

## Comparative Ethnic Studies 338 Cinematic Representations of Blackness

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### Introduction and Course Description

In 2002, Hollywood celebrated the “end of racism” within its movie industry with awards to Halle Berry, Denzel Washington and Sidney Poitier. As with America, this historic moment was cited over and over again as a sign of America’s racial progress. No longer reduced to maids or clowns on screen, blacks in the twenty-first century supposedly had access to all the prestige and opportunities of white actors. Reflecting, a “new” kind of (anti) racism that focused more on diversity and representation, than power, access, equality or eliminating state violence, Hollywood has ushered in the era of new or post-Jim Crow racism.

This course, while examining the historic involvement and place of African Americans in film, will pay specific attention to this contemporary discourse, examining various forms of representation and constructions of blackness within urban films. Using history as the foundation of our discussions, we will enter into these debates to talk about “progress,” race, racism and the American dream. We will explore the questionable and contested notions of authenticity and essential black subjectivity through a series of “ghetto-centric films.” Of equal importance, we will use these films to interrogate hegemonic (including our own acceptance) notions of the ghetto, examining its relationship to racism/racialized notions, as well as the ways in which the films/we situate issues of work, police brutality, family, racism, resistance, deindustrialization, community, poverty and state violence within the ghetto centric imagination

Although the course centers on images and representation, we will also use film as a means to talk about larger historical/social issues. We will learn about, discourses on racism, the Black freedom struggle, cultural resistance, globalization, gentrification, the war on drugs, deindustrialization, police brutality, the prison industrial complex, and a number of other issues crucial to understanding the history and contemporary position of African Americans.

Specifically, this course will provide insight into the racialized notions of African Americans and the “Ghetto,” which have and continue to be generated by and articulated through (African) American cinema. Examining the ways in which image legitimizes hegemonic notions and those of resistance (sometimes simultaneously), this class challenges its participants to bury the idea “that it is just a movie” to see the powerful function of Hollywood image making within both classical and new racism. Garnering an understanding of the history of these images, and of African American actors, directors and cultural productions, while deconstructing complex social/cultural

meanings, will thus be the task of this course.

### **Prerequisites**

While we are not enforcing any prerequisites for this course (actually there are prerequisites, but all is good as long as you work hard), it is important that everyone arrives in class with an open-mind, a critical gaze (a determination to go beyond common assumptions) and most importantly a willingness and desire to read and write. Without writing and reading skills (as well as a desire to engage in those elements of learning) this class will be a struggle. For those students who want to improve these skills, this class will facilitate that process and assist you in tapping into the resources on campus. For those who want a class that does not require thinking, that does not mandate completion of the reading, that sees attendance as optional, that is in all ways easy on the mind, you may want to look elsewhere.

### **Required Reading**

- S. Craig Watkins, *Representing: Hip Hop Culture and the Production of Black Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999)
- Reader, Available at Cougar Copies

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

### **Attendance**

You are expected to attend class every day, arrive on time, and participate in an informed and consistent manner. (PLEASE NOTE: IF YOU ARRIVE LATE OR LEAVE CLASS EARLY, OR SIMPLY DECIDE TO TAKE A BREAK DURING CLASS, YOU MAY BE GIVEN A PARTIAL ABSENCE). Anything less will not be tolerated and will result in problems in this class. After one absence (excused and unexcused) each missed class will lead to a 5% deduction (per day) from your overall grade. This may seem punitive but (1) class discussions are the most important element of this class; (2) there are a number of extra credit opportunities. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class, so lateness will potentially lead to an absence for that day. If you are absent from class, it is your responsibility to check on announcements made while you were away.

### **Participation (5%)**

In order for this class to be productive you will need to come to class each and every day prepared to discuss the material. This requires more than simply doing the reading (WHICH IS ESSENTIAL), but arriving at class with a readiness to discuss the issues for that day. Recognizing that silence is not always a result of a lack of interest or preparation, I envision participation along many lines. Participating in class not only consists of talking, but also includes **listening** (please do not talk while others are speaking), interacting with your peers, and contributing to our classroom energy (body language, being engaged – no newspapers, no playing “rock, paper scissors,” or cell phones).

There are three additional ways to enhance your participation grade and contribution to class:

- 1 You can e-mail me comments or questions prior to class
- 2 You can hand me (or our guest) a note at the beginning of class that asks specific questions (or relays comments) about readings, a previous lecture or film – I will

- do my best to incorporate into that day's class
- 3 You can also enhance participation grade by reading the daily newspapers in print or online and bringing the class's attention to relevant articles/developments  
(THIS SHOULD BE DONE BEFORE CLASS BEGINS)

**Participation Portion of grades based on following:**

- 5 Points: Active participant in class in all regards; enhances and invigorates the class
- 4 Points: Participates and contributes regularly; does not push class conversations in new directions but often contributes
- 3 Points: Contributes on occasions but does so at basic level; engaged, but not active
- 2 Points: Rarely contributes, but present; shows limited effort and interest in class
- 1 Point: Does not contribute, but physically present for most part; brings little energy and generally demonstrates little interest or effort within class
- 0 Points: Detracts from overall success of class because of disinterest, disengagement, negative attitude, rudeness, non or disruptive/destructive participation, etc.

