

# MALEDICTA: "BAD" LANGUAGE, RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER IN AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE

RUS 369, REE 325, LIN 350, CL 323, MAS 374, WGS 340, AMS 321

## COURSE SYLLABUS

Instructor: Prof. Thomas. J. Garza  
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Office hours: M 2-3:30 (HRH), T 9:30-11 (CAL)  
and any other time by appointment  
Class time: TTh 2-3:30 p.m. in CAL 100

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Teaching Jason Alea, Abbie Weil, and  
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Office hours: TBD



### Required texts: [all available at the UT Co-op]

- *Bad Language: Are Some Words Better than Others?* [BL], E. Battistella. Oxford UP, 2007.
- *Expletive Deleted: A Good Look at Bad Language* [ED], Ruth Wajnryb. Free Press, 2005.
- Course packet of readings [CP], available at Speedway Printers (Dobie Mall)

### Supplementary text: [available at the UT Co-op]

- *Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language*. Keith Allan, Kate Burridge. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

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**Ma•le•díc•ta:** (Latin. n., pl. *maledictum*, sg.), curse words, insults; profane and obscene language of all kinds.

When is a word “bad”? Why does it seem that one person can use a “bad” word with impunity, and another cannot? Why are certain words used specifically to hurt, insult, or demean another person? How do race, socio-economic class, and gender play into the use of “bad” language in the US? This course undertakes the examination of modern usage of language that has been designated as “bad” through social convention. Usage of forms of obscenities and invective in common usage will be examined in an attempt to come to an understanding of how the products of US popular culture portray *maledicta* in situational contexts. Through an examination of various texts culled from print, film, and music, participants will study the context and use of “bad” language and attempt to determine the underlying principles that dictate its social effect and determine its impact on the audience. Though the majority of texts and usage will be taken from English-language sources, several non-English examples of *maledicta* from Mexican Spanish, Russian, and other languages will also be examined for contrast and comparison.

## i. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**Attendance and Participation:** You are expected to attend class meetings regularly, participate *actively* in discussions, do all assigned readings and film viewings, and prepare written and revision assignments. Critical analysis, synthesis and cogent argumentation are essential to the success of the course; precise articulation – orally and in writing -- of your understanding of the texts we consider this term is essential to your own success. [As REE/RUS or MAS participants in this course, you will be required to work with a quotient of the texts in the original Russian or Spanish.]

**Special Accommodations:** Any student with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259. Any necessary accommodations should be presented to the instructor in written form from the SSD **at the beginning of the course**, unless the need for special accommodations becomes necessary during the course.

**Response Paper:** Each participant will submit a brief response paper (5 pages) to one of a series of statements from the course material presented in class. The paper will be due on Thursday, **February 16.**

**Reflection Paper:** A short (5 pages) essay on a pre-assigned topic, or one approved by the instructor, involving at least *two* of the texts covered in the course. This essay is to be handed in on Tuesday, **April 5.**

**Revision Project:** Course participants, working in groups of 2 or 3, are required to hand in **by the last day of class**, a revision project, 10-15 pages in length, treating any of the film or literary texts covered during the semester, or a text chosen by the participant with the approval of the instructor. Sample treatments will be given out and discussed well in advance of the due date. Groups are required to communicate with the instructor about the treatments well in advance of the due date, as well as to turn in a brief, one paragraph prospectus justifying the choice of text before beginning the revision project.

**LANGUAGE, COMEDY, AND MUSIC****ii. GRADING**

George Carlin: 7 Words You Can't Say on TV

There are four components of the final course grade. These components and their relative weights are:

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| • The Rise of Hip-Hop, Rap, and the Spoken Word |     |
| Reflection Paper (5 pp.)                        | 20% |
| • The New Word Reemerges                        |     |
| Response Paper (5 pp.)                          | 20% |
| Revision Project (not less than 10 pp.)         | 40% |
| • Cable TV Pushes the Envelope                  |     |
| Active enthusiastic participation               | 20% |

**iii. HONOR CODE**

The University of Texas Honor Codes reads:

"The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness and respect toward peers and community."

