

A LENS ON DENZEL WASHINGTON: CRAFTING BLACK AND WHITE IMAGES

AFST 3390/CRN 26124

Spring, 2012

COURSE SYLLABUS

Instructor: Kathryn Smith-McGlynn, MFA, MPA
Office: LART 401
Office hours: MON 4:30 – 5:30 PM or by appointment
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Office telephone #: (917) 309-0337
Class time: MON 6:00 – 8:20 PM
Classroom: LART Room 301 -- New room assignment???

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Denzel Washington is a world reknown actor who has accomplished the seemingly impossible. Since the beginning of his career, Washington has managed to craft an image both onscreen and off that at times appears to be an endangered species: that of a highly intelligent, strong black male. Denzel's characters are the everyman, the hero, the lover, the villain, the cad, and the list goes on. Irrespective of color, his talents as an accomplished actor have been recognized by the highest bodies of the film industry. As a youth growing up during the Blaxploitation film era, just how did he do it and how successful has he actually been in challenging the stereotypical images of blacks in film that have become the norm and are purportedly representative of the "true" black experience?

Are the days of overt stereotyping of blacks on film long gone or have they simply taken on a new face? A modern day twist on the old tried and true? Visual images are powerful and intentionally or not, they are key in determining global cultural perceptions of the human diaspora. In this course we will take a close look at how images of blacks on film have evolved throughout American history and juxtapose Mr. Washington's most noted film roles with an analytical eye on character interpretation as well as additional aspects of select film productions in which he has acted, produced and directed.

Students will:

- Gain historical perspective of the representation of blacks in American film.
- Acquire knowledge of the evolution of black film character stereotypes to modern day.
- Learn the significance of the history of representation of blacks in American film and historical events that ensued as a result.
- Develop a theoretical framework through which to analyze a film actor's body of work as it relates to the representative image onscreen.

At the end of this course I would like students to be able to:

- Critically analyze the representation and narration of blacks in American film.
- Identify ideologies and cultural perceptions that have derived from the historical representation of blacks in American film.
- Construct fully supported, sound written and oral arguments to demonstrate a thorough understanding of the social impact and global implications of images of blacks, whether positive or historically stereotypical, represented in American film.
- View films with a new awareness and an altered sensitivity (BOGLE).

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Time permitting, all topics listed below will be considered this semester, although not necessarily in the order presented. Students would be well advised to read several topics in advance of lectures and discussions.

Required Textbooks

1. Bogle, Donald. *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: an Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*. 4th edition. New York : Continuum, 2001.
2. Brode, Douglas. *Denzel Washington: His Films and Career*. Carol Publishing Group, 1997.

Textbooks may be acquired through Amazon or other book outlets online. Please note that some books have multiple editions published -- pay special attention to the cites above to determine which edition to purchase.

Required Articles

- “Always a Partner in Crime: Black Masculinity in the Hollywood Detective Film,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television*. 32 Number 1, Spring 2004, pp. 20-9.
- “The Black Man on Our Screens and the Empty Space in Representation.” Guerrero, Ed. *Callaloo* - Volume 18, Number 2, Spring 1995, pp. 395-400.
- “Going Fourth Denzel Washington and Spike Lee on their Quartet of Movies,” Whipp, Glenn. *Los Angeles Daily News*, March 19, 2006.
- “Fighting a Vicious Film: Protest Against Birth of a Nation,” Boston Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1915.
- “Spectator and Audience,” Braudy, Leo, ed., *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. Chapter 7 pp. 659 - 775, Oxford University Press, 7th edition (2009).
- “The Ruse of Engagement: Black Masculinity and the Cinema of Policing,” Jared Sexton. *American Quarterly*, Volume 61, Number 1, March 2009, pp. 39-63.
- “The Burden of Historical Representation: Race, Freedom, and "Educational" Hollywood Film,” *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* - Volume 36.1 (Fall 2006), pp. 26-35.
- Wendy Reyes (2010): *American Gangster*, *Contemporary Justice Review*, 13:4, 491-495

Additional scholarly essays and tertiary articles may be introduced throughout the semester.

Screenings

Except where noted, all screenings must be completed **BEFORE** the class period in which they are to be discussed. While the films are entertaining, you are to watch them for study and analysis. Take detailed notes. The screenings will serve as the foundation for all class discussions, critical papers, and exams. In addition to the required films to be screened, additional film clips will be viewed during class.

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Plagiarism and Scholastic Integrity

In this class you are expected to gain a thorough understanding of the subject matter as well as *form your own theories and ideas* based on the materials presented. Any and all sources used in your class work (written and verbal) must be noted and duly credited to its original creator. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Following is the reprinted policy of the University of Texas as stated on the university's website.