**In-Class Work (5%)**

In this course, we will utilize the classroom space to engage in numerous exercises and activities. It is important that you take these seriously and put forth your best effort. In order to convey the seriousness and importance of these activities (which will be both individual and group oriented), they will account for 5% of your grade. If you miss a class in which we do an exercise, or arrive late, you will receive a zero for that assignment. If it becomes clear that we are not completing the reading, **weekly reading quizzes** may be included within this component of the class.

**Daily Class Preparation Papers (33%)**

Throughout the semester, you will be asked to turn in a daily class preparation papers, which should include (1) a journal-type writings that highlights its argument, major themes and your thoughts/analysis about points raised (please note, you can also use this space to engage the reading creatively through poetry or spoken word); (2) a list of several key quotes from that reading; (3) a list of several questions taken from that reading. **It is estimated that each daily class preparation will be roughly two (2) pages (1 page of questions/quotes and 1 page of your reaction/analysis) and they must be typed.** They are due at the beginning of class (NO EXCEPTIONS) – (3 x 11)

**EXAMS (32% -- 2 X 16%)**

There will be two exams for this class, both of which will be take-home essay exams. In totality, the exams will ask you to reflect on and analyze representations of films, cinematic techniques (as they relate to representation, racial aesthetics, identity formation, politics, ideology), arguments offered within course texts, etc. For example, a short-answer question might ask you to the symbolic meaning of traffic signs in *Menace and Boyz*, whereas an essay question may ask you to write about the gender politics and context of understanding for these two films

**Critical Film Essay (25%)**

The critical film essay asks you to explore a single theme/trope/concept/ideology within two films (one from class and one not screened in class) through both textual analysis and textual (readings) engagement. Be clear about the following: (1) this paper is to be comparative in that it asks you to examine two courses film. (2) As you are to engage in two films, it is expected that paper 5-6 pages. (3) You must conduct outside research that includes library/scholarly texts (2-3) as well as integrate course readings (2-3). No encyclopedia writings or Wikopedia articles will be accepted as source material; no more than 2 popular sources are allowed.

Grading for papers will be based on its: **CONTENT** (clear argument, analysis, textual evidence, integration of source material, film interpretation & uniqueness), **QUALITY OF WRITING** (grammar, punctuation, format, paragraphing, title, sentence variety), and **EFFORT** (I know it when I see it)! **FAILURE TO INCORPORATE A DISCUSSION OF AND ENGAGEMENT WITH READINGS/OUTSIDE SCHOLARSHIP WILL RESULT IN PAPER GRADE STARTING WITH A GRADE OF 17/25**

**Extra Credit (UP TO 10%)**

While there will likely be events that will come during the semester, which will provide extra credit opportunities, there are two clear possibilities for extra credit: (1) You may select a book focused on African American film (please see me if you want suggestions) and write a 3-4 page book review, offering analysis, critical engagement, etc. This is worth up to 10%. (2) You may write an extra a critical film analysis paper that reflects on an African American film, offering analysis, critical engagement, etc. This film should be one not screened in class. This is worth up to 10%. Please note with this extra credit assignment, as with Book Review extra credit assignment, your paper should not a thumbs up/down paper, but rather a critical, in-depth, smart, analytical, and argumentative paper; (3) Other possibilities to follow

Your grade will be derived from the following assignments and requirements:

**Assignment Schedule**

<b>Due Date**</b>	<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Grade Value</b>
<b>September 19, 2007</b>	<b>EXAM #1</b>	<b>16 points</b>
<b>November 14, 2007</b>	<b>EXAM #2</b>	<b>16 points</b>
<b>December 12, 2007</b>	<b>Film Analysis</b>	<b>25 points</b>

	<b>Paper</b>	
<b>11 x ALL TERM</b>	<b>DAILY PREP PAPERS</b>	<b>33 points (11 X 3 pts)</b>
<b>Everyday</b>	<b>Participation/</b>	<b>5 points</b>
<b>Everyday</b>	<b>In-Class Work</b>	<b>5 Points</b>
<b>December 7, 2007</b>	<b>Extra Credit/Late Work</b>	<b>Up to 10 points for extra credit</b>

\*\*We hold right to change due dates in your favor according to your needs and desires – Communicate

### Grading Scale

100-93: A

92-90: A-

89-87: B+

86-83: B

82-80: B-

79-77: C+

76-73: C

72-70: C-

69-67: D+

66-63: D

62-60: D-

59 and Below: F

## Tentative Course Schedule

### August 22

Film: *Classified X*

### August 29

Reading: Watkins, 1-49; hooks,

Film: *A Day in Black in White*

Prep papers are worth double

### September 5

Reading: Watkins, 98-136; bell hooks, "Whose Pussy is This?: A Feminist Comment" (Reader)

Film: *She's Gotta Have It*

### September 12

Reading: Watkins, 137-166; Douglas Kellner, "Aesthetics, Ethics, and Politics in the Films of Spike Lee"; Wahneema Lubiano, "But Compared to What?"

