Blacks In Films: Ethnographic Views  
AFA 4905 Sect. 2456  
Wednesdays 3 PM – 6 PM  
Turlington Hall 2354  
M. M. Thomas-Houston, Ph.D.  
Office Hours: Tues 12 Noon – 2 PM & Weds 11 AM – 12 Noon  
And by Appointment  
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Description: This seminar course explores the impact of film--operating as a tool of scientific investigation, entertainment, a means of documentation, a channel of communication, a shaper of opinion, a determinant of taste, an investment, and an artistic object--on society's perceptions of African Americans. By treating film as ethnographic texts, tt focuses on such issues as representation, construction of identity, and the economic and political significance of Black images in popular culture cinematic productions. In addition, it will investigate how specific representations are influenced by political, social, economic, and popular culture trends.

SCHEDULED TOPICS & FILMS
Jan 5 - Course Introduction & Film (Ethnic Notions)
Jan 12 - "Race as a Social Category" & Discussion
Jan 19 - "The Image of Blacks in America" & Film  
(Black Is, Black Ain't & *In Black and White)
Jan 26 - "Black Bucks & Coons" – (Uncle Tom's Cabin)
Feb 2 - "Demonizing the Black Male" – (The Birth of A Nation)
Feb 9 - "Black Male Stereotypes" – (Amos ‘n Andy & *Our Gang Series)
Feb 16 - "The New Negro" – (Guess Who's Coming to Dinner)
Feb 23 - "Roles for Black Women" & (Body and Soul)
Mar 2 – (Member of the Wedding)
Mar 9 - "Identity Crisis of The Tragic Mulatto" – (Imitation of Life)
Mar 16 – “Gender” – (She’s Gotta Have It)
Mar 23 - "Race Movies" – (Midnight Ramble)
Mar 30 - "Visual Imperialism" –(Hallelujah)
Apr 6 - "Economics of Blackness" - (Superfly)
Apr 13 - "Beautiful Black Culture" - (Crooklyn)
Apr 20 - "Revisionist Features" (Rosewood)
Final Exam Day – Presentation Critiques

Requirements: There are no quizzes or exams for this class. Students are required to attend each class, complete assigned readings (identifying 5 key issues/questions addressed in the readings), view films in and out of class, keep a film log, participate in classroom discussions by analyzing the visual content of selected frames, and write three five-page critical essays. A research topic focusing on cultural and social meanings attached to images in cinema and their significance for social policies and practices related to the Black experience in particular and US society in general is to be completed for interdisciplinary research paper and an in-class presentation.

GRADING SYSTEM
Assignment Points
Research Presentation 40
Research Critique 60
Key Issues 40
Essay #1 15
Essay#2 15
Essay#3 15
Attendance 15
200
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180 - 200 = A
170 - 179 = B+
160 - 169 = B
150 - 159 = C+
140 - 149 = C
130 - 139 = D+
120 - 129 = D
REQUIRED READINGS

1. Takes on Race and Power
Week 1 - "Race as a Social Category & The History of Blacks in Films" & Film Assignment: Library Research Select Review or Public Opinion Articles

W 1/5 - Introduction

Week 2 - Film Reviews
W 1/12
Shanklin, Eugenia

Mapp, Edward

Week 3 - "Politics in the Movies" & Film Reviews
W 1/19
Gianos, Phillip L.

Combs, James

Week 4 - "Black Male Stereotypes" & Film Reviews
W 1/26
Simcovitch, Maxim

Week 5 - "Black Bucks & Coons" – Film Reviews -- 1st Essay Due
W 2/2
Cawelti, John G.

Week 6 - "Demonizing the Black Male" - Film Reviews
W 2/9
Hansberry, Lorraine

Week 7 - "The New Negro," "Roles for Black Women" & Film Reviews - Film Reviews
W 2/16
Donalson, Melvin Burke
Week 8 --Research Topic Due - "Identity Crisis of The Tragic Mulatto" & Film Reviews
W 2/23
Thaggert, Miriam

Week 9 - Spring Break – NO CLASS
W 3/2 (Use time to catch up with reading assignments and film reviews.)

Week 10 - “Gender” - Film Reviews – 2nd Essay Due
W 3/9
Lubiano, Wahneema
1991. But Compared to What?: Reading Realism, Representation, and Essentialism in
School Daz, Do the Right Thing, and the Spike Lee Discourse. Black American

Week 11 - "Race Movies" & Film Reviews
W 3/16
Hooks, Bell
Number 2. (Summer).

Week 12 - "Visual Imperialism" & Film Reviews –Working Bibliography & Thesis Due
W 3/23
Bowser, Pearl and Louise Spence
1996. Identity and Betrayal: The Symbol of the Unconquered and Oscar Micheaux’s
“Biographical Legend.” IN The Birth of Whiteness: Race and the Emergence of U.S.

Week 13 – “Exploiting the Self” & Film Reviews
W 3/30
Greene, Dennis
October.

Rhines, Jesse Algeron

Week 14 - "Beautiful Black Culture" & Film Reviews – 3rd Essay Due
W 4/6
Lott, Tommy L.
Forum, Volume 25, Number 2 (Summer). Pp. 221-236

Williams, John
1993. Re-creating their media image: two generations of black women filmmakers.

Week 15 – “Revisionism” & Film Reviews
W 4/13

Week 16 – 10-minute Research Presentation
W 4/20
Special Note: All assignments must be typed in MS Word, double-spaced, 12 pt Courier or Times font, include a cover page, works cited when necessary, and emailed by 5 PM on Due Dates.