

**AMH4317**  
**History by Hollywood**  
**Race and Representation in the Western**  
**Fall 2014**

**Instructor:** Louise Newman, Associate Professor  
**Office:** Keene Flint 212  
**Email:** [lnewman@ufl.edu](mailto:lnewman@ufl.edu)

### **Course Description**

This course examines seven Hollywood films, released in the mid 1950s through 2003, which consider racial identities, gender roles, and sexual behaviors in U.S. society. Three of these films are historical westerns; the remaining four are contemporary westerns. In examining these films, we will focus on how filmmakers make use of historical settings and events (the settling of the United States, Battle of Little Big Horn, American Indian Movement, for example) to reflect on contemporary problems such as race relations, interracial relationships, masculine ideals, feminism, and homophobia. We begin with John Ford's classic western, *The Searchers* (1956), whose plot involves a white man's attempt to rescue his niece who has been abducted in an Indian attack in the 1870s and who comes close to killing her because he considers her to be irredeemably sullied by her marriage to an Indian. Then we will move to the period of the late 1960s, early 1970s, when in the midst of the Viet Nam War protests and Civil Rights movements of that era, some filmmakers began to create new narratives about Indians and Cowboys (decades ahead of *Dances with Wolves*). We will analyze how one of these revisionist westerns, Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man* (1970), offers a satiric retelling of the Indian wars and the settling of the West. From there, we move into the 1990s to look at how a feminist director, Maggie Greenwald, reworks other themes of the classic historical western in *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993), a film that is also set in the 1865-1890 period and is purportedly based on the "true story" of a white woman who passes for a man, and who-- as Greenwald imagines—voluntarily engages in a clandestine sexual relationship with her Chinese servant. In our second unit, we will look to westerns set in a contemporary moment (rather than the nineteenth century), and explore romantic relationships that cross either racial or gender boundaries as a metaphor for thinking about the impact that history has had on individuals and society. First, we will examine *Lone Star* (John Sayles, 1996), which is set in the 1990s but uses flashbacks to reflect on the 1960s, and which is also a murder mystery, featuring several interracial romances as part of its story to raise fundamental questions about what purposes U.S. history should serve. Then we will turn to Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), which is also set in the 1960s and explores homophobia—both internalized and external variants. Finally, we will look at two films made by native-American directors that directly challenge Hollywood's racial constructions of the Indian, ending the course with Chris Eyre's *Smoke Signals* (1998) and Sherman Alexie's *The Business of Fancydancing* (2002).

Students will learn how to situate these seven Hollywood films in various historical contexts so as to speculate about how they were understood by audiences at their original release dates, along with what meanings these texts may hold for us today. One of our central concerns will be to ask whether the meanings of these films have changed over time—taking us into the thorny area of how best to interpret cultural texts that are produced in one historical moment (about another historical moment) but continue to circulate in a third historical moment. We will also explore what makes a Hollywood film "good" from a historical, as opposed to aesthetic, perspective. Is it some correspondence/affirmation of an already-known past, or an ability to offer new insights and perspectives about history? Is it because it lends itself to competing interpretations or generates meaningful reflection? Or perhaps the historical value of a film lies elsewhere—in the way it changes our understanding of both past and present, as well as how we think about the possibilities for the future.

### **Course Objectives**

- To gain an appreciation for how film draws on popular ideologies to shape our understanding of both past and present

- To complicate conventional understandings of truth, objectivity, causality, reality, facts, evidence, etc.—key concepts for historians
- To make students better readers and interpreters of cultural texts
- To further develop students' critical reading, writing, and thinking skills

### Required Readings/Screenings

#### Books

Purchase is strongly recommended. These two texts are widely available from online and traditional booksellers, including Amazon.com, the University of Florida Bookstore, and Gator Textbooks (located in the Creekside Mall on SW 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave).

- Benschoff, Harry M. and Griffin, Sean. *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality at the Movies*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. One copy will be available on course reserves at the Circulation desk, Library West for on-site use only.
- Greg M. Smith, *What Media Classes Really Want to Discuss: A Student Guide*. Routledge, 2011. Course reserves is in the process of acquiring one copy to be made available for on-site use only.

#### Articles

Electronic copies of the following articles are available through Smathers' Library/ARES Course reserves and can be downloaded to your computer at home if you use the VPN client (available for free from Cisco) to connect to the UF server.