Reading Realism, Representation and Essentialism in School Daze, Do the Right Thing and the Spike Lee Discourse;" Paula Massood, "Bed-Stuy, Do or Die: Do the Right Thing and the Contested Terrain of the Cityscape" (Reader)

Film: *Do the Right Thing*

### September 19

Reading: Mark Berrettini, "Private Knowledge, Public Space: Investigation and Navigation in Devil in a Blue Dress"

Karen Voss "Replacing L.A.: Mi Familia, *Devil In a Blue Dress*, and Screening the Other Los Angeles" (Reader)

Film: *Devil in a Blue Dress*

### September 26

Reading: Watkins, 169-195; 213-215; 222-224

Film: *Boyz n the Hood*

EXAM #1 DUE (10/01/07 – YES, ON MONDAY)

### October 3

Reading: Watkins 50-76; Beretta E, Smith-Shomade, "'Rock-a-Bye, Baby!': Black Women Disrupting Gangs and Constructing Hip-Hop Gangsta Films"; Kimberly Springer, "Waiting to Set it Off: African American Women and the Sapphire Fixation"

Film: *Set if Off*

### October 10

Reading: Watkins, 196-231; Paula Massood, "Mapping the Hood: The Genealogy of City Space in 'Boyz N the Hood' and 'Menace II Society'" (Reader)

Film: *Menace II Society*

Guest Speaker/Facilitator: Sanford Richmond

### October 17

Reading: Jared Sexton, "The Ruse of Engagement: 'Black Cinema' and the New American Century;" David Leonard, "Recasting State Violence: *Training Day*" (Reader)

Film: *Training Day*

Guest Speaker/Facilitator: Lisa Guerrero

### October 24

Reading: Dwight McBride, "Can the Queen Speak?"; bell hooks, "Homophobia in the Black community;" Lindon Barrett, "Black Men in the Mix" (Reader)

Film: *Holiday Heart*

Guest Speaker/Facilitator: Henry Averhart

### **October 31**

Reading: Heather E. Bruce, Bryan Dexter Davis, “Slam: Hip-Hop Meets Poetry--A Strategy for Violence Intervention”; KRS One, “Ruminations”; Eric Schlosser, “The Prison Industrial Complex” (Reader)

Film: *Slam*

Guest Speaker/Facilitator: Frank King

### **November 7**

Reading: Ed Guerrero, “Slaves, Monsters’ and Others”; John Sales, “The Brother from Another Planet and Matewan”

Film: *Brother from Another Planet*

Guest Speaker/Facilitator: Lisa Guerrero

### **November 14**

Reading: Patricia Hill Collins, “Assume the Position”; Joy James, “Symbolic Rage: Prosecutorial Performance and Racialized Representations of Sexual Violence” and “Coalition Cross Fire: Antiviolence Organizing and Interracial Rape” (Reader)

Film: *NO!*

Guest Speaker/Facilitator: Martin Boston, Talitha Easterly and possibly others

Exam #2 (Due November 14, 2007)

### **November 28**

Reading: Toni Cade Bambara, “Reading the Signs, Empowering the Eye”; Joel R. Brouwer, “Repositioning: Center and Margin in Julie Dash's 'Daughters of the Dust.'”; Greg Tate, “A Word from Greg Tate” (reader)

Film: *Daughters of the Dust*

### **December 5**

Reading: Watkins, 96-98; Paula Massood, “An Aesthetic Appropriate to Conditions: Killer of Sheep, (Neo)Realism, and the Documentary Impulse”; bell hooks, “A Guide Light: An Interview with Charles Burnett” (Reader)

Film: *Killer of Sheep*

Guest: Kelvin Monroe (with D. Leonard)

This syllabus and schedule are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances and shifts in class needs. If you are absent from class, it is your responsibility to check on announcements made in your absence.

