

## **Course Overview:**

**FILM 2362: Diversity and American Film** examines the history of social attitudes towards race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in the United States as they have been represented in film and media. Through readings, in-class screenings, and in-class discussion, students are introduced to how cinema both affects and is affected by social understandings of these concepts, and learn the history of what opportunities various minority groups have (or have not) had within the media industries.

## **Instructor Biography:**

Sean Griffin is a Professor of Film and Media Arts, and an Associate Professor in that Division. He received his PhD from the University of Southern California in 1997, and his dissertation became the book *Tinker Belles and Evil Queens: The Walt Disney Company from the Inside Out*, examining the relationships between Disney and lesbian/gay/queer culture. He is also the co-author of *America on Film: Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality at the Movies* and *Queer Images: A History of Lesbian and Gay Film in America*. He has also edited a number of anthologies, and contributed a number of articles on the musical genre, soap operas, and Disney to journals and other anthologies. He is currently finishing a history of the American film musical from *The Jazz Singer* to *Into the Woods*, titled *Free and Easy*. Prior to becoming a professor, Dr. Griffin helped produce the television ad campaigns for Disney and Touchstone motion pictures, including *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Pretty Woman*, *Dick Tracy* and *Beauty and the Beast*.

## **Benefits:**

- Students will come to recognize how concepts of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality have evolved over time.
- Students will learn how to analyze media texts as a work of art and as a historical document.
- Students will become more aware of the cultures and viewpoints of minoritized communities by exposure to media work done by artists of color, as well as female and LGBT artists
- Students will be able to recognize how attitudes from the past about race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality continue to impact current attitudes
- Students will be appreciate how media texts can create change in social attitudes about race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality

## **UC/GEC Tags and SLOs**

**Historical Contexts, Level I:** Students will be able to identify the main events, actors, and evidence involved in a defined historical period and; students will be able to summarize in their own prose the major changes that took place over time in a defined historical period

**Human Diversity:** Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the historical, cultural, social, or political conditions of identity formation and function in human society, including the ways in which these conditions influence individual or group status, treatment, or accomplishments, and; students will be able to demonstrate the ability to differentiate and understand values different from their own.

## FILM 2362: Diversity and American Film

Dr. Sean Griffin

MTWThF Noon – 4 PM

Greer Garson 3531

Historical survey of representations of race and ethnicity, class structure, gender, and sexual orientation in American cinema, as well as the opportunities for minorities within the industry.

### Course Objectives:

- 1) Students will learn the history of social attitudes towards race/ethnicity, class structure, gender, sexuality and ability in the United States. (In relation to taking this course, the **Historical Contexts, Level I** Curriculum: Students will be able to identify the main events, actors, and evidence involved in a defined historical period and; students will be able to summarize in their own prose the major changes that took place over time in a defined historical period.)
- 2) Students will learn how cinema both affects and is affected by these attitudes (In relation to taking this course, the **Human Diversity** Curriculum: Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the historical, cultural, social, or political conditions of identity formation and function in human society, including the ways in which these conditions influence individual or group status, treatment, or accomplishments, and; students will be able to demonstrate the ability to differentiate and understand values different from their own.
- 3) Students will learn the various opportunities various minority groups have (or have not) had within the film industry.

**Required Reading:** Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality at the Movies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2009).

<b>Course Requirements:</b>	Mid-Term Examination	35%
	Final Examination	45%
	Attendance and Participation	20%

Attendance is mandatory, and in-class contribution is a strong portion in determining a final grade. **Those not attending the first class session (unless notifying me ahead of time) and those with three unexcused absences during the semester are subject to being dropped from the course.**

Examinations are based on class lectures, assigned readings, and films screened in class. Midterm and final exam will be in short answer and essay format; the final will *not* be cumulative.

**Laptop and/or tablet computers are NOT to be used during class sessions unless signed documentation from DASS stipulates such use is a necessary accommodation for a particular student. BRING A NOTEBOOK TO CLASS!**

**Disability Accommodations:** Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS). Students can call 214-768-1470 or visit <http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALEC/DASS> to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible, present a DASS Accommodation Letter, and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement.

## **BREAKDOWN BY CLASS MEETING:**

- May 12: Introduction and Filming Whiteness  
Read: Benshoff & Griffin, Chs. 1 – 3  
Screen: *Multi-Facial* (1995, d. Vin Diesel, 20 min.)
- May 13: Filming African Americans  
Read: Benshoff & Griffin, Ch. 4  
Screen: *Fruitvale Station* (2013, d. Ryan Coogler, 85 min.)
- May 16: Filming Native Americans  
Read: Benshoff & Griffin, Ch. 5  
Screen: *Smoke Signals* (1998, d. Chris Eyre, 88 min.)
- May 17: Filming Asian Americans  
Read: Benshoff & Griffin, Ch. 6  
Screen: *Better Luck Tomorrow* (2002, d. Justin Lin, 101 min.)
- May 18: Filming Hispanic Americans  
Read: Benshoff & Griffin, Ch. 7  
Screen: *Devious Maids* (2013, d. Paul McGuigan, 45 min.)
- May 19: **MIDTERM EXAM**
- May 20: Femininity in Classical Hollywood  
Read: Benshoff & Griffin, “What Is Gender,” Chs. 10 & 11  
Screen: *Scandal—Season 1, Ep. 6* (2012, d. Tom Verica, 43m.)
- May 23: Masculinity in Classical Hollywood  
Read: Benshoff & Griffin, Ch. 12 & 13  
Screen: *Breaking Bad—Season 1, Ep. 2* (2008, d. Adam Bernstein, 48 min.)
- May 24: Sexuality in Classical Hollywood  
Read: Benshoff & Griffin, “What Is Sexuality” and Ch. 14 and 15  
Screen: *Go Fish* (1994, d. Rose Troche, 83 min.)

May 25:      The Interaction of Identity Categories  
              Read: Benshoff & Griffin, Ch. 17  
              Screen: *Quinceañera* (2006, d. Richard Glatzer, Wash Westmoreland,  
                      90 min.)

May 26:      **FINAL EXAM**