

Professor Thompson
AFR 372E, 81350
AMS F325, 81467
WGS F340, 88482
TD 357T, 80334
Flags: Cultural Diversity, Writing

Black Film

Course Description

This course is primarily designed to introduce students to African American film produced both inside and outside the Hollywood mainstream. It will trace the history of African American film culture from Oscar Micheaux's groundbreaking silent films of the 1920s to Ava DuVernay's hopes for a prosperous independent black cinema led by AAFRM (African American Film Releasing Movement) in the present. During the term we will consider how these filmmakers engage with and refute dominant cultural images of African Americans as well as create a cinematic language specifically derived from African American culture. Other topics include the blaxploitation era of the 1970s, the black film renaissance of the 1990s, and the influence of Hip Hop culture on Black cinema. We will also examine how filmmakers who focus on issues of gender and sexuality broaden cinematic representations of Black life. Besides screening films, students are expected to read articles on film theory and black cultural criticism. Although the class does not require any prior knowledge of or experience with film studies, I expect participants to become active, skilled, critical viewers of African American cinema and astute readers of film scholarship.

Required Texts

Timothy Corrigan, *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, 8th Ed. (2012)

Diana Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual*, 6th Ed. (2011)

Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*, 4th Ed. (2001)

Additional chapters and articles can be found on the class Blackboard site.

Course Requirements

Class Participation

Make sure to complete all reading before class and participate fully in discussions and exercises (presentations, quizzes and peer-editing). Remember to bring texts to class because you may be called upon to read an excerpt or analyze a passage. Each student is expected to speak during EVERY class discussion. We will screen several films during the course of the term. You are to be an attentive, active audience. I expect you to take notes during screenings since our discussions rely on your critical observations of the films. Note that prompt and regular attendance is expected. Poor participation (missing classes, tardiness, lackluster contributions to class discussions etc.) will adversely effect your final grade.

Essays

Since this course has a writing flag students will write two essays during the term—a 3-4 page review of a film from the suggested list, and a 7-10 page research paper exploring an underexplored aspect of black film. Detailed prompts for each essay will be distributed in class. You will have the opportunity to write a draft and receive feedback on your writing from peer-editors and from me. Please note that written assignments must be turned in at the BEGINNING of class—late papers will be penalized. All work must be typed, stapled, doubled-spaced, with 12-point font and one-inch margins. Consult Diana Hacker's *A Pocket Style Manual*, the *MLA Style Manual* or *The Chicago Manual of Style* for appropriate citation and formatting. It is incumbent upon you to keep a personal copy of all work that you submit until final grades are posted.

Journal

Each student will keep a weekly film journal during the course of the term. You are to write 1-2 page entries that record your reactions to 5 of the assigned films (3 from the first half of the class and 2 from the second half). You will submit your journal twice during the term. The topics you explore in your journal entries are open but they should not include territory that covered during class discussions. I urge you to raise issues and make observations about subjects that we did not undertake or we only discussed briefly. This is your opportunity to take advantage of the copious notes you take during film screenings.

Presentation

The presentation (5-minutes MAX) is an opportunity for you to discuss the findings from your final research paper or critical essay. I encourage you to be inventive! Design a website, shoot a video, fashion a poster, create a model, or devise a PowerPoint, or Prezi presentation. I strongly advise you to rehearse your presentation several times so that it is engaging, coherent and adheres to the time limit.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

Journal	20%
Essay 1 (film review)	25%
Essay 2 (research paper)	30%
Presentation	15%
Participation	10%

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Key Dates

Thursday, June 5

Introduction: Black American Film

Friday, June 13

Due: Essay 1 (film review)

Wednesday, June 18

Due: Essay 2 proposal (research paper)

Wednesday, June 25

Due: Film journal (3 film responses)

Monday, June 30

Due: Draft Essay 2 (research paper)

Monday, July 7

Research Presentations: A-F

Due: Film journal (2 film responses)

Tuesday, July 8

Research Presentations: G-N

Wednesday, July 9

Research Presentations: O-Z

Thursday, July 10

Conclusion: The New Black Film

Due: Essay 2 (research paper)