## **Course Policies**

As I hope to redefine the classroom as a space of discussion, debate and intellectual transformation, I hope to unsettle your ideas of a student-teacher relationship. Specifically, I embrace democracy in the classroom and critical pedagogy. In terms of a democratic classroom, I attempt, with your assistance and desire, to create a space that is yours to define and shape. I will facilitate and guide, but not demand and order. This change may be potentially disconcerting, given the nature of classroom organization and pedagogy, compared to others at this university. I encourage you to take ownership in (of) the classroom and in your learning, and to demand agency (control) within your learning experience. This requires communication, effort and **not taking advantage of the freedom available in this space (or worrying about other’s inability to utilize this opportunity)**. Although I hope someday I will not have to institute class rules, experiences have shown it to be necessary. We can certainly expand on these, but the

following represents rules/guidelines for our class, ones that are in part based on experiences in previous classes:

- 1 READ, READ, READ . . . .
- 2 **Turn cell phones off upon arrival to class – Please note that if I see (not if it rings) your cell phone/other handheld device (sidekicks, etc.) on a consistent basis whether because you’ve decided to text message, check scores, show friend a picture or listen to messages, you will be asked to place that phone (handheld device) in a box before every class for the rest of the semester. YOU WILL ALSO BE MARKED AS ABSENT FOR THAT DAY’S CLASS**
- 3 If you decide that you cannot make it through class without getting up to get something to eat or drink, you are asked to bring back food or drink for everyone. Class is not a movie theater so **YOU ARE ASKED NOT TO GET UP DURING CLASS BECAUSE YOU FEEL THIRTY OR HUNGRY**
- 4 Arrive to class on time (and that doesn’t mean put down your stuff before class begins and then leave for 25 minutes)– **THAT MEANS AT WHAT TIME? \_\_\_\_\_**
- 5 Sleeping or otherwise “tuning out” is not acceptable; class requires engagement and participation from all members of the community. You should not come to class with the sole intent of sucking up the classroom oxygen while you sleep
- 6 **IF I SEE YOU SLEEPING DURING A FILM, YOU WILL RECEIVE ONE WARNING (I.E. I/WE WILL BE YOUR ALARM CLOCK ONCE); IF YOU ARE SEEN TO BE SLEEPING AGAIN, YOU WILL BE ASKED TO REENACT THE SCENES THAT YOU SLEPT THROUGH AFTER THAT NEXT DAY’S CLASS MEETING**
- 7 **IF I SEE OR ANY OF YOUR COLLEAGUES SEE YOU READING THE NEWSPAPER OR ANY OTHER NON-CLASS RELATED DOCUMENT, YOU WILL BE ASKED TO PUT IT AWAY. UPON A “SECOND OFFENSE” YOU WILL BE ASKED TO COMPLETE AN ESSAY, USING 5 SOURCES FROM ETHNIC NEWS WATCH, WHICH WILL BE WRITTEN ON THE NEWSPAPER (OR OTHER DOCUMENT) YOU WERE READING IN CLASS. YOUR PAPER MUST BE LEGIBLE – THIS PAPER IS DUE THAT FOLLOWING CLASS MEETING AND IF IT IS NOT TURN IN OR DO SO AT A SATISFACTOY LEVEL, YOU WILL RECEIVE AN ABSENCE FOR THAT PREVIOUS DAY**
- 8 Be respectful of others, in terms of engaging and listening to other’s analysis, commentaries, points of discussion
- 9 Reflect on social location
- 10 Respect and understand rage
- 11 Don’t be rude (egs – Offer a comment and then while someone is responding walk out of the room to get something to eat; walking out

of the room to get something to eat CONSTANTLY; doing other work or engaging in rock-paper-scissors while in class; disrespect the privacy of the class by gossiping about issues or discussions of class)

### **Cheating**

DON'T CHEAT! IT IS PATHETIC, UNNACEPTABLE, AND DISRESPECTFUL TO YOURSELF, YOUR COLLEAGUES, THE MATERIALS, HISTORY, MYSELF, AND THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION. DON'T DO IT! What constitutes cheating: Turning in any work that is not yours, whether that means copying and pasting from a website, using someone else papers, copying a friend's work, etc. If someone else said it, wrote it, thought it, etc. give them credit – DON'T STEAL INTELLECTUAL WORK OF OTHERS. The assignments you turn in should be your work, with your analysis, your prose, and your voice, spirit, soul, and effort. Your failure to follow these basic instructions, to respect the classroom, each other, history; in choosing to cheat, to take the easy route, to be in the business of pretending to learn, think, analyze, and otherwise be a student, is not acceptable in any regard. If you are unfamiliar with WSU policy regarding cheating and confused as to what constitutes cheating (plagiarism), please consult with WSU Student handbook.

### **Students with Disabilities**

I am committed to providing assistance to help you be successful in this course. Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. Please go to the Disability Resource Center (DRC) during the first two weeks of every semester to seek information or to qualify for accommodations. All accommodations MUST be approved through the DRC, located in the Administration Annex Bldg, Room 205. To make an appointment with a disability counselor, please call 335-3417.

