

AMS 6805: Black American Cinema

Class: TR 9:30-10:45am

Screenings: R 5:00pm

Instructor: Todd Jurgess

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Classroom: BSN 1310

Screening: BEH 104

Office: Cooper 378

Office Hours: TR, 12-1pm

Oscar Micheaux directing *The Brute* (1920)

Course Description and Purpose

AMS 6805: Black American Cinema provides students with the historical and intellectual grounds of cinema made by Black Americans. Over the course's four months, we'll cover a broad variety of cinema, moving from

of color from participating in their own image-making, and one that Black filmmakers have dealt with in varied, complex ways. As such, we will move backward and forward in period to show the continuities in various historical moments of Black American cinema, to show how the concept of developing a Black mainstream has varied over the course of cinema's 130 years. Key to this project is the conceptualization of history itself as a continual rewriting, one accomplished here through the artistic capacities of cinema.

Required Texts

bell hooks, *Reel to Real: Race, Class and Sex at the Movies* (1996, Routledge)

Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (1936) (any edition)

Cedric J. Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film Before World War II* (2007, University of North Carolina Press).

Other course texts will be made available through Canvas, via the Course Reserves tool. Students should read assigned texts for the week before participating in discussions.

Grading Scale

Final grades are discerned by the overall percentage you earn on each assignment, totaled into a percentage out of 100. In case of decimals, grades jump

Research Project (50%)

The end of the semester project for this class is a substantial research paper meant to explore some angle from the course in an expansive and detailed manner, expanding beyond the course information to advance a singular argument on ideas pertinent to the class. This assignment is inclusive of the following component parts:

- 1) Close Reading - in a short writing, students will base the project in a hands-

R Screening 3: Stormy Weather (1943, Andrew L. Stone)

Week 4 (1/30 to 2/3)

- T In Between Years: Black Performance in White Hollywood Cinema
Read: Robinson, *Forgeries*, pp. 272-286, (skim) 306-344
Skim: Batiste, "No Storm in the Weather: Domestic Bliss and African
American Performance" (Course Reserves)
- R Hollywood Cinema and Interpretive Apparatuses
Read: hooks, *Reel*, "The Oppositional Gaze" (pp. 253-274)
- R Screening 4:

Julie Dash); "Illusions" (1981, Julie Dash); "Cycles" (1989, Zeinabu Irene Davis)

Week 8 (2/27 to 3/3)

- T The LA Rebellion
Read: Field, Horak, and Stewart, "Emancipating the Image" (Course Reserves)
Hurston, *Mules*, Hoodoo Chaps 1 and 2
- R Individual Consultations
- R Screening 8: *Killer of Sheep* (1977, Charles Burnett)
- F Midterm Responses Due

Week 9 (3/6 to 3/10)

- M Gender and Economic Networks
Read: hooks, *Reel*, "Back to the Avant-Garde" (pp. 123-135)
Skim: hooks, *Reel*, "A Guiding Light" (pp. 192-215)
- W The Orientation of (Black) Cinema
Read: Arnaud and Lardau, "An Artisan of Daily Life" and Wali, "Life Drawings" (Course Reserve)
- R Screening 9: *She's Gotta Have It* (1986, Spike Lee)

Week 10 (3/13 to 3/17) - No Class - Spring Break

Week 11 (3/20 to 3/24)

- T Black Mainstream Cinema and Pop Culture in the 80s
Watch: Clip from *Color Adjustment* (1992, Marlon Riggs)
Read: hooks, *Reel*, "'Whose Pussy Is This?' A Feminist Comment" (pp. 291-302)
- R The 90s and the Hollywood Independents
- R Screening 10: *Daughters of the Dust* (1991, Julie Dash)
- F Due: Research Write-Up

Week 12 (3/27 to 3/31)

- T Black Archival Writing and Biomythography
Read: hooks and Dash, "Dialogue" (Course Reserves)
Lorde, excerpt from *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (Course

Week 13 (4/3 to 4/7)

T Historical Reenactment and Experimental Style
 Read: Francis and Dunye, "

Incompletes:

The current university p

- o! Students and instructors are responsible for compliance with the statute and related potential sanctions. Misuse of the recordings may result in referrals as possible violations of the student code of conduct or considered academic disruptions.
- o! Additional links for reference:
 - ! [House Bill 233 \(2021\): Postsecondary Education](#)
 - ! [USF Regulation 3.025](#), Disruption of Academic Process
 - ! [USF Regulation 6.0021](#), Student Code of Conduct

Classroom Behavior:

Please keep in mind that students come from diverse cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. Some of the texts we will discuss and write about engage controversial topics and opinions. Diverse student backgrounds combined with provocative texts require that you demonstrate respect for ideas that may differ from your own.