stephane Dunn, Baad Bitches and Sassy Supermamas: Black Power Action Films (University of Illinois Press, 2008)

Norman Mailer, The Fight (Vintage, 1997)

Iceberg Slim (Robert Beck), Pimp: The Story of My Life (Cash Money Content, 2011).

“The Blaxploitation Era” Course Reader (CR) available on Blackboard
**Course Schedule:**

**August 28**
**SCREENING:**
_In the Heat of the Night_ (Norman Jewison, 1967)

**READINGS:**

*Nelson George, “A Chronicle of Post-Soul Black Culture” _Buppies, B-Boys, Baps & Bohos: Notes on Post-Soul Black Culture_. (CR)

*Nelson George, “Video Blaculinity” _Buppies, B-Boys, Baps & Bohos: Notes on Post-Soul Black Culture_. (CR)

**September 4**
**SCREENING:**
_Dutchman_ (Anthony Harvey, 1967)

_Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song_ (Melvin Van Peebles, 1971)

**READINGS:**
*Donald Bogle, (Chapter 8) “The 1970s: Black Bucks and a Black Movie Boom” _Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks_.


*Huey P. Newton, “He Won’t Bleed Me: A revolutionary analysis of Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song” _To Die For The People_. (CR)


**September 11**
**SCREENING:** _Shaft_ (Gordon Parks, 1971)

**READINGS:**

*Todd Boyd, “Blaxploitation's Baadasssss History,” _TheRoot.com_. (CR)

September 18
SCREENING: Superfly (Gordon Parks Jr., 1972)

READINGS:


September 25
SCREENING: The Mack (Michael Campus, 1973)

Iceberg Slim: Portrait of a Pimp (Jorge Hinojosa, 2012)

READINGS:
*Iceberg Slim, Pimp: The Story of My Life


*Todd Boyd, “To the Player’s Ball and Beyond. Right On.” Los Angeles Times. (CR)

*Mark Skillz, “How Ex-Pimp Robert Transformed into Writer Iceberg Slim, Introducing a Genre for Literature, Film and Music” Hip Hop 101A. (CR)


October 2
SCREENING: Coffy (Jack Hill, 1973)

READINGS:
*Stephane Dunn, Baad Bitches and Sassy Supermamas


*Mia Mask, “Pam Grier: A Phallic Idol of Perversity and Sexual Charisma” Divas on Screen: Black Women in American Film. (CR)

* Michelle Wallace, “Black Macho” (Chapters 1) Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman. (CR)

*Paula Giddings, “The Woman’s Movement and Black Discontent” When and Where I Enter. (CR)
October 9  
**SCREENING:**  
_Claudine_, John Berry (1974)

**READINGS:**  
Stephane Dunn, _Baad Bitches and Sassy Supermamas_, cont.


Michelle Wallace, “Black Macho” (Chapters 2) _Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman_. (CR)

October 16  
**Research/Critical Essay (No Class)**

October 23  
**SCREENING:**  
_Wattstax_ (Mel Stuart, 1973) 98min

**READINGS:**  


October 30  
**SCREENING:**  
_Uptown Saturday Night_, Sidney Poitier (1975)

**READINGS:**  
*Mark Anthony Neal,” Sweetback’s Revenge: Gangsters, Blaxploitation, and Black Middle Class Identity,” _Soul Babies_ (CR)

November 6
SCREENING:  
*When We Were Kings* (Leon Gast, 1996) 89min

READING:

*Todd Boyd, “Esquire Covers Commemorate Boxing’s Prime.”* *ESPN.com* (CR)

*Todd Boyd, “Cheap Thrills” *Notorious PhD.* (CR)

*Norman Mailer, *The Fight.*

November 13
SCREENING:  
*The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (Ivan Dixon, 1973) 102min

READING:


*Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet”* *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements.* (CR)

November 20
SCREENING:  
*Richard Pryor, Live in Concert* (1979)

READING:

*Todd Boyd, “Dear Academy: Give Richard Pryor the Lifetime Achievement Oscar”* *TheRoot.com.* (CR)


*Mel Watkins, Prologue “Black Humor… what is it” and Chapter 13 “Pryor and Thereafter…On the Real Side”* *On the Real Side.* (CR)

*Glenda R. Carpio, Chapter 2 “The Conjurer Recoils: Slavery in Richard Pryor’s Performances and*
November 27
NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)

December 4
Screening: Dolemite, D’Urville Martin (1975)

READINGS:

December 11
Critical Essay due

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
Critical Essay: The final assignment is a 5,000-6,000-word critical essay which analyzes and critically engages the individuals, issues, themes, and ideas that have defined this course. You are to select one or more of the films screened in the course for the purpose of building an essay that highlights the relevant issues represented by the film/films. Your essay should include references to course lectures, readings, additional films and where relevant, other forms of media. While you are free to select your own topic, examples of potential topics might include, for instance, the image of Sidney Poitier and the Civil Rights Movement, the politics of Sweetback, Pam Grier and the role of black women in 1970s Hollywood, etc.

The Critical Essay is due on December 11. Email your critical essay to tboyd@cinema.usc.edu no later than 7:00pm (PST)

Attendance/participation: This is a graduate course that will revolve around weekly in-class discussions relative to the issues at hand. You are expected to participate in these seminar discussions, as the content of the discussions form a significant part of the overall course experience. Thus your weekly attendance and participation in course discussions are required components necessary to perform well in this course.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained through DSP. Please be sure that the letter is delivered to Dr. Boyd as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 AM-5:00 PM, Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213)740-0776.