### **Critical Pedagogy**

Unlike many classes at the university level, which embrace the classroom in traditional terms (professor lectures, you listen, write down as much as possible and then spit all back during exams), as a place where professors teach to unknowing students, this class works from a critical pedagogical approach. We will follow in this tradition, hoping to use the classroom space to not only learn, but as a place to transgress our reality. Challenging our accepted notions of school and society, this class works from the idea that the classroom is a democratic site of social transformation, requiring critical reflection, dedication and limited signs of authority (while I remain in “power” in terms of grades, we must challenge the student/teacher dichotomy). A critical pedagogical approach, however, requires preparation and effort – to make it work you cannot passively use the class and wait for others to inform you. Take initiative. The following definition, from Henry Giroux, establishes some additional points of departure

“The critical question here is whose future, story, and interests do the school represent. . . Critical pedagogy argues that school practices need to be informed by a public philosophy that addresses how to construct ideological and institutional conditions in which the lived experience of

empowerment for the vast majority of student becomes the defining feature of schooling. Critical pedagogy attempts to:

1. “Create new forms of knowledge through its emphasis on breaking down disciplines and creating interdisciplinary knowledge.
2. Raise questions about the relationships between the margins and centers of power in schools and is concerned about how to provide a way of reading history as part of a larger project of reclaiming power and identity, particularly as these are shaped around the categories of race, gender, class, and ethnicity.
3. Reject the distinction between high and popular culture so as to make curriculum knowledge responsive to the everyday knowledge that constitutes peoples' lived histories differently.
4. Illuminate the primacy of the ethical in defining the language that teachers and others use to produce particular cultural practices.”<sup>1</sup>

### Guiding Principles<sup>2</sup>

The classroom is a unique environment where we can come together to promote learning and growth in each other; it is a space that has the potential to be transgressive along a number of lines. In order to make the best use of the classroom space, while fulfilling the ideological objects of critical pedagogy, it is important that we have some guidelines to frame our conversations. These are not rules or demands (as opposed to the above), but guidelines/suggestions that should ground each and every discussion, as well as your own reading, fostering a respectful and safe learning environment, that challenges all of us to reflect on our own analysis, positionality, privileges and racial/gender/class/nation/sexual ethos.

1. Acknowledge that racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and other institutionalized forms of oppression exist.
2. Acknowledge that one mechanism of institutionalized racism, classism, sexist, heterosexism, etc. is that we are **all systematically taught misinformation** about our own group and about members of other groups. This is true for members of privileged and oppressed groups.
3. **Read in an engaged way**, recognizing the ideology and politics imbedded in every text. Make notes in the margins – **“dialogue” with the text**, using exclamation points, questions or issue complete statements, questions or critiques. Ask yourself: what is significant in this piece, what elicits anger/sadness/laughter, but go beyond emotional responses to be prepared to make specific statements about the reading!
4. **Be aware of your own subject position, ideologies, privileges and prejudices.** Recognize your own relationship to institutions of power and structures of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.perfectfit.org/CT/giroux2.html>

<sup>2</sup> Adopted from guidelines used by Dr. Lynn Weber and Dr. Patti Verstrat

- domination. This can help you make specific connections to the reading, class discussions and other forms of feedback. Rather than proclaiming, “This article sucks,” or “You are wrong,” you can get more specific about the basis and origins of your reaction. For example, rather than engaging in a discussion about homosexuality with statements of disgust and contempt, it might be better to state: “From my position as a white male, who was raised with the teachings of the Bible, I find homosexuality a bit troubling, especially in the context of the arguments made by \_\_\_\_\_ on page \_\_\_\_.”
5. Agree to **combat actively the myths and stereotypes** about your own “group” and other groups so that we can break down the walls that prohibit group cooperation and group gain. Read and listen with recognition of other people’s subject position and ideologies. **LISTEN TO OTHERS!**
  6. Reflect on our **choice of language in and outside of class**, striving to rid our vocabulary of racist, sexist, homophobic words, phrases. Recognize that your choice of words reflect your own ideological position and may bother others (think about how others may react to your words – not just content, but the way we chose to express those thoughts)
  7. **Create a safe atmosphere for open discussion.** If members of the class may wish to make comments that they do not want repeated outside the classroom, they can preface their remarks with a request that the class agree not to repeat the remarks. Also, think about your language (including body language), posture, etc. contributes to safe/empowering or disempowering/unsafe learning environment.
  8. **Take Risks:** I want this class to be a space where everyone should feel comfortable enough to disagree with each other. This needs to be safe space so reflect on the ways you engage others with your own pronouncements and how you react (with words, body language) to their statements – react privilege and positionality
  9. **Read and dialogue in a politically engaged way.** Politics, for our purposes here, reflects **power**, and relationship to systems/sources of power. Power dynamics are contextual (situational) and relational. You may have power in some spaces and lack it in others, all depending on social location. Ask yourself these questions while reading and discussing within the classroom space: Is the analysis leaving anyone relevant out? For what reasons? Where is this analysis coming from? Whose knowledge base is being explored or forwarded?
  10. **Speak with evidence** and “facts” on your side. Despite the popular pronouncements that there are no wrong answers, there are incomplete, problematic, superficial, surfaced, and unsubstantiated answers. Reflect on your own answers and the basis of your conclusions
  11. **Go beyond an either/or dichotomy.** Movies are neither entertainment nor ideological constructs, but both. **Incorporate a both/and approach** rather than an “either/or.”
  12. **Recognize the knowledge base of your peers.** Its ok – recommended and great, in fact – to respond to a counterpoint with “hey, I’ve never thought of it that way,” or “well, you do make a good point – I’ll have to think about that for a while.” Discussion in this class isn’t about proving, embarrassing, showing off, winning, losing, convincing, holding one’s argument to the bitter end – its about

