

Fall 2003

Intro to Cultural Studies: US Film/US Culture

English 207

Instructor: Kimberlee Gillis-Bridges

Class: Monday and Wednesday, 9:30-11:20 a.m.

Location: Mary Gates 271

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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 11:30-12:30, and by appointment

Class Web Page: <http://faculty.washington.edu/kgb/207>

Description

What stories do American films tell us about ourselves? How do these stories reinforce, reconstruct, and resist dominant cultural systems? Do we read cinema's stories "straight," or do we create alternative tales? How do film advertising, star interviews, product tie-ins, and fan sites fit into the story?

We will explore these questions by analyzing U.S. films made over the past 90 years. In addition to investigating the social, historical, political and industrial factors surrounding the films' production, the course will focus on the relationship between cinematic codes, reception and mainstream ideology. While films constitute our primary texts, we will consider other cultural artifacts, among them posters, ads, magazine articles, fan web sites, and viewer testimonials. As we probe cinema's cultural work, we will gain insight into what constitutes cultural studies and how one reads from a cultural studies perspective.

Course Goals and Methodology

Students in the course work toward several goals: learning how to read film from a cultural studies perspective and developing as critical thinkers and writers. Course activities promote active learning, with most class sessions including a mix of mini-lectures, discussion, short writing exercises, and group work. My role is to provide the tools and resources you will need to advance your own thinking and writing. I will pose questions, design activities to help you think through these questions, and respond to your ideas. Your role is to do the hard work—the critical reading, discussion, and writing. You will analyze films, generate ideas in electronic and face-to-face discussions, develop projects with your peers, construct written arguments, and revise those arguments.

Requirements

Class Participation

Class discussion constitutes one key method of developing your analytical skills. Thus, I expect prompt, regular attendance and active participation in discussions of films and supplemental readings. You should come prepared for each class session, with assigned reading completed. You should also plan to ask questions, make comments, summarize critical arguments, analyze clips, paraphrase your electronic postings, or contribute to small-group discussions. Like all skills, speaking in class becomes easier with practice. I do not expect fully polished analyses in class discussion; rather, your contributions represent ideas for further development.

Electronic Discussion

Students will use the class discussion board to post responses to films and readings. To facilitate discussion, I will post questions to which I want you to respond. Your posting should provide a

200- to 250-word response to a selected question; you may also address your classmates' ideas as you respond to the question. The electronic discussion site allows us to extend class discussion and to raise issues for in-class discussions. Your postings receive points on a credit/no credit basis, with full points granted to on-time postings that meet the length requirement and demonstrate serious engagement with the discussion questions. Occasionally, I will give you the opportunity to do optional postings in which you respond to your classmates or develop an idea only partially explicated in class. These postings will also receive full points for length and genuine engagement.

To access the electronic discussion board, go to the course web site, click on "Discuss," and follow the instructions. I have divided the class into three groups to keep the discussion manageable:

- **Group One:** Students with last names A through J
- **Group Two:** Students with last names K through M
- **Group Three:** Students with last names N through Z

Group Video Trace

Students will use a program called Video Traces to complete a group verbal annotation of a film scene. In their annotations, groups will address the cinematic codes at play in the scene, analyzing those codes through a cultural studies lens.

Essays

Students will complete two 4- to 5-page essays on assigned topics. You will compose your essays in two stages, writing a draft in class, receiving comments from me, and revising the draft for a grade. As part of the midterm essay sequence, you will attend a short conference with me; final essay conferences are optional. In addition to speaking with me, you can seek feedback from consultants at the English Department Writing Center, located in Padelford B-12.

Please submit essays on 8.5" by 11" paper, titled, paginated, typed and double-spaced, with one-inch margins. In the upper left hand corner of the first page, include your name, the course number, the assignment, and the due date; this information should be single-spaced. You may use a 10- or 12-point Arial, Bookman, Century Schoolbook, or Times New Roman font for your papers. You may submit revised essays in hard copy or via the course E-submit tool. I will include a link to the E-submit space on the web version of each essay assignment.

Policies

Lateness Policy

I will not accept late electronic postings, traces, or essay drafts. Late essay revisions will receive a 10-point deduction per day late, including weekends. Failure to submit essay drafts will also result in a 10-point deduction, as revising from feedback constitutes an essential part of the assignment. I will make exceptions to the lateness policy only in cases of documented illness or family emergency.