The University Catalog describes scholastic integrity in this way:

"The University of Texas at El Paso prides itself on its standards of academic excellence. In all matters of intellectual pursuit, UTEP faculty and students must strive to achieve excellence based on the quality of work produced by the individual. In the classroom and in all other academic activities, students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. Any form of academic dishonesty is an affront to the pursuit of knowledge and jeopardizes the quality of the degree awarded to all graduates of UTEP. It is imperative, therefore, that the members of this academic community understand the regulations pertaining to academic integrity and that all faculty insist on adherence to these standards. Any student who commits an act of academic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, and any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts. Proven violations of the detailed regulations, as printed in the Handbook of Operating Procedures (HOP), and available in the Office of the Dean of Students and on the homepage of the Dean of Students at: <http://www.utep.edu/dos> may result in sanctions ranging from disciplinary probation, to a failing grade on the work in question, to a failing grade in the course, to suspension or dismissal, among others."

The Handbook of Operating Procedure states the procedure to be used in suspected cases of academic dishonesty:

- <http://admin.utep.edu/Default.aspx?PageContentID=2084&tabid=30292>

This website has links to the major style citation guidelines used to give credit to the works you use in your research:

- <http://libraryweb.utep.edu/online/citing.php>

An interactive website, produced by Rutgers University Librarians, with possible scenarios of issues you might be faced with in your college career:

- <http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/douglass/sal/plagiarism/intro.html>

Students' Responsibilities

- Students will complete all procedures required to drop the course if they desire to obtain a "W."
- Students will be active in their own learning process, obtain knowledge on their own, and share their knowledge with their peers and teacher.
- Students are expected to read assigned material prior to class. They should be prepared to answer questions related to material in the text and may be called on to do so. Students should also be prepared to ask questions

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about issues of interest or for clarifications of concepts during class.

- Students are expected to show respect for the instructor, guests and one another regardless of opinion, cultural values and other group differences.
- Communications with your peers and your professor must follow the protocol as described at <http://www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor> Participation points will be deducted when your messages do not follow the conventions listed in the site referenced.
- When requested to meet with your professor in her office, you must schedule a meeting or meet her during office hours during the next 36 hours. Failing to meet with her in this case will result in a deduction of your participation points.
- Students should give one another equal opportunity to express opinions, experiences and ideas.
- All students should be supportive of a cooperative learning environment in the classrooms.
- Students are encouraged to attend all sessions, arrive on time, and remain in attendance until each session is formally ended. When a test is scheduled, students will not be allowed to leave the classroom before finishing the test, with the exception of a medical emergency. A significant proportion of the learning process originates from interaction with others and in the give-and-take discussions relevant to readings. Because our class represents a system of learning, your presence or absence affects and enables the learning process of every other class member.
- Students will not use cell phones or other electronic devices during our class sessions, or exams at all. Students must turn off all electronic devices at the start of each class session. In cases of emergency, students must notify the instructor of the need to answer a call and will be allowed to exit the classroom for a brief period of time to take the call. Students will not be allowed to use computers during class unless they have a documented need to use a laptop. In that case, the computer will be used exclusively to take notes.
- **5% of your grade will be discounted from your final grade for each absence, after the first absence. For example, if your final grade is 100, but you missed four sessions your final grade will be 85. THREE classes is the maximum amount of sessions you may miss. If you miss class four times you will fail this course.**

Follow these rules for an enjoyable class:

- **Listen actively** -- respect others when they are talking.
- Practice **timely attendance**.
- Do not be afraid to **challenge respectfully one another** by asking questions, but refrain from personal attacks -- focus on ideas.
- **Participate to the fullest of your ability** -- community growth depends on the inclusion of every individual voice.
- **The goal is not to agree** -- it is about hearing and exploring divergent perspectives.

Grading Policy

- Critical Review 20%
- Class Presentations 10%
- Midterm 25%

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- Reading Evaluations 10%
- Final 25%
- Participation in class 10%

Grades will be determined by students' performance in the following areas:

Critical Review (20%): For this assignment you will critically analyze a film for the way it represents race and/or gender. A list of the films that you may analyze will be provided. If you would like to analyze a film that is not on the list, you must first obtain approval from the professor. Grades for the critical review will be based on the clarity and relevance of your thesis statement, clear and concise writing as well as sound arguments including cited third party sources that support your point of view. Papers must be a minimum of five (5) pages long and be formatted in Times New Roman style, size 11 font, double-spaced with one-inch margins all-around. Papers must include the following:

- A clear [thesis statement](#). In proving your thesis, refrain from focusing on themes or dialogue. Instead, focus on the relationship between representation and visual style (i.e., how representational strategies are shaped by creative choices).
- An analysis of the representation of race using the class readings and articles for support. You must incorporate definitions and concepts covered in lecture and the readings.

