

AMH4317/01B2
History by Hollywood
Race and Representation in the Western
Fall 2016

Instructor: Louise Newman, Associate Professor
Time: Course meets MWF period 7 (1:55-2:45) in Pugh 120
Office: Keene Flint 212; office hours MW, 3-4pm and Fridays by appointment
Email: lnewman@ufl.edu
Canvas: elarning@ufl.edu

Course Description

This course examines seven 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. Three of these films are historical westerns; the remaining four are contemporary westerns. In examining these films, we will focus on how filmmakers make use of historical settings and events (the settling of the United States, Battle of Little Big Horn, American Indian Movement, for example) to reflect on contemporary problems such as race relations, interracial relationships, masculine ideals, feminism, and homophobia.

We begin with 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. Then we will move to the period of the late 1960s, early 1970s, when in the midst of the Viet Nam War protests and Civil Rights movements of that era, some filmmakers began to create new narratives about Indians and Cowboys (decades ahead of *Dances with Wolves*). We will analyze how one of these revisionist westerns, Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man* (1970), offers a satiric retelling of the Indian wars and the settling of the West. From there, 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 westerns that are set in a contemporary moment (rather than the nineteenth century) and that explore romantic relationships that cross either racial or gender boundaries as a metaphor for thinking about 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, and which is also a murder mystery, featuring several interracial romances as part of its story to raise fundamental questions about what purposes U.S. history should serve. 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).

Students will learn how to situate these seven Hollywood films 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.

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? Is it because it 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 film draws 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

Books

Purchase is required.

These two texts are widely available from online booksellers, including Amazon.com.

- **Benshoff**, Harry M. and Griffin, Sean. *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality at the Movies*. 2nd edition. MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- **Smith**, Greg M. *What Media Classes Really Want to Discuss: A Student Guide*. Routledge, 2011.

Articles

Electronic copies of the following articles are available through ARES Course reserves, which you can access in one of two ways: from Smathers’ home page (using a VPN client), or from within the course website on **Canvas**. Once you are on ARES, you can download and print out PDFs of each of the following.

- **Bloom**, Alexander, ed. “Timeline and Introduction” in *Long Time Gone*. Ed. Alexander Bloom. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, ix-xiv, 3-9.
- **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.
- **Crowdus**, Gary and Richard Porton, “The importance of a singular, guiding vision: An interview with Arthur Penn.” *Cineaste* 20.2 (1993): 4-17.
- **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.
- **Fregoso**, Rosa Linda “Reproduction and Miscegenation on the Borderlands,” along with Ann DuCille’s response, 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.
- **Keller**, James R. and **Jones**, Anne Goodwyn. “Brokeback Mountain: Masculinity and Manhood.” *Studies in Popular Culture* 30.2 (Spring 2008): 21-36.
- **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.)
- **Kasdan**, Margo and Tavernetti, Susan. “Native Americans in a Revisionist Western: *Little Big Man* (1970).” *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, 121-136.

- **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.
- **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.” *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 Fancydancing*. *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 in the individual Modules on Canvas.

Documentaries and feature films to be screened (required).

(A copy of each will be placed on course reserve and can be screened at Library West, but if you want to do well on the quizzes and assignments, I highly recommend that you find more convenient ways to view these films.)

Documentaries

- *American Storytellers* (Kevin Mukherji, 2003).
- *Reel Injun* (Neil Diamond, Catherine Bainbridge, Jeremiah Hayes, 2009). This documentary is available on a number of websites and can be screened on them 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.

Feature films (listed in the order in which they will be viewed)

- *Lincoln* (Steven Spielberg, 2012) or *Twelve Years a Slave* (Steve McQueen, 2013)
- *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956).
- *Little Big Man* (Arthur Penn, 1970).
- *The Ballad of Little Jo* (Maggie Greenwald, 1993).
- *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005).
- *Lone Star* (John Sayles, 1996).
- *Smoke Signals* (Chris Eyre, 1998).
- *The Business of Fancydancing* (Sherman Alexie, 2002).

- In addition, students will choose **an additional feature film** to watch (not one listed above) to use as the basis for the final project.

Assignments

There are three major assignments scheduled over the 16-week semester.