Every class participant is expected to adhere to these principles throughout the course, in dealing with the instructors, fellow students, and in completing all assignments for the course.

**COURSE OUTLINE****JANUARY/FEBRUARY****WHEN LANGUAGE STRIKES BACK**

- The History of "Bad" Language
- Defining Bad Language: "I Know It When I Hear It"
- The F-Word: What is Bad Language Linguistically?
- "Banned in Boston": Books, Language, and Censorship
- You Can't Say That! The Case of Lenny Bruce

# MALEDICTA: BAD LANGUAGE, RACE, AND GENDER IN FILM

Spring 2012

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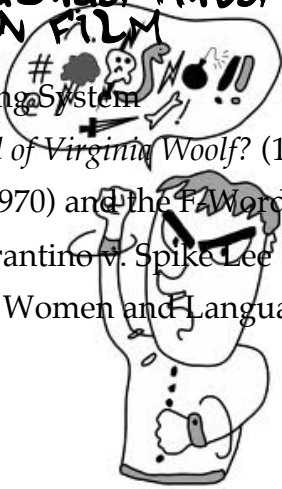
MPAA Rating System

*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966)

*M\*A\*S\*H* (1970) and the F Word

Quentin Tarantino v. Spike Lee

Post-Porno: Women and Language



## MAY

### TAKE BACK WHAT YOU SAID!

- What is the Impact of “Bad” Language?
- “Bad” Rewritten

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## SYLLABUS OF ASSIGNMENTS

Tuesday, January 17

### Introduction to “Maledicta”

#### Overview of syllabus, texts and course requirements

- Cee Lo Green’s “F\*\*\* You” v “Forget You”

For next meeting, read Ch. 1 “Falling Foul” and Ch. 2 “Precisely Foul” in *ED*

Thursday, January 19

### Definitions of Terms: Obscenity v. Profanity

- What are “maledicta”?
- Why do we swear the way we do?
- 👁 View scenes from *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *South Park* (1999)

Tuesday, January 24

Tuesday, January 31

## Setting the Stage I: A History of “Bad”

### Language in Western Civilization

- The Evolution of Bad Language
- Social considerations and the dilution of the word
- From the Renaissance to the New World: Swearing: A Cursory Introduction” by Hughes, and “On Profanity” by Doroghazi in *CP*.

For next meeting, read Ch. 1 and 4 “Bad Language: Realism versus Relativism” and “Bad Words” in *BL*, and “Swearing” by Anderson and Trudgill in *CP*.

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Thursday, January 26

## Setting the Stage II: What Exactly *IS* “Bad” Language?

- Markers of *maledicta*
  - Role of the listener/recipient
- 🔊 Listen to excerpts from James Joyce’s *Ulysses*

For next meeting, read Ch. 4 and 5 “Where the F\*\*\*” and “The Wild Thing” in *ED*, and Sheidlower’s “Introduction: About the F-Word” in *CP*.



Vladimir Vysotsky ca. 1975

Thursday, February 2

## Regulating Language and The Greasy Pole

- Problems in regulating language
- Coming to consensus on how and what to regulate

For next meeting, read “Banned Books: From *Harriet the Spy* to *The Catcher in the Rye*” by Brunner in *CP*.

Tuesday, February 7

## Banned In Boston! Literature under Siege

- What were criteria for the bans?
- Read excerpts from *A Farewell to Arms*, *Leaves of Grass*, *Manhattan Transfer*, and others – banned in Boston

esday, February 14

Thursday, February 9

**What Does the 1st Amendment Protect?**

**Reading Literature –with or without**

**Bad Language**

• Free Speech v Freedom of Speech

*Maledicta*

• What does national culture say about profanity?