- **Bloom**, Alexander, ed., "Timeline and Introduction," in *Long Time Gone*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. ix-xiv, 3-9.
- **Cobb**, Amanda J. "This is What it Means to Say *Smoke Signals*" in O'Connor, Peter C. and John E., eds. *Hollywood's Indians: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998, 206-228.
- **Connelly**, Sherryl. "Two Filmmakers Shatter American Stereotypes," *Indie Magazine*, July 1998, 30-31, 38.
- **Crowdus**, Gary and Richard Porton, "The importance of a singular, guiding vision: An interview with Arthur Penn." *Cineaste* 20.2 (1993): 4-17.
- **Eckstein**, Arthur M. "Darkening Ethan: John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956): From Novel to Screenplay to Screen." *Cinema Journal* 38.1 (Autumn 1998): 3-24.
- **Fregoso**, Rosa Linda, "Reproduction and Miscegenation on the Borderlands," along with Ann DuCille's response, in *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader*. Ed. Arredondo, Gabriela, et. al. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003, pp. 323-353.
- **Grant**, Barry Keith. *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology*, Wallflower Press, 2007, p. 8- 17.
- **Keller**, James R. and **Jones**, Anne Goodwyn. "Brokeback Mountain: Masculinity and Manhood." *Studies in Popular Culture* 30.2 (Spring 2008): 21-36.
- **Henderson**, Brian. "*The Searchers*: An American Dilemma," *Film Quarterly* 34.2 (Winter 1980-81): 9-23. (Article is longer but these are the only required pages.)
- **Kasdan**, Margo and Tavernetti, Susan. "Native Americans in a Revisionist Western: *Little Big Man* (1970)" in O'Connor, Peter C. and John E., eds. *Hollywood's Indians: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998, 121-136.
- **Klopotek**, Brian. "'I Guess Your Warrior Look Doesn't Work Every Time': Challenging Indian Masculinity in the Cinema." *Across the Great Divide: Cultures of Manhood in the American West*. Eds. Matthew Basso, Laura McCall and Dee Garceau. New York: Routledge, 2001, 251-273.
- **Leung**, William. "So Queer yet so Straight: Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* and *Brokeback Mountain*." *Journal of Film and Video* 60.1 (2008): 23-43.

- **Magowan**, Kim. "'Blood Only Means What You Let It': Incest and Miscegenation in John Sayles' *Lone Star*." *Film Quarterly* 57 (Fall 2003): 20-31.
- **Mihelich**, John. "Smoke or Signals? American Popular Culture and the Challenge to Hegemonic Images of American Indians in Native American Film," *Wicazo SA Review* 16.2 (Autumn 2001): 129-137
- **Modleski**, Tania. "A Woman's Gotta Do... What A Man's Gotta Do? Cross-Dressing in the Western." *Signs* 22.3 (Spring 1997): 519-45.
- **Reed**, T.V. "Old Cowboys, New Indians: Hollywood Frames the America Indian." *Wicazo SA Review* (Summer 2001): 75-96.
- **Rosenstone**, Robert. "The Historical Film," *Visions of the Past*, 1995, 45-79.
- **Sayles**, John and Smith, Gavin. *Sayles on Sayles*. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1998, 217-233.
- **West**, Dennis and West, Joan M. "Sending Cinematic Smoke Signals: An Interview with Sherman Alexie." *Cineaste* 23.4 (1998): 28-31.
- **Youngberg**, Quentin. "Interpenetrations: Re-encoding the Queer Indian in Sherman Alexie's *The Business of Fancydancing*." *Studies in American Literatures* 20. 1 (Spring 2008): 55-75.

Additional readings, including film reviews, interviews with directors, and podcasts/websites will be assigned under the "Readings" and "Additional Activities" sections in the individual modules.

### Documentaries and feature films to be screened (required)

Unless otherwise indicated on the website or below, the following films must be purchased or rented/streamed from online vendors. They cannot be downloaded or streamed from the course website. One copy of each Hollywood film will be available at Library West/Circulation Desk for on-site viewing only.

