USLT 498A/AMST 498G, Fall 2012
U.S. Latino/as on the Silver Screen: the Silent Era to the Present Day

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Course Description
Since the early days of moving images, the cinema has held a prominent and influential position in U.S. culture. In pursuit of commercial reward, Hollywood studios and independent filmmakers create and disseminate powerful ideas about politics and culture to mass audiences in the Americas and across the globe. Embedded in a culture in which race was and is always an issue, the U.S. film industry remains a crucial arena in which representations of ethnoracial identity and its relationship to national identity are produced, interpreted, debated, and reconceived. Beginning with the era of silent film and concluding with contemporary films, this course explores the ambiguous and shifting history of U.S. Latina/os both behind and in front of the camera. Combining media theory and film history, we will consider the film industry’s relationship to Latinidad, examining issues such as the shift from silent film to sound, the impact made on Latino/a images by the Second World War and the “good neighbor” era, and Latina/os in the Cold War Red Scare. In these periods, representational power remained chiefly in the hands of white Hollywood producers, and Latino/as (most often Mexican Americans) were subject to a series of demeaning representational strategies. As we move into the second half of the course, we will turn attention to self-representation by Latina/o filmmakers and empathetic images created by whites in and after the 1970s. How have Latina/os been depicted in Hollywood history? How have inter-American foreign relations shaped the US Latino/a image? How have Latina/o filmmakers confronted issues such as racism and sexism in the United States? By taking active part in extensive classroom discussions and viewings, completing short written assignments, and composing two analytical essays of their own devising, students will explore these issues throughout the semester, in doing so gaining insight into both Latina/o racial formations and the practice of film criticism.

Required Texts


All other readings are available through ELMS Course Reserves. These are marked [CR] on the syllabus.

Assessment
Grades will be calculated from a possible 500 points.
1) Regular, insightful contribution to every class discussion (100 pts)
2) Best four short assignments of five completed (25 points each, 100 pts total)
3) A mid-term essay of 5 pages (100 pts)
4) A final essay of 10 pages (150 pts)
5) Final exam (50pts)

Grading for each assignment

- **A** = Demonstrates outstanding mastery of content and application of concepts in completing the assigned work. Written work is clear and free from grammatical and typographical errors, and exhibits original insight and ideas.
- **B** = Demonstrates good understanding of content and concepts in completing the assigned work, but does not meet the same standards of writing and originality as ‘A’ work.
- **C** = Demonstrates acceptable familiarity and understanding of the assignment. ‘C’ grades represent an average level of attainment.
- **D** = Demonstrates only sketchy grasp of concepts and course content.
- **F** = Does not demonstrate understanding or application of course material and concepts. Fails to address the assignment in a coherent manner.

I will provide details as each assignment approaches, and we will spend some time in class discussing the ins and outs of each particular essay or examination. The following schedule is our outline, though I reserve the right to make some changes as we go.

**Week 1 – Introductions**

**Thurs 8/30:** Introductions, etc.

**Week 2 – Setting the Scene**

**Tues, 9/4:**


**Film in Class:** *Stuart Hall: Representation and the Media*

**Thurs, 9/6:**
Read for Today: Ramirez Berg, *Latino Images in Film*, 66-86.

**Film in Class:** *The Bronze Screen: 100 Years of the Latino Image in American Cinema* (2002)

**Week 3 - Pre-War Hollywood: From Silence to Sound**

**Tues, 9/11:**


**Begin Film in Class:** *Bordertown* (1935)
Thurs, 9/13:

Film in Class continued: *Bordertown*

**Week 4 - World War II and Liberal Hollywood**

Tues, 9/18:


Begin Film in Class: *A Medal for Benny* (1945)

Thurs, 9/20:
Film in Class continued: *A Medal for Benny* (1945)

**Week 5 – Latino/as and the “Social Problem” Film**

Tues, 9/25:

Begin Film in Class: *The Lawless* (1950)

Thurs, 9/27:
Film in Class continued: *The Lawless*

**Week 6 – Defying the Blacklist: *Salt of the Earth* (1954)**

Tues, 10/2:
Watch for Today: *Salt of the Earth* (1954)


Thurs, 10/4:
*Salt* discussion continued

FIRST PAPER (5 pages) DUE IN CLASS
Week 7 – “Life is Alright in America (If you’re a White in America)”

