ENG 381: Film, Media, and Culture

COURSE CONCEPTS: English 381 studies genres of film and media as aesthetic and cultural objects that engage with communities defined by class, gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality. This term we will look at media texts that demonstrate the key role that different genres of media play in constructing, negotiating, and reinforcing intersecting categories of identity. Emphasizing specifically the intersectionality of gender, race, and class, we will explore issues of identity, representation, and spectatorship in genres of film, television, and new media. Although the course’s main focus will be gender, the course argues that gender and sexuality always intersect with constructions of race and class.

As citizens living within an increasingly mediated culture, many (if not most) of you are avid consumers of films, television, video games, and various other forms of digital and new media. As advanced undergraduates, many of you are probably familiar with theories of gender, race, and/or class and are easily able to spot representations that might be considered demeaning. However, issues of representation are complex and multi-dimensional; what one person may feel is demeaning might seem appropriate to another depending on what cultural theorists term the “ideological subject position” of the individual. Oftentimes, a film or television show may incorporate representations that are positive and negative at the same time. Hence, the goal of this course is not merely to be able to point out positive and negative representations based on gender, race, or class. Rather, as a class, we will be working to make the invisible visible—that is, to deeply explore media texts and use formal analysis to locate the ways in which cultural assumptions regarding gender, race, and class are woven throughout those texts in their both their production and consumption.

PROCEDURES: Each week we will see a film or media text(s) on Monday and discuss it on Wednesday. For the first three weeks, I will lead our Wednesday discussions and then, beginning in Week 4, a student panel will lead a 30-45-minute discussion of the film, the week’s readings, and related issues.

EVALUATION: Grades will be based on a take-home midterm (30 percent); in class final (40 percent); paper (20 percent); and panel presentation and participation (10 percent). The final will be given during the scheduled exam period.

TEXTS: The primary texts are the films, television shows, and other media objects shown in class as well as articles from Feminist Film Theory: a Reader, a collection of feminist film criticism edited by Sue Thornham and Genre and Hollywood by Steve Neale. Additional readings will be available on Blackboard under “Assignments.”
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:
Classroom standards: Please take active responsibility to create a respectful learning environment within the classroom. Pay full attention to whoever has the floor. Refrain from side-conversations. Turn off cell phones. Don’t eat. Do your best to avoid leaving and re-entering the classroom during screenings, lectures or discussions.

Attendance: If you are absent from class, you will need to make your own arrangements for locating and watching the material you have missed. More than two absences will affect a student's grade, without notice. Four absences will result in failure for the course. I will take attendance at the beginning of every class. If you arrive late, you are responsible for seeing that I record your presence at the end of class. Chronic lateness will constitute absences, at my discretion. You should drop the class if you have a scheduling conflict that will require you to arrive late or leave early. There will be no incompletes, and late work will not be accepted.

Written Work: All written work must use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation. All assignments must adhere to the standards of academic honesty outlined in the Student Handbook. Do not turn in work prepared for other classes. Document all sources consulted in preparing your work, including websites and other material obtained on the Internet. If in doubt, document. Plagiarism will result in failure for the course and additional sanctions determined by the director of Student Judicial Affairs.

Special Needs: If you have special needs, please see me outside class to discuss them in the first week. Bring important questions to me in person, during my office hours, rather than communicating them to me by e-mail.

Warning: This course may screen films that contain violence, explicit sex and “adult” themes and/or situations. If such subject matter makes you unduly uncomfortable, please let me know early in the term. You should also consider whether or not this course is an appropriate choice for you.
Course Schedule

Week One—Film/Genre. Readings: Neal Ch. 1-2 (pp. 9-46) and “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” by Laura Mulvey (Thornham 58-69).
Screen: various clips.
Wednesday: More clips, terms, theoretical background. Practice formal analysis. Construct shot list.

Week Two—Gender and Genre. Readings: Molly Haskell’s The Woman’s Film (Thornham 20-30) and Neale 179-204.
Monday: Screen Now Voyager (Rapper, 1942)
Wednesday: Discuss Now Voyager and readings.

Week Three—Gender, Sexuality, and Horror. Readings: Thornham 229-283 (articles by Carol Clover, Barbara Creed, Linda Williams) and Neale pp. 93-99.
Wednesday: discuss Scream and readings.

Week Four—Hard Bodies, Guns, and the Action Film. Readings: “Hard Bodies” reading by Susan Jeffords (BB) and Neale 52-60.
Monday: Screen Terminator 2: Judgment Day (James Cameron, 1991)
Wednesday: Group 1 Presentation, discuss Terminator 2 Hand out midterm exam.

Week Five—The “Chick Flick”. Readings: “Feminine Fascinations: Forms of Identification in Star-Audience Relations” by Jackie Stacey (Thornham 196-209)
Wednesday: Discuss Boys on the Side and Group 2 Presentation.

Week Six—Reception and Spectatorship. Readings: “Black Women as Cultural Readers” by Jacqueline Bobo (BB)
Monday: Screen The Color Purple (Spielberg, 1985)
Wednesday: Discuss film, Group 3 Presentation

Week Seven—Postfeminism and Film. Readings: Angela McRobbie, Post-Feminism (BB) and “Generic Womanhood: gendered depictions in cop action cinema” by Neal King (on BB).
Monday: Screen Miss Congeniality (Petrie, 2000)
Wednesday: Discuss Miss Congeniality. Group 4 Presentation.

Week Eight—“Quality” TV. Readings: “Quality postfeminism” by Diane Negra (link on BB) and TBA.
Monday: Paper Due. Screen Sex and the City and Weeds (episodes, TBA).
Wednesday: Discussion and Group 5 Presentation.

Week Nine—Transformative Works and Cultures. Readings: “Women, Star Trek, and the early development of fannish vidding” by Francesca Coppa (link on BB)
Wednesday: Discuss screened media, readings. Group 6 Presentation.

Week Ten—Political Remix. Reading: DIY Video 2010: Political Remix (Parts 1,2, and 3) by: Henry Jenkins (link on BB).
Monday: Screen: Various Remix clips and vids
Wednesday: Discussion and Final Exam review.

Week Eleven—Final Exam: In class during exam period
I. Group Panel Presentations

Student panels will be made up of 5-7 students. Each panel will be in charge of leading discussion for the first half of our class period (about 30-45 minutes) on Wednesday. A successful student panel will integrate the week’s readings, and outside resources and result in a lively discussion of the film/media text that addresses how it engages with ideologies of gender, race, and class. Examples of outside resources might include:

1. Historical/Cultural context for the film
2. Additional media (film clips, web video, etc.) that might enhance our understanding of the film and/or the readings

Panels will be graded according to how well the group does the following:

1. Demonstrates an understanding of the week’s reading and conveys that understanding to the class.
2. Demonstrates an ability to use formal analysis.
4. Relates the week’s readings to the film.

II. Final Research Paper

For the final paper, you will choose, as your topic, one of the films or media texts from the course of the term. Using one of the readings from the course, as well as two additional scholarly sources, you will construct an argument about the film and the way it engages intersecting categories of race or ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and/or class. 5-7 pages.