

Descriptif d'enseignement

Cours en ligne pour le Semestre 1 de 3^{ème} année - *idem en anglais*

Course Title

Selma not Chicago : Hollywood's obfuscating of racism in the North

Type de cours : Cours en ligne

Language of instruction : English

Enseignant

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Course description – Targets

George Floyd was killed by police forces in Minneapolis right on the demarcation line between the traditionally black area and the traditionally white area of the city, a spot deemed particularly contentious by the city police. The reason why this is so is because, not only in Minneapolis but all across the country, real estate issues have been historically bound up with race, in what have been known as “restrictive covenants” entrenching black ghettos and overwhelmingly white areas.

In fact, Americans like much of the world's educated opinion like to believe that race has mostly been a *regional* rather than a national question, historically affecting places like Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, etc... and hardly states like Colorado, Oregon, or cities like Minneapolis indeed, Portland (Or.), Denver, Seattle, Boston, etc. This bias has been challenged by historians, from Howard Zinn (*The Southern Mystique* (1964)) to Matthew Lassiter / Joseph Crespino (*The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, 2009) or Thomas Sugrue (*Sweet Land of Liberty : The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*, 2008).

The aim of this course is to unpack the extent to which Hollywood has been instrumental in entrenching this geographical bias. With hugely successful and prize-winning films such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), *In The Heat of The Night* (1967), *Mississippi Burning* (1989), *Selma* (2014), *Green Book* (2018) and many others, the film industry has almost exclusively relegated race to the deep South. “Racism” or “race” is here apprehended in terms of a white / black binary, and in terms of “North” vs. “South”. Admittedly, *West Side Story* (1961) has been hugely successful and it is about race in New York, but it pits whites against Porto-Ricans, and is therefore outside the remit of this course. More to the point here has been the fact that Hollywood has developed an interest in the Ku Klux Klan (as an

ignoble Southern tradition,¹ not a national one), segregated buses and restaurants in Alabama, not really (or not at all) in restrictive covenants in Chicago or Cleveland, in White Flight all across the country, in Harlem (New York) as by very far the largest Black ghetto in the country, in bussing controversies in Pontiac, Boston, Pasadena, in “blockbusting” practices accelerating the racial transition of most major downtowns, etc. This is partly because east-coast and west-coast elites have enjoyed hegemony in the production of popular culture to American as well as global audiences.

This course deals with films on a quantitative basis (how many films ? watched by how many people ? What awards ?) as well as on a qualitative basis (specific excerpts will be studied from very well-known films to not so famous ones). Excerpts from films reviews in the press (Northern / Southern press, British press) will also be studied. Southern reactions to certain films will also be looked into.

Likewise, the aim of this course will be to interrogate the reasons behind the construction of such a consensus on race in the U.S, particularly in times of cold war, when the U.S. soft power needed to be hammered to newly decolonized, non-white countries, but also to convey to Americans the sense that despite the hundreds of chocolate cities and vanilla suburbs, “race” and “racism” were now things of the past, through stories that had taken place “far away” and “long ago”. These views triumphed in 2008 with talk about “post-racial America” when Obama was first elected, and were shattered in 2013 with “Black Lives Matter” and the more recent death of George Floyd.

Ultimately, it bears repeating that the course is certainly *not* about gauging the (necessarily subjective) aesthetic qualities of this or that film about racism in the South or North, it is rather about how much a certain quantity of films watched by many people generate a near-consensus on an otherwise complex, controversial social and historical reality.

Online teaching method

Most of the contact with students will be via Zoom, or a free software equivalent of it.

A couple of videos will be posted on Youtube.

Assessment

Students will be asked to record a 10-minute max video of themselves presenting and discussing a bunch of documents on the topic, mixing primary and secondary sources.

Course outline

See above detailed presentation of the course.

¹ For instance in *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café* (1991) or *Mississippi Burning* (1989).

Bibliography

(a selection of primary sources and archival documents will be made available to students).

Students will be sent, and asked to read the introduction to Lassiter / Crespino's *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* BEFORE the first class. The document will be provided to them.

Courtney, Susan, *Split Screen Nation: Moving Images of the American West and South*, New York : Oxford University Press, 2017.

Delaporte, Chloé, « Sociologie du cinéma et théorie des réseaux : pour une analyse structurale des 'Européens à Hollywood' », *Sociologie de l'Art*, Vol. 25-26 (1-2), 2016, p. 37-62.

Duneier, Mitchell, *Ghetto : The Invention of a Place, the History of an Idea*, New York : Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2017.

Esteves, Olivier, « 50 ans après sa mort, on fait de Martin Luther King un symbole au lieu de construire la société dont il rêvait », *Huffington Post*, 04. 04. 2018.

Lassiter, Matthew, Crespino, Joseph (eds.), *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

McAdam, Doug. *Freedom Summer*, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1988.

Scott, Ellen C., *Cinema Civil Rights : Regulation, Repression, and Race in the Classical Hollywood Era*, New Jersey : Rutgers University Press, 2015.

Sugrue, Thomas. *Sweet Land of Liberty : The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*, New York : Vintage, 2008.

Theoharis, Jeanne, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History : The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History*, Boston : Beacon Press, 2018.

Zinn, Howard. *The Southern Mystique*, Chicago : Haymarket, 1964.

Zinn, Howard. "The Federal Bureau of Intimidation", in *Howard Zinn on Democratic Education*, Boulder (CO.) : Paradigm Publishers, 2005, p. 175-185.