- Twice during the semester (**in weeks 8, 13**), students will submit a “portfolio” containing short essays on a total of 3 of the 7 films assigned on the syllabus. The first submission will contain 1 essay (500 words), on either *The Ballad of Little Jo* or *Little Big Man*, and it is due in **Week 8. (100 points)**. The second submission will contain 2 essays, on two of the following: *Lone Star*, *Brokeback Mountain*, *Smoke Signals* and *Business of Fancydancing*, and is due in **Week 13. (200 points)**
- **In weeks 14-15**, students will submit a **final project** using Powerpoint, along with a brief word document, which they will have to upload to CANVAS and share with classmates. Students will need to budget extra time to complete this assignment as it will require the locating of information that is not available through the course website. **(300 points)**

Points Assigned (1000 pts total)

- Discussion and attendance 100 pts
- 11 Graded Quizzes (100 total questions) 3 pts per question 300 pts
- 3 short essays 100 points each 300 pts
- Final assignment (Powerpoint, word document on a non-syllabus film) 300 pts

Grading Scale

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

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

University/Course Policies

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

Selected Schedule of Topics, Readings and Major Assignments for the purpose of advance planning

IMPORTANT NOTE: This course is using CANVAS – and there are additional required readings and assignments listed there. The schedule below is a selective listing of the material that I am recommending you purchase, download or print out so that you have your own personal copies. A complete schedule will be distributed at a later date.

Week 1	Realism is not the same thing as reality Smith, <i>What Media Classes Really Want to Discuss</i> , 1-34, 52-62.
Week 2	Objectification and Stereotyping Smith, <i>What Media Classes Really Want to Discuss</i> 35-59, 88-113. Benshoff and Griffin, <i>America on Film</i> , 3-17, 47-55, 78-84, 213-222. Focus for discussion; animated films, especially <i>Zootopia</i> (2016) http://birthmoviesdeath.com/2016/03/03/zootopia-review-a-muddled-mess-of-racial-messaging...-and-cute-animals
Week 3	Historians on Film, Filmmakers on History: Steven Spielberg's <i>Lincoln</i> (2012) and/or <i>Twelve Years a Slave</i> (Steven McQueen, 2013) Rosenstone, 45-79. Mazur, (3p) Zelikow, (4p)
Week 4	Hollywood's Early History Benshoff and Griffin, <i>America on Film</i> , 30-43, 56-76, 187-190.
Week 5	Masculinity and Race in A Classic Western: John Ford's <i>The Searchers</i> (1956) Benshoff and Griffin, <i>America on Film</i> , 102-110, 257-260, 274-277. Matheson, "Let's Go Home, Debbie," 50-58. Eckstein, 3-24. Henderson, 9-23. Grant, 8-17.
Week 6	A (Not-so?) Revisionist Western, Arthur Penn's <i>Little Big Man</i> (1970) Benshoff and Griffin, <i>America on Film</i> , 110-122. Bloom, ix-xiv, 3-9. Kasdan and Tavernetti, 121-136. Klopotek, 251-255. Crowdus and Porton, 4-17.
Week 7	Feminist Historical Imaginings: Maggie Greenwald's <i>The Ballad of Little Jo</i> (1993) Benshoff and Griffin, <i>America on Film</i> , 278-302

Modleski, 519-545.

- Week 8 **Portfolio, first submission due (100 points)**
1 short essay (500 words), on either *Ballad of Little Jo* or *Little Big Man*
- Week 9 Multicultural Histories in John Sayles' *Lone Star* (1996)
Sayles, 217-233.
Magowan, 20-31.
Fregoso and duCille, 323-353.
- Week 10 Queering the Western: Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005)
Benshoff and Griffin, *America on Film*, 347-353, esp. 406-407.
Keller and Jones, 21-36.
Leung, 23-43.
- Week 11 Redefining Indian Masculinity/Retelling Indian History: Chris Eyre's *Smoke Signals*
(1998)
Benshoff and Griffin, *America on Film*, 110-121, esp. 118.
West, 28-32.
Klopotek, 251-273.
Cobb, 206-228.
Reed, 75-96.
Connelly, 30-31, 38.
Mihelich, 129-137.
- Week 12 Queering the Native Sphere: Sherman Alexie's *The Business of Fancydancing* (2002)
Youngberg, 55-75.
- Week 13 **Portfolio, second submission due (200 points)**
Commentary on 2 films, choosing from *Lone Star*, *Brokeback Mountain*, *Smoke Signals* and *The Business of Fancydancing*.
- Week 14 Word document on non-syllabus film
- Week 15 **Final Project due (300 points)**
No common readings; students should be reading material they have identified for the film that is the basis of their final project.