• Read excerpts from Mexican and Russian literature

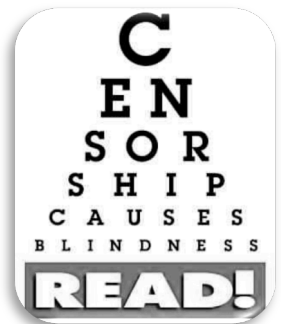
• Listen to “protected speech” in the US

**Short Essays are due today!**

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For next meeting, read “The Trials of Lenny Bruce” by Doug Linder.

For next meeting, read the First Amendment of the US Constitution, “Book Censorship” in *CP*.



Thursday, February 16

**The Case of Lenny Bruce**

- Lenny Bruce performance
- Review case history and verdict
- Was Lenny Bruce a scapegoat?

For next meeting, read “Richard Pryor,” and “Shock Jock” in *CP*.

Tuesday, February 21

**Lenny Bruce’s Inheritors: From Richard Pryor to Howard Stern**

- 1987 and a Youth "Revolution" in film

For next meeting, read “Nigger” [from Wikipedia(!)] in *CP*.

Thursday, March 8

## Tipper Gore and the PRSC

Thursday, March 1

Male Rock music lyrics, profanity, and Capitol City Moms

Thursday, March 1

Words You Can't Say on TV

Carlin's 7 Words and Why List

Current models

View importance of "7 Words"

For next meeting, read Ch. 6 "Bad Ac

and "Bad Ac

For next meeting, bring in examples of "controversial"

language in current television media.

the "Relationships of Justice" by Dele

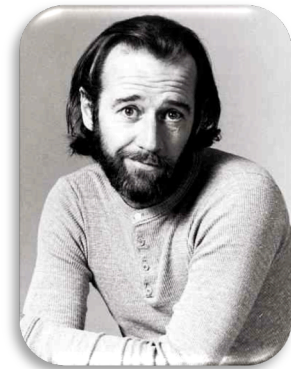


Lenny Bruce Mug Shot

## Tuesday, February 28 Language and the Media

- Does it matter *where* bad language occurs?
- 👁 Watch segment from "The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour"

For next meeting, read transcript of George Carlin's "Filthy Words" and "A Tribute to George Carlin" in *CP*.



George Carlin

Tuesday, March 6

## Music, Lyrics, and Bad Language

- Relationship between music lyrics, obscenity, and censorship
- 👂 Listen to selected songs from various "watch lists"

For next meeting, read the introduction to *Raising Kids in an X-Rated Society* by Tipper Gore in *CP*.



Tipper Gore and PRSC

Wednesday, March 29 **Bad Language** **Bad Language and TV Culture**

- Was the youth community the March 20 • Rating **The Rise of Hip Hop**

👁️ View scenes from *The Sopranos* and *Dexter*. View scenes from *The Sopranos* and

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• The creation of a new musical genre, and new language of film - and controversy

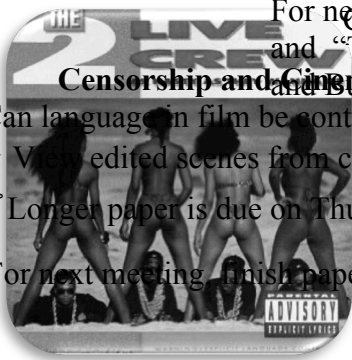
For next meeting, read Beck's "Hollywood Censored: The Production Code Administration and the Hollywood Film Industry, 1930-1940" in *CP*.  
Censored: The Production Code Administration and the Hollywood Film Industry, 1930-1940 in *CP*.  
For next meeting, read "Congress Examines Hip Hop" and "The Language of Political Correctness" by Allan

Wednesday, April 3

### Censorship and Cinema

- Can language in film be controlled?
- 👁️ View edited scenes from censored movies.
- 👉 Longer paper is due on Thursday!