Technology glitches do not constitute valid excuses for lateness. To avoid computer problems, you should save frequently while working, and you should back up work saved to a hard drive on disk or your Dante account. Remember also to avoid storing floppy disks next to cellular phones. To avoid problems submitting essays and exams via E-Submit, make sure to save in Word or Rich Text format and to use only alphanumeric characters to name files; otherwise, the program will not accept your document. You should also give your files distinct names so that you do not upload the wrong paper to E-submit. If the posting board or E-Submit breaks down, email your work directly to me.

Plagiarism Policy

In your electronic postings, essays, and trace, you may draw upon the ideas and words of other writers. However, you must make clear to your audience that you are incorporating another's work by placing quotation marks around exact words and citing the author's name whenever you quote, summarize or paraphrase. Failure to credit sources may result in a failing grade for the assignment, a failing grade for the course, or expulsion from the university. The course links page contains information on when and how to cite sources.

Email and Access to Course Web Site

You must have a UW Net ID, a working email account and a way to access the course web site. I frequently upload schedule changes, film clips, assignment guidelines, and grading criteria to the course web site. The site also contains links and sample papers not distributed in class.

Films

All course films are on reserve at the Odegaard Media Library. While you may not check out reserve films, you may view them at the Media Library.

The Birth of a Nation (D.W. Griffith, 1915, 90 min.)
The Deer Hunter (Michael Cimino, 1978, 183 min.)
Do the Right Thing (Spike Lee, 1989, 120 min.)
Double Indemnity (Billy Wilder, 1944, 107 min.)
Dr. Strangelove (Stanley Kubrick, 1964, 93 min.)
Easy Rider (Dennis Hopper, 1969, 94 min.)
Fight Club (David Fincher, 1999, 139 min.)
Invasion of the Body Snatchers (Don Siegel, 1956, 80 min.)
Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (Frank Capra, 1939, 125 min.)
Our Dancing Daughters (Harry Beaumont, 1928, 85 min.)

Textbooks

Gillis-Bridges, Kimberlee. *Reading Packet for English 207A*. Available at Professional Copy N' Print on the northeast corner of 42nd and University.

Available for check-out from Kimberlee: Kolker, Robert. *Film, Form, and Culture* (CD-ROM)

Reserve Texts

I have placed a small collection of books on three-day reserve at Odegaard Undergraduate Library. These books should prove valuable if you wish to seek additional information on course films and cultural studies of cinema. Go the course web page, click on "Texts," and follow the reserve texts link to view a complete list of reserve books.

Evaluation

Grades in English 207 will be computed by points, with 400 points equaling a 4.0, 300 points a 3.0, and so on. If your total falls between grades, I will round up if you score one to five points below the higher grade and round down if you score one to four points above the lower grade. For example, 274 points equals a 2.7 and 275 points a 2.8. Students who score less than 65 points total will receive a 0 for the course, as the UW grading system does not scale grades lower than .7.

Apart from postings, which are graded on a credit/no credit basis, points for each assignment will be awarded based on quality of work submitted. I will distribute grading criteria for each assignment early in the term. Each component of the course is worth the following number of points:

- Class Participation: 60 points
- Electronic Postings: 80 points
- Group Video Trace: 100 points
- Midterm and Final Essays: 160 points (80 points each)

Schedule

This schedule may be altered at any point in the term at the instructor's discretion. Students must screen course films by the listed dates; they may view the films in Odegaard Media Library, rent them, or attend one of the scheduled screenings. Students must also complete readings by the time class meets on the dates indicated. The page numbers listed refer to the hand-drawn numbers at the bottom of each reading packet page.

Date	Activity/Topic	Reading/Film	Due
9/29	Course introduction Screening: <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> (Griffith, 1915)		
9/30			Posting on <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> due by 10:00 p.m.
10/1	Doing Cultural Studies: The Case of <i>The Birth of a Nation</i>	Rogin, "And the Sword Became a Flashing Vision': D.W. Griffith's <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> " 1-46	
10/6	Doing Cultural Studies: The Case of <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> Continued	Corrigan, "Film Terms and Topics," 161-183	
10/7		<i>Our Dancing Daughters</i> (Beaumont, 1928)	Posting on flapper films due by 10:00 p.m.
10/8	Film Flappers, Consumption, and the Production Code: <i>Our Dancing Daughters</i>	Landay, "The Flapper Film: Comedy, Dance, and Jazz Age Kinaesthetics," 47-61; "The Production Code," 62-69	
10/10			<i>Our Dancing Daughters</i> Group Trace due by 5:00 p.m. Optional response posting due by 10:00 p.m.
10/13	<i>Mr. Smith Goes to Washington</i> and the Politics of Hollywood Film	<u>Film</u> : <i>Mr. Smith Goes to Washington</i> (Capra, 1939) <u>Reading</u> : Wolfe, "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington: Democratic Forums and Representational Forms," 70-85	