dialogue, debate and self-reflections.

This list merely represents a starting point of guidelines, which we may need to add to throughout the semester. The included guidelines can be amended and changed with the consent of the class, as well.

### **Primary Learning Outcomes**

- 1 Articulate a clear working definition of African American film (or the difficulty of creating such a definition), while understanding the difficulty of defining such a genre; understand the contradictions and limitations of any one definition
- 2 Understand the ways in which space and experience are constituted within African American film
- 3 Recognize film production and consumption as a contested space of meaning, whether along racial, gendered, national, class, ideological, political and sexual axis (or their interconnections)
- 4 Understand the dialectical relationship between race/gender-based ideologies, film production, capitalism and other forms of popular culture
- 5 Ability to think through continuities of systems of oppression; understand systems of power and domination within and beyond the context of African American film production and consumption
- 6 Identify the ways in which blackness is imagined through African American film production; understand the ways in which films reify and/challenge dominant voices, narratives, and theories of racialized difference
- 7 Recognize and understand the ways in which race, blackness, masculinity, femininity, Africanness, America, white supremacy, resistance, etc. are dealt with within African American film
- 8 Ability to analyze and deconstruct the racial and gendered meanings within various African American films
- 9 Analyze the relationship between blacks and whites, Latinos, Native Americans, Asians, etc. as they are constructed through film
- 10 Ability and willingness to enjoy film while maintaining a critical gaze – critical introspection and analysis should enhance film watching experience
- 11 Learn the key elements to understanding film, including editing, mis-en-scene, music, etc.
- 12 Effort and willingness to deconstruct our own views/enjoyment of particular cinematic representations; reflection on notions “eating the other”, especially as it relates to notions of authenticity; reflect on links between race, gender, and film as a site of pleasure, etc.,
- 13 Articulate the ways in which artists and cinematic activists resist assimilation, demonization, and racism through the production film, critical interventions and oppositional gaze
- 14 Understand the ways in which injustice and inequality operate within a context of cinematic production; how does consumption and the privileges afforded to each of us (in different ways) contribute to or undermine such injustice

- 15 Relate notion of personal being political to concepts discussed in class – how are we complicit with the reactionary and oppressive realities that define Hollywood, and that which parts of Hollywood try to reflect
- 16 Understand the history and power of African American cultural production as a site of resistance, whether individual or collective challenges to oppressive forces within Hollywood or broader cultural field, as well as issues of assimilation, globalization, and demonization so prevalent within societal institutions.

### Key Terms<sup>3</sup>

**Binary Thinking:** A system of thought that divides concepts into two oppositional categories, whereupon meaning for one is derived from meaning of the other; for example, white/black, man/woman, West/East, civilized/uncivilized, saint/sinner, reason/emotion, and normal/deviant

**Capitalism:** an economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production. Capitalism is typically characterized by extreme distributions of wealth and large divisions between the rich and the poor.

**Colorblindness:** a racial ideology that gained prominence during the post-civil rights era that argues that using racial language perpetuates racism

**Commodification:** in capitalist political economies, land, products, services, and ideas are assigned economic values and are bought and sold in marketplaces as commodities

**Controlling Images:** The terms representations and stereotypes describe this socio-cultural phenomenon: representations need not be stereotypical and stereotypes need not function as controlling images, yet as hegemony works to form consent dominant representations govern and direct common sense ideas and dominant discourses. Controlling images are closely tied to power relations of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality.