Midterm Exam (25%): The midterm exam will cover all readings, lectures and discussions to date and will evaluate your understanding of the material.

Final Exam (25%): The final exam will cover all readings, lectures and discussions presented in the course and will evaluate the cumulative knowledge you have gained throughout the course.

Group Presentations (10%): Your team will make two presentations during the term, using multimedia technology to address the main topics of this course.

Reading Evaluations (10%): Each week you will construct thesis statements summarizing the mandatory readings for that class period. In addition, you will prepare one question about the readings. Both the thesis statement and the question will be handed in to me no later than 12 noon the Sunday preceding class. Please retain a copy of the assignment to help assist you in the day's discussion.

Participation (10%): Your professor as well as the other members of your team will grade your participation. Evaluation will be based on punctuality, attendance, preparedness, number and quality of interventions, willingness to take notes for yourself and for your team, and collaboration with your team and the rest of the class to attain our learning goals. When you are absent you are missing information and making it more difficult for you to do well in the class and your participation points decrease. I believe that all of us need to contribute to the educational growth of the whole group. These are some of the basic points regarding participation followed by a basic description of participation points.

Final grades will be based on the following grade scale.

Grade Scale

A = 90 – 100%

B = 80 – 89%

C = 70 -79%

D = 60 – 69%

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F = 59 and under

It is highly recommended to visit Blackboard periodically. You can find your grades, post messages, form discussion groups and be reminded of tests, assignments, events, etc.

Late work policy:

- **All assignments are due on or before the assigned dates.**
- **There will be no make ups for class participation or quizzes in class.**
- **Papers placed underneath the instructor's office door or in her box won't be accepted if they are late.**

It is important that you understand the reasons why you receive the grade you do. I encourage students to discuss the graded papers, quizzes or exams with me, but such conversation can only take place 24-hours after students receive their graded paper or quizzes.

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Reading and Discussion Schedule:

Reading assignments must be completed BEFORE the respective discussion in class. Guest presentations, film screenings and group discussions, among other events may take place during the term and the topics will be integrated into your exams.

January 23

Lecture: **Class Introduction: Image and Perception**
Film Clips: Denzel Washington Clip
Black Stereotypes Clip
Screening: *Ethnic Notions* [videorecording] / produced, written & directed by Marlon T. Riggs ; in association with KQED. ***to be screened in class.**

January 30

Lecture: **POV: The Cinematic Audience as Spectator and Consumer**
Reading: Bogle, Donald. *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: an Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*. 4th ed. New York : Continuum, 2001. **Chapters 1 - 5.**
"Spectator and Audience," Braudy, Leo, ed., "Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings". Chapter 7 pp. 659 - 775, Oxford University Press, 7th edition (2009).
"Fighting a Vicious Film: Protest Against Birth of a Nation," Boston Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1915.
Film Clips: *Birth of a Nation* (Griffith, 1915)
Birth of a Race (Noble 1918)

February 6

Lecture: **Sidney Poitier: The First Black Superstar**
Reading: Bogle, Donald. *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: an Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*. 4th ed. New York : Continuum, 2001. **Chapters 6 - 7**
Screening: *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Kramer 1967) ***to be screened in class.**
Film Clips: Sidney Poitier Clip
Paul Robeson Clip
James Edwards Clip
Juano Hernandez Clip

February 13

Lecture: **The Blaxploitation Era: A Step Forward or A Step Back?**
Reading: Bogle, Donald. *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: an Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*. 4th ed. New York : Continuum, 2001. **Chapters 8**
Screening: *Shaft* (Parks, 1971) ***to be screened in class.**
Film Clips: *Donald Bogle Discusses Blaxploitation Cinema*
Blaxploitation Clip

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February 20

Lecture: **Introducing Denzel Washington**

Reading: Bogle, Donald. *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: an Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*. 4th ed. New York : Continuum, 2001. **Chapter 9**

Brode, Douglas. *Denzel Washington: His Films and Career*. Carol Publishing Group, 1997.
Chapter 1

“The Black Man on Our Screens and the Empty Space in Representation.” Guerrero, Ed. *Callaloo* - Volume 18, Number 2, Spring 1995, pp. 395-400.

