

Cultural and Ethnic Studies 115 – American Film as Literature

Spike Lee: An American Director

Spring 2012

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Class Time: M W 12.30-2.40

Class Place: R 101

Office: A 200 D

Office Hour: 10.30-11.20 Daily

Phone: 425.564-3082

Recommended Texts:

The Spike Lee Reader, Massood

Black Film/White Money, Rhines

How to Analyze the Films of Spike Lee, Reynolds

Course Description

This course introduces the critical study of the motion picture as an expressive medium comparable to literary art. Students review the history and cultural traditions of American film, with focus on the feature-length film as a novelistic form. Students analyze film adaptations of American literary texts. Also includes documentaries and other genres. Previously this course was listed as (American Studies) AMST 115.

Instructor's Philosophy:

I strongly believe that each of us is responsible for what happens in this classroom. Students are just as capable of making a class great as the instructor. We are studying communities and cultures, and in the process we are also creating a new community in our own classroom. We are all still striving, still learning. The key to a successful class is mutual responsibility. We all have a myriad of valuable insights to offer. I will expect each of you to be committed to the course, just as you will expect commitment from me. I am excited to learn with you. It is my hope that we can have a fun, enriching quarter. Therefore, expect to do a good bit of work, and plan on participating fully in class.

COURSE OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, successful students will be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of their own previously-held perspectives on the theme and explain how those perspectives may have changed.
- Demonstrate an understanding of trends in American thought and attitude regarding the theme.
- Discuss, orally or in writing, the theme showing the interrelation of historical events, literary works and social changes.
- Demonstrate the ability to synthesize information from various sources/media and communicate that insight effectively.

Policies in support of the Course Objectives:

1. Be Here! I expect each student to be in class, on time, each day, for the full time allotted for the class. Absences will affect the final grade in the following way: **MORE THAN 4 ABSENCES FOR ANY REASON WILL RESULT IN THE STUDENT NOT BEING ALLOWED TO TAKE THE FINAL, AND THE STUDENT WILL RECEIVE A GRADE OF "F" FOR THE COURSE. MISSING MORE THAN 15 MINUTES OF EACH HALF OF THE TWO HOUR CLASS, COUNTS AS AN ABSENCE.**

2. Work must be turned in on time and presented in a professional manner.

3. We must listen to each other. This one will be difficult for all of us. We have to give respect, and create an atmosphere in the classroom where we can all feel comfortable enough to make mistakes. We must also be able to express our opinions even if what we have to say is not popular, or easily received. True learning can only take place in an atmosphere which is safe enough to examine any ideas which arise. It is the responsibility of each of us to keep this classroom safe.

4. In a similar vein as #3, I expect to hear from you. Part of the thought process is verbalization. Both speaking and writing help to clarify our thoughts. Participation counts. Therefore, I expect all students to be prepared for each class, and to contribute.

Tests, Projects and Papers:

- Each student will write 1, 3-5 page analytic essay.
- Each student will also turn in 1-2 page reflection paper to the readings, films and discussions on the week every Friday. There will be a total of 10 weekly papers. I will randomly grade five (5) of those papers for a single Reflection Paper grade which will be assessed at the end of the quarter.
- Each student will complete the class final.

If you have a documented disability that will require some type of accommodation, please contact me as soon as possible so that we can make whatever arrangements necessary. I will do all in my power to make this classroom a safe environment for all, but this is not my sole responsibility. We are all accountable for the classroom environment.

My office hours are for your use. Come and see me any time you have a question or a problem with the course or your work.

I am looking forward to this quarter, and hope that we can do good things together.

Disclaimer:

This is a heavily dialogue-based class and you will be graded upon your participation. There will be few if any lectures and you will not be required to memorize things as much as to analyze the many aspects of the issues discussed. Many of these issues will be controversial and do not have one correct answer. Often class dialogues will begin with open-ended questions meant to get at a deeper understanding of the content being discussed. Don't be discouraged if a classmate or even the professor raises another question or theory that may point out the flaws of your own argument, this is all part of the process. The more we question ourselves the more we can understand. In order to be successful in this class you must complete all assigned readings and be willing to participate respectfully. If you cannot come to class regularly, or are simply looking to "coast" this is not the class for you.

Dialogue vs. Discussion/Debate

Dialogues require the use of logical arguments and concrete facts instead of personal opinions or experiences. Valid arguments are based on premises (much like the scientific “if-then” method of reasoning). For Example: If the secession of the southern states in 1860 was intended to protect those states from the economic oppression of the northern states, then it follows that the issue of slavery during the American civil war was not one of morals but one of economics. And if the economic backbone of the southern states was the system of slavery and, in many the southern states were the economic backbone of the country as a whole, it makes sense to say that our nations earliest economic system was based on the oppression of people based on the color of their skin.

During class dialogues you will be expected to:

- Be prepared. This is not a bull session. If you aren't prepared, please don't participate.
- Articulate the concepts and principles of the issue(s) in question
- Refer to the text when needed during the dialogue
- Ask for clarification when confused
- Stick to the point under discussion. You can make notes about ideas you want to bring up later.
- Speak clearly and loud enough for everyone to hear
- Listen carefully and respectfully
- Engage your classmates in the dialogue, not just the teacher

Remember, class dialogues are not a test of memory and you are not simply “learning a subject.” Here your goal should be to broaden your understanding of social issues we all face.

Want to check on your success in this class? Here's a cheat-sheet of things to consider during class dialogues:

Did I...

- Come to class?
- Prepare?
- Speak clearly and loudly?
- Cite reasons and evidence for my statements?
- Listen respectfully?
- Stay on point?
- Talk to my classmates and not just the professor?
- Paraphrase accurately?
- Ask questions to clear up confusion?
- Support my classmates?
- Avoid hostile exchanges?
- Raise questions in a civil manner?

One last thing:

There are going to be times in this class when you feel uncomfortable. That's okay; a certain amount of discomfort can be conducive to learning. However, if you ever feel unsafe or threatened please let me know so we can try to work it out. The classroom should be a safe place for everybody.

Useful Websites:

Library Media Center: <http://bellevuecollege.edu/lmc/>

Research Help: <http://bellevuecollege.edu/lmc/research.html>

Reading/Writing Lab: <http://bellevuecollege.edu/writinglab/>

Counseling Center: <http://bellevuecollege.edu/hdc/>

Academic Tutoring: <http://bellevuecollege.edu/tutoring/>

The following link will connect you to the Student Handbook, which will give you vital information about being a student at BCC:

http://bellevuecollege.edu/stupro/handbook_cd2008/default.html