**Tues, 10/9:**
*Watch for Today:* West Side Story (1961)


**Thurs, 10/11:**
*West Side Story* discussion continued

Week 8 – Border Troubles in Robert M. Young’s *Alambrista!*

**Tues, 10/16:**
*Watch for Today:* Alambrista! (1977)


**Thurs, 10/18:**
*Alambrista* discussion continued.

Week 9 – The Cinema of Gregory Nava: *El Norte*

**Tues, 10/23:**


**Thurs, 10/25:**
*El Norte* discussion continued.

Week 10 – Transnational Identities and Crossover Dreaming

**Tues, 10/30:**

**Begin Film in Class:** *Crossover Dreams* (1985)

**Thurs, 11/1:**
**Film in Class Continued:** *Crossover Dreams* (1985)

**Week 11 - Inside and Out:** *American Me*

**Tues, 11/6:**
**Watch for Today:** *American Me* (1992)


**Thurs, 11/8:**
*American Me* discussion continued

**Week 12 – Gender and Power in *Girlfight***

**Tues, 11/13:**
**Watch for Today:** *Girlfight* (2000)


**Thurs, 11/15:**
*Girlfight* discussion continued

**Week 13 – Tues, 11/20 & Thurs, 11/22: No Class**

**Week 14 – 21st Century Images, Part I**

**Tues, 11/27:**
**Read for Today:**

Begin Film in Class: *Real Women Have Curves* (2002).

Thurs, 11/29:
Film in Class Continued: *Real Women...*

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**Week 15 – 21st Century Images, Part II**

Tues, 12/4:
Read for Today: TBA

Film in Class: *Sleep Dealer* (2008)

Thurs, 12/6:
Film in Class continued: *Sleep Dealer*

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**Week 16 – Final Paper and Wrapping Up**

Tues, 12/11:
FINAL PAPER DUE in class.

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**Rules, Requirements, and the Like**

**Participation**
Student participation is essential to maximize our exchange of ideas and get the most out of the class. It also accounts for 20% of your final grade. **Note: Simply turning up does not count as participation; it is only its prerequisite.** I expect to hear from everyone each week, and will be taking note of who is contributing and, importantly, assuming a leadership role in facilitating discussion between students. Class discussion must be conducted respectfully: there is room for all viewpoints to be raised and debated. Participation also extends to watching films and clips, both in class and as part of homework assignments. You should give undivided attention to the screen, and all electronic devices, and newspapers, etc., should be turned off/put away before the class begins (unless you have a very good reason that I have approved, laptop computers, cellphones, etc., are prohibited in the classroom). In order to participate effectively, you must complete all readings and viewings on time and come to class (also on time) with points to make and questions to ask. **The syllabus is the guide, unless you hear otherwise, follow the syllabus to keep up.**

**Papers and format**
I will distribute information on the specifics of each paper as we go along. However, there are some matters of format that apply to each of them. All papers should be **double-spaced**, written in **12 point font, and include page numbers and a title**. All papers must include a works cited page, and must be formatted to the conventions of a recognized academic citation style, preferably Chicago or MLA.

**Unexcused absences and lateness**
Unexcused non-attendance means that students will not be eligible to receive participation points for that particular class. Students should also be on time, which means being seated and ready to
begin by 2:00. It is students’ responsibility to contact the instructor concerning potential missed assignments and to make up missed classes by borrowing notes from a classmate.

**Excused absences**  
Satisfactory documentation is required in order for an absence to be considered excused, and it must be presented in a timely fashion (during the class period that you return). Please make a copy of your documentation for me to keep. You are responsible for making up missed material, assignments, and so on.

**Late Work**  
Written work that is late without good reason will be penalized at the rate of 5 points a day (weekends count as one day). If you are absent when an assignment is due, you must e-mail me that assignment by class time and bring a hard copy to the next class to get credit. Late work may be submitted via email in between classes, with a hard copy again due at the next class. These are the only situations in which I will accept work electronically. Extensions on assignment deadlines can, in extenuating circumstances, be agreed with me before the due date.

**Additional Notes**  
Students with disabilities should contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to discuss any accommodation for this course. Students with scheduling conflicts due to university activities, or with religious or cultural dates to observe, should also speak with instructor early in the semester.

**Academic Integrity**  
The University has approved a **Code of Academic Integrity** which prohibits students from cheating on exams, plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper for credit in two courses without authorization, buying papers, submitting fraudulent documents, and forging signatures. The plagiarism policy specifies that all quotations taken from other authors, including from the Internet, must be indicated by quotation marks and referenced. Paraphrasing must be referenced as well. The following University of Maryland Honor Pledge can be handwritten and signed on the front page of all papers, projects or other academic assignments submitted for evaluation in this course: "I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment/examination." Potential instances of academic dishonesty will be referred to the UMCP Student Honor Council. Penalties for cheating, plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty can be severe. All members of the University Community share the responsibility to challenge and make known acts of apparent academic dishonesty.

All the best for a productive and successful semester,

Rob.