

**AMH4317/01B2**  
**History by Hollywood**  
**Race and Representation in the Western**  
**Fall 2017**

**Instructor:** Louise Newman, Associate Professor  
**Time:** Course meets MWF period 7 (1:55-2:45) in Flint 105  
**Office Hrs:** MW, period 6 (12:45-1:35) in Flint 212  
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### **Course Description**

This course focuses on six Hollywood westerns, released from 1956 through 2003, which consider racial identities and race conflict, gender roles and sexual behaviors, and major events in U.S. society. Two of these films are historical westerns; four are contemporary westerns. In examining these films, we will analyze how filmmakers make use of historical settings and events (the settling of the western United States and the American Indian Movement, for example) to reflect on contemporary problems such as race relations, interracial relationships, masculine ideals, feminism, and homophobia. 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.

First we will view and discuss a recent release by Disney Studios, *Zootopia* (Bryan Howard and Rich Moore, 2016), in order to become conversant with filmic tropes and stereotypes that are used to represent race. Then we will turn to John Ford's classic western, *The Searchers* (1956), whose plot involves a white man's attempt to rescue his niece who has been abducted in an Indian attack in the 1870s and who comes close to killing her because he considers her to be irredeemably sullied by her marriage to an Indian. John Ford is credited with inventing/mastering many of the conventional themes and stereotypes we associate with the western genre (white male hero, Indian-as-savage), but in this film, he purposefully undercuts those stereotypes and offers us an opportunity to consider the politics of racial desegregation during the early 1950s.

Then we move into the 1990s to look at how a feminist director, Maggie Greenwald, reworks themes of the classic historical western in *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993), a film that is also set in the 1865-1890 period and is purportedly based on the "true story" of a white woman who passes for a man, and who-- as Greenwald imagines—voluntarily engages in a clandestine sexual relationship with her Chinese servant.

In our second unit, we will look to two contemporary westerns that again use romantic relationships that cross either racial or gender boundaries as a way to explore the impact that history has had on individuals and society. First, we will examine *Lone Star* (John Sayles, 1996), which is set in the 1990s but uses flashbacks to reflect on the 1960s through the trope of an incestuous inter-racial romance. Then we will turn to 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 look at two films made by native-American directors that directly challenge Hollywood's racial constructions of the Indian, ending the course with Chris Eyre's *Smoke Signals* (1998) and Sherman Alexie's *The Business of Fancydancing* (2002).

By the completion of the course, students will have carefully considered 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 Hollywood fictional films 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 offering insight into history
- To further develop students’ critical reading, writing, and thinking skills

### Required Readings/Screenings

The following text is widely available from online booksellers, including Amazon.com, which has inexpensive used copies for sale.

- **Smith**, Greg M. *What Media Classes Really Want to Discuss: A Student Guide*. Routledge, 2011.

Electronic copies (PDFs) of the following articles are available through ARES and can be accessed using the Course Reserves tab on Canvas. Five points of extra credit will be awarded for each selection that is printed out and brought to class on the appropriate day (up to a total of 100 points).

- **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.
- **Day**, Kirsten. “What Makes a Man to Wander: *The Searchers* as a *Western Odyssey*.” *Arethusa* 41.1 (Winter 2008). <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/232477>
- **Eckstein**, Arthur M. “Darkening Ethan: John Ford’s *The Searchers* (1956): From Novel to Screenplay to Screen.” *Cinema Journal* 38.1 (Autumn 1998): 3-24.
- **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 [about *Lone Star*], 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.
- **Henderson**, Brian. “*The Searchers*: An American Dilemma,” *Film Quarterly* 34.2 (Winter 1980-81): 9-23. (Article is longer but these are the only required pages.)
- **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.

- **Magowan**, Kim. “‘Blood Only Means What You Let It:’ Incest and Miscegenation in John Sayles’ *Lone Star*.” *Film Quarterly* 57 (Fall 2003): 20-31.
- **Matheson**, Sue. “‘Let’s Go Home, Debbie’: The Matter of Blood Pollution, Combat Culture and Cold War Hysteria in *The Searchers* (1956).” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* (2011): 50-58.
- **McManus**, Sheila. “Women and Mining,” *Choices & Chances: A History of Women in the U.S. West*. Wheeling, Ill: Harlan Davidson, Inc. and Cody, WY: The Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 2011, 125-144.
- **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.
- **Modleski**, Tania. “A Woman’s Gotta Do... What A Man’s Gotta Do? Cross-Dressing in the Western.” [about *Ballad of Little Jo*] *Signs* 22.3 (Spring 1997): 519-45.
- **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.
- **Youngberg**, Quentin. “Interpenetrations: Re-encoding the Queer Indian in Sherman Alexie’s *The Business of Fancysdancing*.” *Studies in American Literatures* 20. 1 (Spring 2008): 55-75.

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.

### Feature films to be screened at home

(Listed in the order in which they will be viewed). All except *Zootopia* 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*** (Bryan Howard and Rich Moore 2016). (Netflix streaming)
- ***The Searchers*** (John Ford, 1956).
- ***The Ballad of Little Jo*** (Maggie Greenwald, 1993).
- ***Lone Star*** (John Sayles, 1996).
- ***Brokeback Mountain*** (Ang Lee, 2005).
- ***Smoke Signals*** (Chris Eyre, 1998).
- ***The Business of Fancysdancing*** (Sherman Alexie, 2002).
- In addition, students will choose **an additional feature film** (not one listed above) to use as the basis for the final project.

### Documentaries (recommended)

- ***American Storytellers*** (Kevin Mukherji, 2003).

- **Reel Injun** (Neil Diamond, Catherine Bainbridge, Jeremiah Hayes, 2009). This documentary can be streamed on a number of websites for free. There is also a copy at Library West/Circulation Desk for on-site viewing only. For those who want to purchase their own copy, DVDs are available from Amazon.com.
- **We Shall Remain: America Through Native Eyes** (Chris Eyre, 2009). This 470-minute documentary aired on PBS as part of the “American Experience” series in 2009. It can be viewed for free on the PBS website or purchased as a 3-DVD set from Amazon.com.

### Assignments

- Essay on *Zootopia* (100 pts)
- 6 Short commentaries on the film westerns and relevant readings assigned on the syllabus. (600 points)
- **Final project** using Powerpoint on a film chosen by the student (that is not on the syllabus), due the last week of the semester. (200 points)

### Points Assigned (1000 pts total)

- Attendance 100 pts
- Essay on *Zootopia* 100 pts
- 6 Film Commentaries 600 pts
- Final assignment (on a non-syllabus film) 200 pts

### Grading Scale

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

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

## Policies and expectations

- **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. If you are absent more than two times, then you will receive 0 points out of the 100 allocated for attendance, and additional penalties may be applied.
- **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 period, please let the instructor know.
- **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.**

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

**Because of national and/or religious holidays, class will not meet on the following days.**

- September 4 (Mon) Labor Day
- September 24 (Fri) Rosh Hashanah
- September 29 (Fri) Yom Kippur
- October 6 (Fri) Homecoming
- November 10 (Fri) Veteran's Day
- November 22, 24 (Thanksgiving Break)