Screening: *Carbon Copy* (Schulz, 1981)

Film Clips: *Donald Bogle on Black Cinema Today* (TCM 2011)

Death Wish (Winner, 1974)

February 27

Lecture: **Denzel the Patriot: Serving His Country Through the Transformation of Stereotypical Images of African Americans**

Reading: Brode, Douglas. *Denzel Washington: His Films and Career*. Carol Publishing Group, 1997.
Chapters 3, 5 - 7, 16, 17, 19

“The Burden of Historical Representation: Race, Freedom, and "Educational" Hollywood Film,” *Glory* (Zwick, 1989)

Screening: *A Soldier's Story* (Jewison, 1984)

Film Clips: *The Manchurian Candidate* (Demme, 2004)

Courage Under Fire (Zwick, 1996)

Virtuosity (Leonard, 1995)

Crimson Tide (Scott, 1995)

For Queen & Country (Stellman, 1998)

Class Presentation 1: **Monday, February 20 during regular class hours**

March 5 **Midterm Exam: In-class on Monday March 5 during regular class hours**

March 12 **Spring Break - No Class**

March 19

Lecture: **A Black Romantic Leading Man is Born**

Reading: Brode, Douglas. *Denzel Washington: His Films and Career*. Carol Publishing Group, 1997.
Chapters 8 - 11; 14 and 18

“Always a Partner in Crime: Black Masculinity in the Hollywood Detective Film,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television*. 32 Number 1, Spring 2004, pp. 20-9.

Screening: *Mo Better Blues* (Lee, 1990)

Film Clips: *Film Historian Donald Bogle on Interracial Romance on the Screen* (TCM 2011)

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The Bone Collector (Noyce 1999)
Mississippi Masala (Nair, 1991)
Devil in a Blue Dress (Franklin, 1995)
The Pelican Brief (Pakula, 1993)
Fallen (Hoblit, 1998)
The Preacher's Wife (Marshall, 1996)

March 26

Lecture: **Denzel and Spike**
Reading: Brode, Douglas. *Denzel Washington: His Films and Career*. Carol Publishing Group, 1997.
Chapter 12
Screening: *Malcolm X* (Lee, 1992)
Film Clips: *Mo Better Blues* (Lee, 1990)
Inside Man (Lee, 2006)
He Got Game (Lee, 1992)

April 2

Lecture: **Denzel and Spike**
Reading: "Going Fourth Denzel Washington and Spike Lee on their Quartet of Movies," Whipp, Glenn. Los Angeles Daily News, March 19, 2006.
Screening: *He Got Game* (Lee, 1992)
Film Clips: *Mo Better Blues* (Lee, 1990)
Malcolm X (Lee, 1992)
Inside Man (Lee, 2006)

April 9

Lecture: **Denzel: Our Nation's Finest**
Reading: "The Ruse of Engagement: Black Masculinity and the Cinema of Policing," Jared Sexton. *American Quarterly*, Volume 61, Number 1, March 2009, pp. 39-63.
Screening: *Training Day* (Fuqua, 2001)
Film Clips: *The Bone Collector* (Noyce, 1999)
Inside Man (Lee, 2006)
Deja Vu (Scott, 2006)
Man on Fire (Scott, 2004)
Ricochet (Mulcahy, 1991)
Virtuosity (Leonard, 1995)
The Siege (Zwick, 1998)
Out of Time (Franklin, 2003)

April 16

Lecture: **A Brand New Day: Denzel as Villain**
Reading: Wendy Reyes (2010): *American Gangster*, *Contemporary Justice Review*, 13:4, 491-495

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Screening: *American Gangster* (Scott, 2007)

Film Clips: *Training Day* (Fuqua, 2001)

Critical Review: [Due to the Digital Dropbox Monday April 16 by 6:00pm](#)

April 23

Lecture: **Denzel Gets Serious: Making a Statement with Historical Accuracy as Director, Producer, Teacher, Mentor, Motivator, Activist**

Reading: Brode, Douglas. *Denzel Washington: His Films and Career*. Carol Publishing Group, 1997.
Chapters 4

Screening: *Remember the Titans* (Yakin, 2000)

Film Clips: *Antwon Fisher* (Washington, 2002)
The Great Debaters (Washington, 2007)
Cry Freedom (Attenborough, 1987)
The Hurricane (Jewison, 1999)

April 30

Lecture: **Denzel: Our Hero, The Everyman**

Screening: *The Book of Eli* (Hughes, 2010)

Film Clips: *The Taking of Pelham 1 2 3* (Scott, 2009)
John Q (Cassavetes, 2002)
Unstoppable (Scott, 2010)

Class Presentation 2: [Monday, April 30 during regular class hours](#)

May 7 **Final Exam:** [Monday, May 7 during regular class hours](#)