

SLAVERY IN FILM
HIST 3098/AFRA 3898
University of Connecticut, Spring 2017
Professor Dexter Gabriel, Department of History
Lecture, Wednesdays 2:30-5:30PM STRS 011

Office Hours/Contact Info:

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Course Description: The release of films like *Django Unchained*, *12 Years a Slave* and the television series *Underground* have sparked renewed dialogue on slavery, as all such films inevitably do. Outside of the classroom much of what we know, or think we know, about slavery often comes from popular media--especially film and television. This course examines slavery in the Atlantic world through the lens of this popular medium, exploring filmic depictions of slavery, famous figures, or related events. These films are both foreign and domestic, and range from historical dramas to the surreal. In examining these films, we will take into account the time period, location and social atmosphere in which they were created. And we will see how much they actually tell us about slavery and, most important, what they might tell us about ourselves.

Learning Objectives: By successfully completing this course, students will increase their knowledge of the slave system(s) that permeated the Atlantic world; the cultural and social events that surrounded these systems; the way in which varied visual media have shaped our collective memories about slavery; the political atmosphere surrounding the creation of these films; the larger contemporary discourse these films set into motion; and lastly, through a critical reading of a range of historical works, cultural critiques and primary sources, students will develop a greater comprehension of how historians and filmmakers both differ or find mutual agreement in their approaches to the past.

Required Texts:

- David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*
- Frederick Douglass, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*
- Dan Laughey, *Key Themes in Media Theory*
- Melton A. McLaurin, *Celia, A Slave: A True Story*

All other **required** readings (images, etc) will be made available via our Blackboard online learning platform, indicated by **(HUSKYCT)** on the syllabus. You can find them on the site under the folder **Course Materials**.

While we will watch some films in class, there will be viewing required at home. These videos will be made available through **HUSKYCT** in the folder **Films & Videos**. There are also Viewing Guides for each film. Students should bring ALL assigned reading materials to class on the day they are to be discussed. This means you will need to print out some readings in time for class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Movie Talk: Following the viewing of films, students will be required to engage in an online discussion via **HUSKYCT** within **48 hrs** of class (by Friday). The purpose is to gauge your *initial* reaction to the films *before* engaging the reading assignments. Each participant should make at least TWO posts.

Reaction Papers: Reaction papers will be assigned following film viewing.

Requirements: This is a **group assignment**. Your group will turn in a **Reaction Paper assignment by each following Wednesday on HUSKYCT**. Your group's paper should provide reaction and scholarly criticism that apply your readings to the visual material from the previous week. Your responses in all should total **2 full pages** in length and should show that you have fully comprehended and reasoned through the readings and visual material.

Book Analysis: There will two separate book analyses due by individual students on *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass* and *Celia, A Slave*. Your analyses should NOT be a summary. Instead, they should examine each book within the context of our historical understandings of slavery. What are its key themes? What does it tell us about slavery? How does this medium convey history differently than a film? Students should show within their papers that they have read and comprehended the books in full, using citations from the texts when needed. Each analysis should be **2 full pages** in length and will be due on the same day the reading is due to be completed (Douglass- Feb. 8, Celia- Mar. 8).

Critical Film Review Paper: By the end of the semester, each group will write a critical review paper of at least five pages on a film (or films) pertaining to slavery. The film(s) chosen should be **approved by the professor beforehand**. It cannot be a film that was already viewed or assigned in the class. If the film is a series, it must entail at least four episodes. The critical review should incorporate both a historical and media theory analysis of the film(s) along with proper citations and a bibliography. Your group's critical review will be due on **Friday April 28** by 5PM.

Exams: There are two exams for the course, a Midterm and a Final. The Midterm will be administered and completed via (**HUSKYCT**). You will have a set time to complete the exam and a date by which you will have to take it. Please note once you begin an exam you cannot stop and continue at a later time. You must complete the exam in the time allotted. The Final will be an **in-class exam**. It will include everything post-midterm, along with cumulative questions that draw on the full breadth of the session. You must take your final exam at the scheduled time.

Grading:

Reaction Papers	20%
Movie Discussions	10%
Book Analyses	10%
Midterm	20%
Final Exam	20%
Critical Film Review Paper	20%

CLASS AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES:

Electronic Devices: ALL electronic devices should be off and put away during class unless otherwise noted. If you have an emergency, you may step outside for phone use. Take care not to abuse this policy. Laptops are not allowed for use unless deemed necessary by the instructor or necessitated by a disability through proper documentation.

