

EngLit 0400  
Spring 2004  
Best, M.

Lit 0400

## **ENGLIT L0400 Introduction to Film**

Spring 2004  
T 6:00-9:50 p.m.  
LAWRN 209  
CRN: 27032

Professor: Mark Best  
e-mail: mtb6@pitt.edu  
Office Hours: H 12:30-2:30 CL 427  
or by appointment

Textbook: Available in the Pitt bookstore.

**Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *America on Film*, Blackwell 2004.**

In our media-saturated and image-dominated culture, it is increasingly important that we go beyond passive viewing to become informed spectators, aware of how media work. The goal of L0400 is to enable you to become more active viewers of films by investigating a variety of films in their cultural and historical contexts.

The main theme of this class will be representations of race, class, gender, and sexuality in American cinema, and the syllabus and choice of films are structured around these issues that influence our lives in America everyday. As we investigate these issues, we will also examine several critical approaches to film (such as auteurism, genre study, and feminism), develop a critical vocabulary for analyzing films, and increase our understanding of how film forms create meaning.

### **Requirements:**

Exam 1	25%
Exam 2 (final)	25%
Class Presentation	15%
Paper	25%
Attendance/Participation	10%
Extra Credit Paper	5% maximum

**Exams:** These exams will test your understanding of and ability to synthesize the material we have covered in class to that date. Exams will cover the films viewed in class, the readings, and lecture/discussion. Therefore regular attendance and careful note-taking, as well as completion of the readings, are crucial to succeeding on the exams.

Because one goal of this class is to develop a critical vocabulary for analyzing and understanding all films, the final exam *will* be cumulative with regard to the ideas, issues, and terms we have covered. For example, while the final will focus on the films discussed in the second half of the semester, you would still need to be familiar with concepts that will be introduced in the first half of the course, such as "mise-en-scene" or "Classical Hollywood narrative."

**Class Presentation:** You will choose one film from a list of films handed out later this semester. You will give a short (5 minute) presentation on the film in class, discussing how the film represents the issues that we are focusing on this semester. You will prepare a handout on the film for the rest of the class. Class presentations will begin after the first exam.

**Research Paper:** You will write a 6-8 page paper on the film on which you do your class presentation, analyzing in detail how that film represents the relevant issues that we are focusing on in class. You will be expected to 1) utilize the critical and cinematic vocabulary you have learned in class, and 2) use (and properly cite) external materials relevant to the film and the issues that you examine.

Your paper is due the week after your class presentation. I will give you feedback on your class presentation via e-mail before your paper is due.

**Attendance:** Because this class meets only once a week, regular attendance is crucial to your success (especially on exams). After the first two absences, excused or unexcused, 3.3% (one-third of a letter grade) will be deducted from your final grade. Attendance will be taken in every class.

**Extra Credit Paper:** You have the option of writing a 4-5 page paper on a film of your choosing (with my approval) that represents the issues that we are focusing on in class, following the same guidelines that will be given for your research paper. This paper is due at the final exam (or before).

**Note:** You must complete all assignments to pass this class. Late or missed assignments will negatively affect your final grade. Three percent (3%) will be deducted from your paper's grade for every day that it is late. You may turn assignments in to my mailbox in CL 526. If you turn in an assignment electronically, you *must* also turn in a hard copy of that assignment.

**Plagiarism and Academic Integrity** — You are expected to comply with the university's policy on academic integrity. Anyone suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity.

As you already know, plagiarism is *any* use of someone else's work or ideas without giving proper credit. Plagiarism is not tolerated by the university, so don't do it. The first occurrence of plagiarism will result in failure of the course. The two easiest ways to avoid plagiarizing are to work only with your own ideas or to simply to cite other sources if and when you use them.

**Disabilities:** If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, you need to notify both me and Disability Resources and Services no later than the second week of the term. You may be asked to provide documentation of your disability to determine the appropriateness of accommodations. To notify Disability Resources and Services, call 648-7890 (Voice or TTD) to schedule an appointment. The office is located in 216 William Pitt Union.

**Warning:** Some of the materials in this class may contain violent or otherwise potentially disturbing content and/or language that some people may find offensive. If you feel that these materials might offend your personal or religious beliefs, you may wish to take a different course.

### **Weekly Schedule**

1/6 (T) — Introduction to course; film production  
View: Living in Oblivion (Tom DiCillo, 1995)

#### **Unit 1: American Cinema: Black and White**

1/13 (T) — Hollywood: What We Know and Why We Know It  
View: North by Northwest (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959)  
Read: *America on Film*, ch. 1-2 (1-46)

1/20 (T) — American "Normalcy": Whiteness on Film; the Horror Genre  
View: Night of the Living Dead (George Romero, 1968)  
Read: *America on Film*, ch. 3 (47-74)

1/27 (T) — African-Americans on Film 1  
View: Do the Right Thing (Spike Lee, 1989)  
Read: *America on Film*, ch. 4 (75-95)

2/3 (T) — African-Americans on Film 2; Documentary 1  
View: Ethnic Notions (Marlon Riggs, 1986)  
Strange Fruit (Joel Katz, 2002)  
Read: Excerpt from *Film Art* on documentary films [handout]

2/10 (T) — **Exam 1**; Experimental Films

#### **Unit 2: American Histories: Defining Ourselves through (the) Others**

2/17 (T) — Other Countries Within our Country 1: Native Americans on Film  
View: Smoke Signals (Chris Eyre, 1998)  
Read: *America on Film*, ch. 5 (96-115)

2/24 (T) — Asian-Americans on Film; Early Cinema  
View: Broken Blossoms (D. W. Griffith, 1919)  
Read: *America on Film*, ch. 6 (116-134)

3/2 (T) — Know The Place You Come From: History and Film; Latinos on Film  
View: Lone Star (John Sayles, 1996)  
Read: *America on Film*, ch. 7 (135-154)

[3/5 (F) – Last Day for Withdrawal]

3/9 (T) – **Spring Break** — have fun; watch movies

3/16 (T) — Other Countries Within our Country 2: Class on Film  
View: The Grapes of Wrath (John Ford, 1940)  
Read: *America on Film*, ch. 8-9 (155-199)

### **Unit 3: Female Troubles, Male Troubles**

3/23 (T) — Women on Film; Visual Pleasures: Men Watch Women  
View: Vertigo (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958)  
Read: *America on Film*, ch. 10-11 (201-248)

3/30 (T) — Gender Troubles  
View: The Ballad of Little Jo (Maggie Greenwald, 1993)  
Read: *America on Film*, ch. 12-13 (249-290)

4/6 (T) — Sexuality and Sexual Orientation on Film; Documentary 2  
View: The Times of Harvey Milk (Rob Epstein, 1984)  
Read: *America on Film*, ch. 14-15 (291-338)

4/13 (T) Tying it all together; conclusion; final exam review  
View: Suture (Scott McGhee and David Siegel, 1993)

4/20 (T) – **Final Exam** (at regular class time and place)  
**Due:** optional extra credit paper