AMH 3931/4900
Hollywood’s Histories-- Race and Representation
Fall 2012

Dr. Louise Newman, lnewman@ufl.edu
Course meets T/R 7/7-8 in Flint 105
Office Hours R 11:45-12:45 a.m. in Keene Flint 224 (and by appointment)

Course Description

This course uses Hollywood films to examine cultural anxieties concerning racial identities, gender roles, and sexual behaviors in U.S. History, with an emphasis on the postwar period, from the mid 1950s through to the present. In addition to viewing eight Hollywood films, we will watch several documentaries and read film criticism and historiography in order to consider how various genres and media forms (e.g., Hollywood film, historical documentary and academic historiography) differently construct the politics, racial struggles, and social/sexual relations of the period under study.

Students will learn how to situate Hollywood films in their immediate historical context so as to speculate about how they were understood by audiences at their original release dates. 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 but continue to circulate in another. We will also explore 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? Or is it because it lends itself to competing interpretations or because it generates meaningful reflection? Or perhaps the historical value of a film lies elsewhere—playing a role not just in changing our understanding of the past, but also changing how we think about the present and the possibilities for the future.

We will begin the course by looking at westerns, focusing on John Ford’s classic, *The Searchers* (1956), whose plot involves the near-killing of a white woman who is considered to be irredeemably sullied because of her marriage to an Indian. From there, we will look at how a feminist director, Maggie Greenwald, reworked the themes of the classic western in *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993), a film that is based on the “true story” of a white woman who passes for a man, and who-- as Greenwald imagines—voluntarily engages in a hidden sexual relationship with her Chinese servant in the late nineteenth century. Then, we will explore *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), Ang Lee’s masterful exploration of homophobia—both internalized and external variants. From here, we will go on to look at other filmic commentaries on white racism, which we will examine through a quintessential white male/black male buddy film, *The Defiant Ones* (Stanley Kramer, 1958), white women and their black caretakers, *The Help* (2011), and interracial romances-- *Lone Star*, (John Sayles, 1996). Finally, we will look at two films that directly challenge Hollywood’s racial constructions, ending the course with Chris Eyre’s *Smoke Signals* (1998) and Paul Haggis’ *Crash* (2004) (or Spike Lee’s *Bamboozled* (2000)).

Course Objectives

• To gain an appreciation for how film genres (western, melodrama, social problem film etc.) shape historical narratives by drawing on popular ideologies

• To increase awareness of how historical memory is influenced by popular culture

• To complicate conventional understandings of truth, objectivity, causality, reality, facts, evidence, etc.

• Further develop students’ critical reading, writing, and thinking skills
Required readings
The required textbook is available at the University’s bookstore and Gator Textbooks in the Creekside Mall (SW 2nd Ave) and can be bought online from Amazon.com and other websites. Students will be expected to bring their textbook and printouts of all assigned articles to class in order to participate fully in discussions.

Textbook

- Benshoff, Harry M. and Griffin, Sean. *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality at the Movies.* 2nd edition. MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. This is the main text for the course. There is one copy on course reserve.

Articles

Electronic copies are available online through Smathers’ Library/ARES system (course reserves)

- Modleski, Tania. “Our Heroes Have Sometimes Been Cowgirls.” *Film Quarterly* 49.2 (Winter 95): 2-11
- Tucker, Susan. *Telling Memories Among Southern Women: Domestic Workers and Their Employers in the Segregated South.*

Students found the following articles pertaining to *Brokeback Mountain:*

• Kitses, Jim. “All that Brokeback Allows.” Film Quarterly 60.3 (Spring 2007): 22-27.

DVDs (I strongly advise purchase of these films even if you can stream them for free.) I will place one copy of each film on course reserve so that you can (re)watch these films in Library West.