**Discourse:** A set of ideas and practices that, when taken together, organize both a way society defines certain truths about itself and the way it puts together social power

**Globalization:** The increasing concentration of capital in the hands of relatively small number of transnational corporations. Two effects of globalization are greater influence on the world economy than that of nation states, and a global distribution of wealth and poverty that privileges Western European, North American, and other advanced industrial nations

**Hegemony:** A form of social organization that uses ideology to create taken-for-granted ideas that are used to justify oppression. Hegemonic conditions absorb and depoliticize oppressed groups' dissent and encourage individuals and groups to police one another

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<sup>3</sup> The following terms are taken from the works of Patricia Hill Collins, Michael Omi, Cornel West, Howard Winant, Peggy McIntosh, Robert Blauner

and suppress each other's dissent.

**Ideology:** a body of ideas reflecting the interests of a particular social group. Racism, sexism, xenophobia, and heterosexism all have ideologies that support social inequality. Ideologies are never static and always have internal contradictions.

**Intersectionality:** analysis claiming that systems of race, economic class, gender, sexuality, nation, ethnicity, and age from mutually constructing features of social organization, which shape African American experiences and, in turn, are shaped by African Americans.

**Oppression:** An unjust situation in which, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society. Race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, age, and ethnicity constitute major forms of oppression.

**Paradigm:** an interpretive framework used to explain social phenomena.

**Political economy:** the way of organizing power relations and the economic system. Capitalism has a distinctive political economy characterized by larger differences in wealth between social classes and major difference in power where wealthy people have more power than poor people.

**Racism:** a fundamental characteristic of social projects which create or reproduce structures of domination based on essentialist categories based on essentialist categories); a system of unequal power and privilege in which humans are divided into groups or 'race' with social rewards unevenly distributed to groups based on their racial classification. In the United States, racial segregation constitutes a fundamental principle of how racism is organized.

**Racial Formation:** a Sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed. A process of historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized

**Racial Project:** a racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular lines

**Social Oppression:** dynamic process by which one segment of society achieves power and privilege through the control and exploitation of other groups, which are literally oppressed, that is, burdened and pushed down into the lower levels of the social order

**White Privilege:** an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visa, clothes, tools and blank checks.

White Supremacy: the attitudes, ideologies, and policies associated with the rise of blatant forms of white European dominance over ‘nonwhite’ populations ... making invidious distinctions of a socially crucial kind that are based primarily if not exclusively characteristic and ancestry. White supremacy refers to “color bars,” racial segregation, and restriction of meaningful citizenship.

**A comment about me, my views on class, and discussions of film**

Rather than simply delineate the seriousness I have for the classroom in general, and for discussions about race and popular culture; rather than use this space to challenge you to think about your own social location (identity) and how that affects your expectations and desires for the class; rather than use this moment to complicate the commonplace desire for Ethnic Studies to serve as a tourist destination of the “exotic,” and the “unknown” (and therefore not suppose to be difficult and challenging); rather than my reminding you that this will be a challenging class, which requires your seriousness on all fronts; rather than highlighting the problematics of “saying its just a movie,” or “sure that sucks, but we are making progress,” I thought I would conclude this syllabus with three spoken word pieces. I hope we have some time to talk about them!

You say it’s just a movie  
(Dedicated to those who sit in the back)

You say it’s just a movie	The source of social ills
But maybe that’s because in that movie	The fodder for observation and denunciation
You are the hero	Just a movie?
The star	
The sex symbol	If you are celebrated
The million dollar man on the marquise	And not demonized
Maybe that’s because you are the soldier	If you are seen with voice
And not the skinny, the terrorist, or the gook	And just invisible
Maybe that’s because you are the cop	If you are given accolades and Oscars
And not the criminal, the gangsta, or the urban menace	For something other than Mammy and King Kong
You say it’s just a movie, but you are	You say its just entertainment
Father Knows Best	Maybe because you aren’t affected by rape culture
The father of the bride	Because you aren’t profiled at the store, in school, and at the airport
The one who teaches, loves and earns	Because your family isn’t incarcerated or subjected to night-stick justice
You are not the absentee father	Because your loyalties and citizenship

aren't questioned each day

You say it's just a joke

Because you get to tell the joke  
Because you get to laugh at the joke  
Because you get to make money off the joke  
Because you own the joke  
Because you don't have to feel the affects of that joke

You say it's just a video game

Surprise?

You don't look like a virtual gangsta  
Or a prostitute who you fuck, kill and rob as part of the fun of the game  
You don't look like the terrorist in Socom or Full Spectrum Warrior  
Or the Indigenous and the Vatos, all whom you get to kill from your world

You say its just fun

Images of Arab Terrorists  
Black and Brown Criminals

Images of hypersexual, unrapeable women of color  
And you wonder why everyone believes the Duke Lacrosse team

You say people are too serious or sensitive

Racist images and bombs raining from the sky  
And you complain about your life, now who's sensitive

You say it's just a movie

Confined to racist caricatures and cold prison cells

But it ain't that bad, "since that is what you are use to"

You say its just entertainment

Called a savage by Disney and the Defense Department  
Women needing to be saved by those free white men

You say it's all about money

Except when they do, its propaganda  
Its lies from Aljazeera

You say it's just a game

Then why does the Pentagon spend so much  
As GE gets rich from NBC and the military

You say it's just a toy

Then why so many guns, soldiers and cops?  
Where are my activist and diplomat dolls?