Date	Activity/Topic	Reading/Film	Due
10/14			Posting on <i>Mr. Smith Goes to Washington</i> due by 10:00 p.m.
10/15	The Cultural Work of Depression and WWII-Era Film		
10/17			<i>Mr. Smith</i> Group Trace due by 5:00 p.m. Optional response posting due by 10:00 p.m.
10/20	<i>Double Indemnity</i> , Film Noir, and Post-War Culture	<u>Film</u> : <i>Double Indemnity</i> (Wilder, 1944) <u>Reading</u> : Belton, "Film Noir: Somewhere in the Night," 86-96	
10/21			Posting on <i>Double Indemnity</i> due by 10:00 p.m.
10/22	Writing About Film	Corrigan, "Six Approaches to Writing About Film," 183-194	
10/24			<i>Double Indemnity</i> Group Trace due by 5:00 p.m.
10/27	In-class midterm essay		
10/28-10/31	Individual conferences on midterm essay (class cancelled 10/29)		
11/3	Seeing Red: Communism and U.S. Culture		Midterm Essay revision due in hard copy at Padelford A305 or via E-Submit by 5:00 p.m.
11/4		<i>Invasion of the Body Snatchers</i> (Siegel, 1956)	Posting on <i>Invasion of the Body Snatchers</i> due by 10:00 p.m.
11/5	<i>Invasion of the Body Snatchers</i> and Cold War Film	Samuels, "The Age of Conspiracy and Conformity," 97-104	

Date	Activity/Topic	Reading/Film	Due
11/7			<i>Invasion of the Body Snatchers</i> Group Trace due by 5:00 p.m. Optional response posting due by 10:00 p.m.
11/10	Atomic Culture		
11/12	<i>Dr. Strangelove</i> and Nuclear Nightmares	Film: <i>Dr. Strangelove</i> (Kubrick, 1964) Reading: Maland, " <i>Dr. Strangelove</i> (1964): Nightmare Comedy," 105-115	
11/13			Posting on <i>Dr. Strangelove</i> due by 10:00 p.m.
11/14			<i>Dr. Strangelove</i> Group Trace due by 5:00 p.m. Optional response posting due by 10:00 p.m.
11/17	<i>Easy Rider</i> , the Counter-Culture, and a Changing Hollywood	Film: <i>Easy Rider</i> (Hopper, 1969) Reading: Klinger "The Road to Dystopia," 116-128	
11/18			Posting on <i>Easy Rider</i> due by 10:00 p.m.
11/19	<i>Easy Rider</i> , the Counter-Culture, and a Changing Hollywood Continued		
11/21			<i>Easy Rider</i> Group Trace due by 5:00 p.m. Optional response posting due by 10:00 p.m.
11/24	Hollywood, Vietnam, and <i>Apocalypse Now</i>	Note: We will screen <i>Apocalypse Now</i> clips in class	
11/25		The Deer Hunter (<i>Cimino</i> , 1978)	Posting on <i>The Deer Hunter</i> due by 10:00 p.m.
11/26	Hollywood, Vietnam, and <i>The Deer Hunter</i>	Wood, "Two Films by Michael Cimino," 129-143	

Date	Activity/Topic	Reading/Film	Due
12/1	Queer Cinema/Queer Culture		<i>Deer Hunter</i> Group Trace due by 5:00 p.m.
12/2		<i>Do the Right Thing</i> (Lee, 1989)	Posting on <i>Do the Right Thing</i> due by 10:00 p.m.
12/3	<i>Do the Right Thing</i> and Contemporary Constructions of Race	Pouzoulet, "The Cinema of Spike Lee: Images of a Mosaic City," 144-153	
12/4			<i>Do the Right Thing</i> Group Trace due by 5:00 p.m.
12/8	<i>Fight Club</i> and Masculinity in Crisis Course evaluation	<u>Film</u> : <i>Fight Club</i> (Fincher, 1999) <u>Reading</u> : Jeffords, "The Big Switch," 154-160	
12/9			Posting on <i>Fight Club</i> due by 10:00 p.m.
12/10	In-class Final Essay (commented Final Essays returned by 12/12 at 5:00 p.m.)		
12/16			Final Essay revision due in hard copy at Padelford A305 or via E-Submit by 5:00 p.m.