• The Searchers (John Ford, 1956); available on Netflix instant video
• The Ballad of Little Jo (Maggie Greenwald, 1993)
• Brokeback Mountain (Ang Lee, 2005)
• The Defiant Ones (Stanley Kramer, 1958) or Thelma & Louise (Ridley Scott, 1991)
• The Help (Tate Taylor, 2011)
• Lone Star (John Sayles, 1996)
• Smoke Signals (Chris Eyre, 1998)
• Crash (Paul Higgins, 2004) or Bamboozled (Spike Lee, 2000)

Documentaries
(Excerpts screened in class; purchase isn’t necessary)
• Hollywood: An Empire of Their Own (1997)
• Incidents at Oglala: The Leonard Peltier Story (Michael Apted, 1992)
• Reel Injun: On The Trail of the Hollywood Indian (Neil Diamond, 2009); avail thru Netflix streaming

Written Assignments

• Short Analysis (500 words, due week 2) (50 pts)—10%
  Choose any Disney film (except The Lion King), or a film meant for children, in which race is represented and/or obscured in interesting ways and write a 2-page analysis. Possible films include Pocahontas, Shrek, The Karate Kid, etc.
• Group Presentation (weeks 4-12) 100 pts—20%
• Selection and summary of two articles, one on Brokeback Mountain— 50 points — 10%
• Portfolio (due week10) (100 pts)—20% Commentary on five films. Detailed instructions will be distributed in a separate handout.
• Final Assignment: Case Study and Textbook commentary (due week 16) (200 pts)—40%

Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Total Points</th>
<th>GPA Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>475-500</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>450-474</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>435-449</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>425-434</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>400-424</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>385-399</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>375-384</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>350-374</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>335-349</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>325-334</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>300-324</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>&lt;300</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overview of Topics and Assignments

Week 1 (8/23)  
Introduction to the History of Hollywood Filmmaking  
*Hollywood: An Empire of Their Own* (excerpts shown in class)  
*America on Film*, 30-43, 65-70

Week 2 (8/28, 8/30)  
Genre and Technical Considerations—The Western, Melodrama and Social Problem Films  
*Hollywood: An Empire of Their Own* (excerpts shown in class)  
*America on Film*, 3-28, 78-87, 238-252  
**Short analysis due 8/30 (50 pts)**

Week 3 (9/4, 9/6)  
Cold Wars/Red Scares/White Saviors: White Masculinity in the 1950s  
*Reel Injun* (excerpts from the documentary shown in class)  
The *Searchers* (John Ford, 1956)  
*America on Film*, 52-55, 102-110, 274-77  
Madison, Eckstein, Henderson

Week 4 (9/11, 9/13)  
Feminist Reimaginings, 1970s and 1980s  
The *Ballad of Little Jo* (Maggie Greenwald, 1993) or *Thelma & Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991)  
*America on Film*, 278-301, esp. 296-7  
Two articles, both authored by Modleski

Week 5 (9/18, 9/20)  
Interracial Romances and White Liberal Guilt  
The *Lone Star* (John Sayles, 1996)  
Magowan, Fregoso

**Week 6 (9/25, 9/27)**  
Yom Kippur Holiday

Week 7 (10/2, 10/4)  
Queering the Cowboy  
The *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2004)  
*America on Film*, 347-353, esp. 406-7  
**Article to be chosen by students (50 pts)**

Week 8 (10/9, 10/11)  
Buddies in defiance  
The *Defiant Ones* (Stanley Kramer, 1958)  
*America on Film*, 85-90, 296-301  
Vera & Gordon

Week 9 (10/16, 10/18)  
Neither a Savior nor a Buddy be …  
The *Help* (Tate Taylor, 2011)  
Tucker

Week 10 (10/23, 10/25)  
Writing Workshops  
**Submission of portfolio (100 pts)**
Week 11 (10/30, 11/1)   Redefining Indian Masculinity/Rewriting Indian History

   *Smoke Signals* (Chris Eyre, 1998)
   *America on Film*, 110-121, esp. 118
   Klopotek, Cobb, Reed, Churchill

Week 12 (11/6, 11/8)   **Homecoming**


   *America on Film*, 402-3, 98-99

**Week 14 (11/24, 11/26)**  **Thanksgiving**

Week 15 (11/27, 11/29)  Writing Workshops

Week 16 (12/4)   **Final assignment due (200 pts)**