Submission of Work: All work is due when it is due. Late work **will not** be accepted except in extraordinary circumstances (with documented evidence) at the discretion of the instructor. Any accepted late work will be penalized at the discretion of the instructor. Work is to be turned in via HuskyCT, unless there is a request for hard/paper copies. If there is some problem with HuskyCT you may turn in your work to me directly via email.

Communication with Instructor and TA: Students should feel free contact both the professor and/or the teaching assistant through the emails provided above. I am also available during my listed office hours or by appointment. As an instructor, I am here to help answer questions regarding the course you may have.

Respectful Exchange of Ideas: In discussing historical topics it is important that students feel comfortable expressing their opinion. Yet it is imperative students refrain from creating a hostile environment. Feel free to speak your mind, but let's also keep our exchanges respectful.

Academic Integrity: UConn has very strong and clear policies regarding academic dishonesty (cheating, plagiarism, etc.). Penalties could include a **Failing grade** in the course, and misconduct is required to be reported to the Academic Integrity Hearing Board. An explanation of what constitutes academic misconduct can be found here: <http://community.uconn.edu/academic-integrity-undergraduate-faq/>

Students with Disabilities: If you are a student with a disability that may impact your course work, please contact the Center for Students with Disabilities: <http://csd.uconn.edu>. CSD will help determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

Warning of Sensitive Material: The subject matter of this course—both in imagery and description—can and will at times be graphic, including the presence of violence, sexual abuse and derogatory language. Some of the films have an R rating. Understanding that each individual's level of sensitivity can be different, if some part of the course is overly distressing or disturbing please feel free to discuss such problems with the instructor.

Working in Groups: Much of the work in this class will be completed in groups. It's therefore imperative that everyone in each group contribute toward assignments. Group members should also find a way to keep lines of communication open, through face-to-face meetings, email, or other means (e.g. SLACK). If interpersonal problems arise within groups, students should speak directly to the instructor or the teaching assistant.

Course Schedule

Week 1

W Jan 18 Introduction, Welcome & Media Theory

Readings Due:

Laughey: *Media Theory*, 1-38, 48-52

In Class Film: *Ethnic Notions* (1986)

At Home Viewing: *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)

Online Discussion of *The Birth of a Nation* due by Sun. 1/22

Week 2

W Jan 25 Birth of a Genre

Readings Due:

HUSKYCT Link: “The Lost Cause”- Encyclopedia of Virginia

HUSKYCT Document: Bogle, “Black Beginnings,” 3-14

HUSKYCT Document: Rylance, “Breech Birth,” 1-11

Due: Group Reaction Paper- *The Birth of a Nation*

In Class Film (Clips): *The Littlest Rebel* (1935), *The Little Colonel* (1935)

No Online Discussion of film due

Week 3

W Feb 1 The Plantation Epics

Readings Due:

HUSKYCT Document: DuCile, “The Shirley Temple of My Familiar,” 13-25

HUSKYCT Document: White, “Jezebel and Mammy: The Mythology of Female Slavery” pp. 46-61

HUSKYCT Link: “The Mammy Washington Almost Had,” *The Atlantic*

No Group Reaction Paper Due

In Class Film (Clips): *Gone with the Wind* (1939)

No Online Discussion of film due

Week 4

W Feb 8 Slave Life in History and Film

Readings Due:

Douglass: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 19-121 (Reading Guide in **HUSKYCT**)

Due: Book Analysis of *Douglass* narrative

No Group Reaction Paper Due

In Class Film (Clips): *Song of the South* (1946)

No Online Discussion of film due

Week 5

W, Feb 15 Postcolonial Slave Cinema

Readings Due:

Laughey: *Media Theory*, 122-130, 138-145

Davis: *Inhuman Bondage*, 205-230

Due: Group Reaction Paper- *Littlest Rebel, Little Colonel, Gone With the Wind, Song of the South*

In Class Film: *Burn!* (1969)

Online Discussion of *Queimada! (Burn!)* due by Friday. 2/17

Week 6

W, Feb 22 Burn!