#### Documentaries

- ***American Storytellers*** (Kevin Mukherji, 2003). Netflix loans DVD. Amazon streams the film for \$1.99. DVD available for purchase on Amazon.com for \$1-\$4.00 (used) and \$10.00-\$14.00 (new).
- ***Reel Injun*** (Neil Diamond, Catherine Bainbridge, Jeremiah Hayes, 2009). This documentary is available on a number of websites and can be screened on them for free. There is also a copy at Library West/Circulation Desk for on-site viewing only. For those who want to purchase their own copy, DVDs are available from Amazon.com (\$20 new, \$10 used).
- ***We Shall Remain: America Through Native Eyes*** (Chris Eyre, 2009). This three-disk DVD, 470 minute documentary aired on PBS as part of the "American Experience" series in 2009. It can be viewed for free on the PBS website or purchased from Amazon.com (\$24 new, \$21 used).

#### Feature films

- ***The Searchers*** (John Ford, 1956). Netflix loans DVD or this film can be streamed from Amazon (\$2.99) or purchased (used) from Amazon for roughly the same price.
- ***Little Big Man*** (Arthur Penn, 1970). Netflix loans DVD. DVD also available for purchase on Amazon \$5.00 used, \$7.00 new).
- ***The Ballad of Little Jo*** (Maggie Greenwald, 1993). Not available from Netflix. DVD available for purchase on Amazon.com (\$5.00 used, \$8.00 new).
- ***Brokeback Mountain*** (Ang Lee, 2005). Can be streamed instantly from Netflix or Amazon (\$2.99) or purchased from Amazon (.01 used, \$1.00 new).
- ***Lone Star*** (John Sayles, 1996). Netflix loans DVD. DVD available for purchase on Amazon (\$1.50 used, \$5.50 new).
- ***Smoke Signals*** (Chris Eyre, 1998). Can be streamed instantly from Netflix or purchased on Amazon (\$3.00 used, \$5.00 new).
- ***The Business of Fancydancing*** (Sherman Alexie, 2002). The film is out of print and can no longer be purchased at a reasonable price. Netflix loans DVD but does not have the film available for instant streaming. There is a copy at Library West-Circulation desk for on-site viewing.

- In addition, students will choose **an additional feature film** to watch (not one listed above) to use as the basis for the final project.

**Assignments**

**There are two major assignments scheduled over the 16-week semester.**

- **Twice** during the semester (in Modules 8, 13), students will submit a **portfolio** containing short essays on a total of 4 of the 7 films assigned on the syllabus. The first submission will contain 1 commentary, on either *The Ballad of Little Jo* or *Little Big Man*, and it is due in **Module 8 (50 points)**. The second submission will contain 3 commentaries, selected from among *Lone Star*, *Brokeback Mountain*, *Smoke Signals* and *Business of Fancydancing*, and it is due in **Module 13 (150 points)**.
- **In Module 14**, students will submit a **presentation** using **Powerpoint, along with a brief word document (300 points)**, which they will have to upload and share with classmates. Students will need to budget extra time to complete this assignment as it will require the locating of information that is not available through this website. Students can sign up for a non—syllabus film at any point in the semester but no later than **Module 10**. Students may choose to work in groups of up to three people on this powerpoint assignment—one grade will be assigned and all students in the group will receive the same grade regardless of how the workload was divided.

**Points Assigned (1000 pts total)**

- 11 Graded Quizzes (100 total questions)      3 pts per question      300 pts
- 20 Posts to 10 weekly Discussion Boards      10 points each      200 pts
- Portfolio (4 Film Commentaries)      50 points each      200 pts
- Final assignment (Powerpoint, word document on a non-syllabus film) 300 pts

**Extra Credit points**

- Syllabus/Handout Quiz      10 pts
- Midterm Evaluation      10 pts

**Grading Scale**

Overall letter grades for the course will be assigned according to the following scale:

<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>Total Points</b>	<b>GPA Equivalent</b>
<b>A</b>	<b>950-1000</b>	<b>4.0</b>
<b>A-</b>	<b>900-950</b>	<b>3.67</b>
<b>B+</b>	<b>875-899</b>	<b>3.33</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>850-874</b>	<b>3.0</b>
<b>B-</b>	<b>800-849</b>	<b>2.67</b>
<b>C+</b>	<b>775-799</b>	<b>2.33</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>750-774</b>	<b>2.0</b>
<b>C-</b>	<b>700-749</b>	<b>1.67</b>
<b>D+</b>	<b>675-699</b>	<b>1.33</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>650-674</b>	<b>1.0</b>
<b>D-</b>	<b>600-649</b>	<b>0.67</b>
<b>E</b>	<b>&lt;600</b>	<b>0</b>

### University/Course Policies

All students should observe the University of Florida's standards of academic honesty.

