Blacks in the Americas

HIST 215 901

Spring 2021

4:00PM - 4:55PM MWF Online and Synchronous

The History of Africans in the Americas Through Film

Kimberly V. Jones

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# Contact Information

Instructor: Kimberly V. Jones (Professor Jones or Ms. Jones)  
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Office Hours: After Class MWF 5pm – 6pm or by appointment

# Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

This course surveys the history, theories, debates, and controversies that have characterized the history of Black people in America, with an emphasis on the relationship between African Americans in historical cinema and culture and politics more broadly. One of the debates within African American history centers on the scope and intensity of black resistance to white supremacy and anti-blackness. During this semester we will reveal the black radical tradition in the histories of the United States through examinations of films as historical text and through our reading and discussions. Our conversations around films will analyze depictions of raced bodies in cinema and the implications and origins of the portrayals. We will cover themes of race, gender, medicine, and freedom. This course covers the black experience in America from the 17th century to the 21st century. **This class is not a eat popcorn and watch movie class.** The goal of this class is to learn the history of Black people in the Americas through watching movies.

# Texts and Materials

Books:

Davis, Natalie Zemon. *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision*. Toronto: Random House of Canada, 2011.

Gillespie, Michael Boyce. *Film Blackness: American Cinema and the Idea of Black Film*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

Kendi, Ibram X. *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. New York: Nation Books, 2017.

Articles and Chapters:

In addition to the required texts, you will read scholarly articles and chapters from books. The articles will be available on Canvas.

Fleetwood, Nicole R. “Her Own Spook: Colorism, Vision, and the Dark Female Body.” In *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness*, 71–104. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Morrison, Toni. “Black Matters.” In *Playing in the Dark : Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, 1–28. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Thomas, Ebony Elizabeth. “Toward a Theory of the Dark Fantastic.” In *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*, 15–34. New York: NYU Press, 2019.

Toplin, Robert Brent. “Introduction.” In *History by Hollywood: The Use and Abuse of the American Past*, 1–24. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996.

Urwand, Ben. “The Black Image on the White Screen: Representations of African Americans from the Origins of Cinema to The Birth of a Nation.” *Journal of American Studies* 52, no. 1 (2018): 45–64.

West, Carolyn M. “Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire: Developing an ‘Oppositional Gaze’ toward the Images of Black Women.” In *Lectures on the Psychology of Women*, edited by Joan C. Chrisler, Carla Golden, and Patricia D. Rozee, 3rd edition., 237–52. Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2003.

White, Deborah Gray. “Jezebel and Mammy: The Mythology of Female Slavery.” In *Ar’n’t I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, 27–61. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999.

*Supplemental Texts:*

Corbould, Clare. “At the Feet of Dessalines:  Performing Haiti’s Revolution during the New Negro Renaissance.” In *Beyond Blackface: African Americans and the Creation of American Popular Culture, 1890-1930*, edited by William Fitzhugh Brundage, 259–88. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

Bloomquist, Jennifer. “The Minstrel Legacy: African American English and the Historical Construction of ‘Black’ Identities in Entertainment.” *Journal of African American Studies* 19, no. 4 (2015): 410–25.

Painter, Nell Irvin. *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and Its Meanings, 1619 to the Present*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Guerrero, Ed. “Slaves, Monsters, and Others:  Racial Fragment, Metaphor, and Allegory on the Commercial Screen.” In *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film*, 41–68. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012.

Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past.” *The Journal of American History*, 2005, 32.

# Films

Links are provided to many of the films. However, some films do not have links free streaming. For these films you can choose to watch with the instructor, buy or rent the film.

Thorough a Lens Darkly (2014)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THZWSexAjgk&ab_channel=FamilyPicturesUSA>

Roots Part One (2016)

<https://rice.kanopy.com/video/part-1-2>

Amistad (1997)

<https://decider.com/movie/amistad/>

Freedom (2014)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78yA9K2zVzU&ab_channel=reelblack>

Slaves (1969)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l62bumuGeHQ&t=4344s&ab_channel=Bjgtjme-FreeMovies>

Jefferson in Paris (1995)

[https://www.hoopladigital.com/title/11900040#](https://www.hoopladigital.com/title/11900040)

Lydia Bailey (1952)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKaPpsjJjOw&t=507s&ab_channel=reelblack>

The Retrieval (2013)

<https://www.vudu.com/content/movies/details/The-Retrieval/624932>

Glory (1989)

<https://decider.com/movie/glory/>

The Beguiled (2017)

