

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)

Todd Boyd, *The Notorious Ph.D.'s Guide to the Super Fly 70's: A Connoisseur's Journey Through the Fabulous Flix, Hip Sounds, and Cool Vibes that Defined a Decade* (Harlem Moon/Broadway Books, 2007).

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:

*Donald Bogle, (Chapter 6) "The 1950s: Black Stars" & (Chapter 7) "The 1960s: Problem People Into Militants." *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks*.

*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*.

*Todd Boyd, "The Wrong Nigga To Fuck Wit: Sweetback and the Dilemma of the African-American Avant-Garde." (CR)

*Huey P. Newton, "He Won't Bleed Me: A revolutionary analysis of Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song" *To Die For The People*. (CR)

*Lerone Bennett Jr, "The Emancipation Orgasm: Sweetback in Wonderland," *Ebony Magazine* (September 1971). (CR)

September 11

SCREENING: *Shaft* (Gordon Parks, 1971)

READINGS:

*Todd Boyd, "Hot Buttered Soul" (Part 1), "Hell Up in Hollywood," and "Shaft." pp. 3-31. *The Notorious Ph.D.'s Guide to the Super Fly 70s*.

*Todd Boyd, "Blaxploitation's Baadasssss History," *TheRoot.com*. (CR)

*Ed Guerrero, "The Rise and Fall of Blaxploitation." *Framing Blackness: The African-American Image in Film*. (CR)

September 18

SCREENING: *Superfly* (Gordon Parks Jr., 1972)

READINGS:

*Todd Boyd, "The Return of Blaxploitation: Why the Time is Right to Bring Back Shaft and Foxy Brown." *The Guardian* (CR)

*Todd Boyd, "*Super Fly*" pp. 31-37 and "Curtis Mayfield, *Super Fly* (1972)" pp. 106-113. *The Notorious Ph.D.'s Guide to the Super Fly 70s*.

*Mark Jacobson, "The Return of Superfly" *New York Magazine*. (CR)

*Mark Jacobson, "Lords of Dope-town" *New York Magazine*. (CR)

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, "*The Mack*" pp. 37-43 *The Notorious Ph.D.'s Guide to the Super Fly 70s*.

*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)

*Justin Gifford, "Hollywood" *Street Poison: The Biography of Iceberg Slim*. (CR)

October 2

SCREENING:

Coffy (Jack Hill, 1973)

READINGS:

*Stephane Dunn, *Baad Bitches and Sassy Supermamas*

*Todd Boyd, "Pam Grier" pp. 51-56 *The Notorious Ph.D.'s Guide to the Super Fly 70s*.

*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.

*Christine Acham, "Black Women and Power in Julia and Good Times." *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power*.

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:

*Todd Boyd, "Wattstax" pp.77-78, "Richard Pryor" pp. 43-51, and "Rudy Ray Moore" pp. 62-67 *The Notorious Ph.D.'s Guide to the Super Fly 70s*.

*Mark Anthony Neal, "Soul for Sale" *What The Music Said*. (CR)

*Mark Anthony Neal, "Soul for Real" *What The Music Said*. (CR)

*Rickey Vincent, "Black Rock: Givin' It Back" *Funk: The Music, The People and the Rhythm of the One*. (CR)

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)

*Christine Acham, "What You See is What You Get: Soul Train and the Flip Wilson Show." & "This Ain't No Junk: Sanford and Son and African American Humor." *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power*.

November 6

SCREENING:

When We Were Kings (Leon Gast, 1996) 89min

READINGS:

*Todd Boyd, "Whatcha See is Whatcha Get" (Part 4) pp. 161-194 *The Notorious Ph.D.'s Guide to the Super Fly 70s*.

*Todd Boyd, "Esquire Covers Commemorate Boxing's Prime." *ESPN.com* (CR)

*Todd Boyd, "Cheap Thrills" *Notorious Ph.D.* (CR)

*Norman Mailer, *The Fight*.

November 13

SCREENING:

The Spook Who Sat by the Door (Ivan Dixon, 1973) 102min

READINGS:

*Todd Boyd, "*The Spook Who Sat by The Door*" pp. 68-72 *The Notorious Ph.D.'s Guide to the Super Fly 70s*.

*Malcolm X, "Message to the Grassroots" *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*. (CR)

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

November 20

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

READINGS:

*Todd Boyd, "Richard Pryor's America" *Richard Pryor, No Pryor Restraint: Life in Concert* (CR)

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

*Christine Acham, "That Nigger's Crazy: The Rise and Demise of the Richard Pryor Show" *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power*.

*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 Conjuror Recoils: Slavery in Richard Pryor's Performances and

Chappelle's Show"

November 27

NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)

December 4

Screening: *Dolemite*, D'Urville Martin (1975)

READINGS:

*Mel Watkins, Chapter 8 "Race Records and Black Films...Sounds and Visions in Black and Blue" and Chapter 11 "Folklore and Street Humor...If You're Grinnin' You're in 'em" *On the Real Side: A History of African American Comedy* (CR)

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.