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/academic.php>

Acts of dishonesty, cheating and plagiarism include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Turning in a paper that was written by someone else (i.e., papers written by another student, a research service, or downloaded off the Internet); or written by you for another course.
- Copying, verbatim, a portion of text from the work of another author without using quotation marks and acknowledging the source through a commonly accepted style of footnoting
- Paraphrasing (i.e., restating in your own words) text written by another author without referencing that author, both within in the text and using a commonly accepted style of footnoting
- Using a unique idea or concept, which you discovered in a specific reading, website, blog, discussion board, etc., without acknowledging the original author and source, both within the text and by using a commonly accepted style of footnoting

### Overview of the Weekly Schedule/Deadlines

<b>Sat/Sun/Mon:</b>	Watch films, read the required selections and do other assigned activities
<b>Tues (11:59 pm):</b>	<b>First Post to the Discussion Board</b> is due (posts that are submitted on Monday will be awarded an extra point to encourage early submission)
<b>Thurs (11:59 pm):</b>	<b>Second Post to the Discussion Board</b> is due
<b>Friday (11:59 pm):</b>	<b>Take Quiz;</b> any additional assignments that may be due in a given module are also due by Friday at 11:59 pm (e.g., Portfolios, Final Project)

### Schedule of Topics, Readings and Major Assignments

Many additional activities, including reading film reviews and websites not listed here, are also assigned for most modules.

Module 1	Realism is not the same thing as reality Smith, 1-34, 52-62.
Module 2	Objectification and Stereotyping Smith, 35-59, 88-113. Benshoff and Griffin, 3-17, 47-55, 78-84, 213-222.
Module 3	Historians on Film, Filmmakers on History Rosenstone, 45-79. Mazur, (3p) Zelikow, (4p)
Module 4	Hollywood's Early History Benshoff and Griffin, 30-43, 56-76, 187-190.
Module 5	Masculinity and Race in John Ford's <i>The Searchers</i> (1956): A Classic Western? Benshoff and Griffin, 102-110, 257-260, 274-277 Eckstein, 3-24. Henderson, 9-23. Grant, 8-17.
Module 6	A (Not-so?) Revisionist Western, Arthur Penn's <i>Little Big Man</i> (1970)

- Benshoff and Griffin, 110-122.  
 Bloom, ix-xiv, 3-9.  
 Kasdan and Tavernetti, 121-136.  
 Klopotek, 251-255.  
 Crowdus and Porton, 4-17.
- Module 7 Feminist Historical Imaginings: Maggie Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993)  
 Benshoff and Griffin, 278-302  
 Modleski, 519-545.
- Module 8 **Portfolio, first submission due** (1 film commentary, on either *Ballad of Little Jo* or *Little Big Man*, 50 points)
- Module 9 Multicultural Histories in John Sayles' *Lone Star* (1996)  
 Sayles, 217-233.  
 Magowan, 20-31.  
 Fregoso and duCille, 323-353.
- Module 10 Queering the Western: Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005)  
 Benshoff and Griffin, 347-353, esp. 406-407.  
 Keller and Jones, 21-36.  
 Leung, 23-43.  
**Last module to submit title of film for final project**
- Module 11 Redefining Indian Masculinity/Retelling Indian History: Chris Eyre's *Smoke Signals* (1998)  
 Benshoff and Griffin, 110-121, esp. 118.  
 West, 28-32.  
 Klopotek, 251-273.  
 Cobb, 206-228.  
 Reed, 75-96.  
 Connelly, 30-31, 38.  
 Mihelich, 129-137.
- Module 12 Queering the Native Sphere: Sherman Alexie's *The Business of Fancydancing* (2002)  
 Youngberg, 55-75.
- Module 13 **Portfolio, second submission due** (150 points)  
 (Commentary on 3 films, choosing from *Lone Star*, *Brokeback Mountain*, *Smoke Signals* and *The Business of Fancydancing*)
- Module 14 **Final Project due**  
 (Powerpoint and word document on non-syllabus film, 300 points)

No common readings; students should be reading material they have identified for the film that is the basis of their final project.