You say it is all fun

But your relatives don't make that fun for less than 2 dollars per day  
In America's prisons and sweatshops

You sat its just a movie, entertainment, a joke, a game, a toy, and fun

Maybe that's because

YOU ARE WHITE  
YOU ARE MALE  
YOU ARE UPPER CLASS  
YOU ARE HETEROSEXUAL  
YOU ARE AMERICAN  
YOU ARE BLIND

YOU ARE RESISTANT IN THE  
BACK OF THE ROOM  
YOU ARE COMPLICIT

MAYBE BECAUSE YOU ARE  
PRIVILEGED IT CAN BE JUST A  
MOVIE,

MAYBE BECAUSE YOU CAN TAKE  
THINGS FOR GRANTED, BECAUSE  
THE RULES AND THE GAME ARE  
YOURS IT IS JUST A JOKE TO YOU.  
. . . WHETHER IT BE IMUS,  
CHAPPELLE OR THIS CES CLASS

### Keepin It Real

You say I can't teach African American Studies

That I don't have the credentials or authority to teach ethnic studies

"But I have a Ph.D. and experience," I respond. "Aren't those credentials?"

You say I don't have the personal experience and daily expertise

I'm not authentic, I can't keep it real

Like going to Chinese restaurant owned by white folks

Like eating a burrito from Taco Bell, Taco Time, or the frozen food section at Dissmores

Like going to the Paris or the Luxor as if it were a trip overseas

Nothing to learn from someone who learned from a book

Whether it be hip-hop, history, or hymns

Not authentic

Not keepin it real

Not a native informant

Not a token

Not a marketable face

Not a commodity

Not a tour guide

"Is this a job interview for Disneyland or at a university?" I ask respectfully

A world class university he tells

I wonder if her concerns stem from the absence of professors of color; I wonder if he wants biology or history to hire professors of color; if she, like me, sees my privilege . . . I wish

“Thanks for your ti . . . “

And before I could finish my goodbyes, she, a white female administrator, is back on the phone in search of the one needed and authentic black voice

And before I could reach the door, she, a young white student, was already busy ordering that new Snoop or 50 album as that’s some real shit

And before I could exit the room, he, a white fraternity guy from Othello, was already on the web, searching for an authentic headdress for his next party

And before I could ask if he has read E Patrick Johnson, Kelley, or bell hooks as it relates to authenticity

He, a white male, was on the phone ordering some real Mexican food (I want to ask if he has sought proof passport) and a Kimono straight from Japan for his mail order bride from Thailand

“Thanks for your time”

“No problem, homie, fa shnezle; peace, outey 5,000 . . . . Now that’s keep it real

{Dedicated to all those white administrators and white students who seek authentic voices in the classroom, yet ignore those voices everywhere else; dedicated to those who think Straight out Compton is more real than Straight out of Pullman

### **Learning inside the Box**

Learning how to rationalize poverty and inequality  
To explain away the billions who live on less than 2 dollars a day  
While we spend tens of hundreds on coffee, beer and tans

Learning how to place commodities ahead of people  
To justify the sweatshop workers who sew our shoes and Cougar gear  
Whose pain and suffering are of little consequence to us

Learning how to erase people  
To attend Super Bowl parties and complain about bad calls while half a city lives in poverty  
Still claiming ethics and morals without even hesitation

Learning how to celebrate tourism as philanthropy  
To rationalize extravagant trips to 'exotic resorts' as your way of giving back  
So what about AIDS, tsunamis, earthquakes, absent infrastructure; pass me a guava, kiwi  
mango rum sunrise special

Learning how offer counter arguments and butts to American racism  
To justify black and brown prison populations  
Even though dorms are the true drug house

Learning how to profile, demonize and condemn  
Learning how to rationalize, minimize and deny  
Get out immigrants  
Affirmative Action ruined my life  
Stop the Terrorist  
Can't we all just get along?  
I didn't own slaves  
It's just a joke

Learning citizenship  
As slogans,  
USA . . . USA  
flag waving  
USA . . . USA  
and 2 dollars to the Red Cross  
USA

Thinking compassion for the victims of Jericho road is enough  
Forgetting that we must transform Jericho road, from Soweto to New Orleans

Learning how to manage difference  
Not challenge violence or inequality

Learning how to rationalize privilege  
Not challenge immorality and injustice

Learning how to sell the talking points as if they are original  
Not think

Learning how to be culturally competent  
Not Democratic Global Citizens

Learning how to be corporate competent

Learning Inside the Box  
American Education