Readings Due:

Davis: *Inhuman Bondage*, 157-174

HUSKYCT Document: Pennino, "Pontecorvo's Burn! History, Hegemony, and Hollywood," 1-13

Due: Group Reaction Paper- *Burn!*

In Class Film: *The Last Supper* (1976)

Online Discussion of *The Last Supper* due by Fri. 2/24

Week 7

W, Mar 1 Revolutionary Cuba Remembers Slavery

Readings Due:

HUSKYCT Document: Jaehne, "The Last Supper," 48-53

HUSKYCT Video: PBS Cuba The Next Revolution

Due: Group Reaction Paper- *The Last Supper*

In Class Film: *Mandingo* (1976)

Online Discussion of *Mandingo* due by Fri. 3/3

Week 8

W, Mar 8- Blaxploitation, Slavery, and Gender

Readings Due:

Laughey: *Media Theory*, 100-105, 113-120.

HUSKYCT Document: Keser, "The Greatest Film About Race Ever Filmed in Hollywood"

McLaurin: *Celia, A Slave* (entire book)

Due: Book Analysis of *Celia*

Due: Group Reaction Paper- *Mandingo*

In Class Film: *Roots* Part I (1977)

At Home Viewing: *Roots* Part II (1977)

No online Discussion of film due

***March 9- Live Tweet Season Premiere of Underground (WGN)**

Week 9

SPRING BREAK- MARCH 12 - MARCH 18

*Midterm Exam to be completed by Sunday March 19

*Due by next class: the film your group intends to research.

Week 10

W, Mar 22 The New Slavery Goes Mainstream

Readings Due:

HUSKYCT Documents: Lindsay, "Why Did Africans Sell Slaves," 54-65; Lindsay, "Why Did Europeans Buy African Slaves?," 23-32, 43-47; Rediker, *The Slave Ship* (excerpts)

Davis: *Inhuman Bondage*, 88-102

No Group Reaction Paper Due

In Class Film: *Roots* Part III (1977)

At Home Viewing: *Roots* Part IV (1977)

No online Discussion of film due

Week 11

W, Mar 29 The New Slavery Goes Mainstream II

Readings Due:

HUSKYCT Document: "Why Roots Hit Home" *TIME* 1977

HUSKYCT Link/Document: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938

Davis: *Inhuman Bondage*, 193-204

Due: Group Reaction Paper- *Roots* (all episodes watched)

In Class Film: *Quilombo* (1986)

Online Discussion of *Quilombo* due by Fri. 3/31

Week 12

W, Apr 5 Slave Rebels of Brazil's Cinema Novo

Readings Due:

HUSKYCT Documents: Kent, "Palmares: An African State in Brazil," 161-175; Anderson, "The Quilombo of Palmares," 545-566; Stam, "Slow Fade to Afro," 16-32

Due: Group Reaction Paper- *Quilombo*

In Class Film: *Glory* (1989)

No Online discussion of film due

Week 13

W, Apr 12 Glory: The Civil War Revisited

Readings Due:

HUSKYCT Document: Cripps, "Frederick Douglass: The Absent Presence in Glory," 154-163;

HUSKYCT Links: The 54th Regiment, Massachusetts Historical Society; Vera and Gordon, "Sincere Fictions of the White Self in the American Cinema"

Due: Group Reaction Paper- *Glory*

In Class Film: *Sankofa* (1993)

Online Discussion of *Sankofa* due by Fri. 4/14

Week 14

W, Apr 19 Slavery in the 90s Black Film Renaissance

Readings Due:

HUSKYCT Document: Woolford, "Filming Slavery," 90-104; Kande, "Maroons and Mulattos in Haile Gerima's Sankofa," 128-143

HUSKYCT Link: The Tragic Mulatto Myth

Due: Group Reaction Paper- *Sankofa*

In Class Film: *Amistad* (1997)

No Online Discussion of film due

Week 15

W, Apr 26 Slavery and the Hollywood Blockbuster

Reading Due:

Davis: *Inhuman Bondage*, 12-26

HUSKYCT Documents: Dalzell, "Dreamworking Amistad," 127-133; Lemisch, "You've Taken Our Cinque and Gone," 57-70

No Group Reaction Paper Due

Twenty-First Visions of Slavery: Django Unchained & 12 Years A Slave

Readings Due:

HUSKYCT Links: Denby, "Django Unchained: Put-On, Revenge, and the Aesthetics of Trash" *The New Yorker*; Berry, "Unmixed Blessin'? A Historian's Thoughts on Django Unchained" *Not Even Past*; Toplin, "12 Years a Slave Examines the Old South's Heart of Darkness" *Perspectives on History*

* *Django Unchained & 12 Years a Slave* viewing should be previously completed for this class.

Final Exam TBA