For next meeting, finish papers!

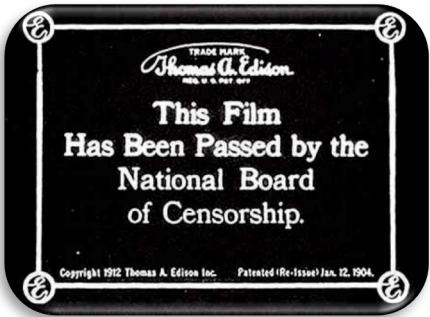


2 Live Crew LP cover 1986

### Thursday, March 22 **Rap, Music, and the Written Word (Graffiti)**

- Language of Rap: Poetry, Lyric, Message
- 👂 Listen to the songs on PRSC "hit list"

For next meeting, read "The Blue Tube: Foul Language on Prime Time Network TV" and "PTC Study Shows Almost 70% Jump in Bad Language on Broadcast TV" in *CP*.





- Maledicta* • Ratings: Utility v. Censorship • Women playing women – or men?

View scenes from " " View scenes from *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1966)

and

For next meeting, read Legman's "A Word for

It" and Stewart's "Male and Female

Differences in Swearing and Taboo Language" For next meeting, read Weiner's "A Concise History of

in *CP* "Tuck" in *CP*.

Thursday, April 5 **Early Cinematic Occurrences**

- "Frankly My Dear..."

View scene from *Gone with the Wind* (1939)

- **Hand in longer papers today!**

- For next meeting, read "Useful Notes: The Fifties" in *CP*.

Tuesday, April 10 **The 1950s and How Language is Managed**

- The New Age of Television and Language

For next meeting, read "One Eternal Round - Movie Ratings and Content Judging Profanity in Film" by Kevin B. and "Motion Picture Association of America Rating System" in *CP*.

|  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>G</b>   | <b>GENERAL AUDIENCES</b>            |
| All Ages Admitted  |                                     |
| (R)  |                                     |
| <b>PG</b>  | <b>PARENTAL GUIDANCE SUGGESTED</b>  |
| SOME MATERIAL MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR CHILDREN           |                                     |
| (R)  |                                     |
| <b>PG-13</b>   | <b>PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED</b>   |
| Some Material May Be Inappropriate for Children Under 13 |                                     |
| (R)  |                                     |
| <b>R</b>   | <b>RESTRICTED</b>                   |
| UNDER 17 REQUIRES ACCOMPANYING PARENT OR ADULT GUARDIAN  |                                     |
| (R)  |                                     |
| <b>NC-17</b>   | <b>NO ONE 17 AND UNDER ADMITTED</b> |
| (R)  |                                     |

MPAA Rating System



*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966)

Wednesday, April 24  
Thursday, May 1

## Post-Cold War Cinema and The F-Bomb Explodes on Film

- View “How to Stop Swearing”
- Why the shift in language use? F-bomb is dropped!
- Course Instructor Survey
- View scenes from *M\*A\*S\*H* (1970)
- View scenes from *Pulp Fiction*

For next meeting, read Ch. 7 “Images and Engagement” in *BL*.

For next meeting, read Ch. 9 “Son of a Bitch” in *ED* and “Dialogue Graffiti” in *CP*. For next meeting, read “Swearing in the Cinema” by Cressman, et al. in *CP* and watch *Reservoir Dogs* in CAL 100.



*M\*A\*S\*H* (1970)



*Pulp Fiction* (1995)

## Thursday, April 26 Post-Porno: Women and Language

- The rise of the b-word and its dilution
- View scene from *Aliens*

For next meeting, read Ch. 11 “Bootleggers and Asterisks” in *ED*, and wikiHow “How to Stop Swearing” (in *CP*).



*Spike Lee*

## Thursday, May 3 Conclusions and Final Thoughts

- Closing Comments
- Final Projects due



**Have a *f\*\*\*ing* great summer!**