<https://decider.com/movie/the-beguiled-2017/>

Within Our Gates (1920)

<https://rice.kanopy.com/video/within-our-gates-0>

Daughters of the Dust (1991)

<https://rice.kanopy.com/video/daughters-dust>

Stormy Weather (1943)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPAPHVAmp1U&ab_channel=BlackMatters>

Green Pastures (1936)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wvII-4Eg_5w&ab_channel=YouTubeMovies>

Night Catches Us (2010)

<https://rice.kanopy.com/video/night-catches-us>

Black Girl (1972)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emT7aBbp3zE&ab_channel=reelblack>

Fresh (1994)

<https://pluto.tv/on-demand/movies/fresh-1994-1-1?utm_medium=textsearch&utm_source=google>

Crooklyn (1994)

<https://decider.com/movie/crooklyn/>

The Girl with All the Gifts (2016)

<https://decider.com/movie/the-girl-with-all-the-gifts/>

# Course Assessment

Participation

Your attendance as well as your engagement in the course and course material will determine your evaluation for participation. Be aware of your preparedness, comportment and presence in class and class discussion. This course rests on active discussion. Everyone has a perspective that we can learn from and students have opportunity and obligation to contribute to every class. Therefore, you must have seen the film, done the reading, and reflected in writing on your blog.

Attendance

Students attend class on time.

Group work (Tuesday following Monday class by Midnight)

During class on Monday’s students will be presented with a still image of film clip for reflection in groups. Students will be presented with a question on the image and will need to write a collective reflection to post on one student’s (or all) blog in class. You must inform the instructor where to find this post.

Film Discussion (In class)

During film discussions all students must participate. We will consider how the film treats its historical contexts and subjects, the objectives of the film/filmmaker and how well they are executed, and the argument that the film makes about black life. Our discussion is not centered on affected responses to the film. You can find guidelines to viewing films actively on Canvas.

Weekly Blog Posts (Mondays by Noon)

For this course, you will be required to set up a blog through blogs.rice.edu and provide the instructor with your page link. Personalize your blog and post specific references to the films and readings (including page numbers and citations). Each post should have at least two but no more than three paragraphs. One paragraph should reflect on the readings and the other paragraph(s) should reflect on the film (s). Readings should be completed for the following week. Students are expected to post ten of the fourteen possible reflections.

Essay Proposal (Sunday, March 28th Midnight)

In preparation for the bibliography and final essay students must choose a topic for historical inquiry. Topics must ask a question about a theme, person, event, or place that is significant in African American history. Proposals should be 1-2 pages and include the merits and scope of the topic and place your topic in the context of black film study.

Annotated Bibliography (Sunday, April 25th Midnight)

Annotated bibliographies are more than a list of sources. They should critically appraise articles, books, and films that you view as potentially essential to writing your essay and answer your proposal question. Annotations should contain a brief summary of the text and asses it in relation to what you have read and how it answers your proposal question. Bibliographies should have ten sources with three films. Bibliographies should be 3-5 pages.**See links for more info on annotated bibliographies-**

http://lib.calpoly.edu/research/guides/bibliography.html or

http://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/ref/research/skill28.htm

Final Essay (Monday, May 10th by Midnight)

For the final essay students will write on a theme, person, event, or place of significance to African American history. Students will use films to analyze how the ideas about their subject has changed over time, reflect on how the moment in time when a film was released determined its themes and subject or write on the absences that are revealed in black historical subjects in film. Your argument should also explain how the film and its reception help us better understand the historical context in which it was made. All essays should treat seriously historical context. The final essay will be 10-15 pages, double spaced, 12pt font, Times Roman. It should include citations that are consistent and clear of your choice of format.

# Grade Policies

Participation: 15%

Blog Responses: 15%

Proposal: 10%

Bibliography: 20%

Final Paper: 40%

Papers will be graded out of the possible points listed in the assessment description using a rubric that will be found on Canvas. It is important that you submit all of your work on time. Late assignments will not receive full credit. All work must be turned in by May 10th Midnight.

Extra Credit:

Students can write additional blog posts on a supplemental film or reading or select an unlisted film or text after conversation with instructor. Students can complete no more than 3 extra credit for up to an additional 3% of their grade.

Extensions are possible, email the instructor to discuss the requirements.

# Academic Integrity

In this course, all students will be held to the standards of the Rice Honor Code, a code that you pledged to honor when you matriculated at this institution. If you are unfamiliar with the details of this code and how it is administered, you should consult the Honor System Handbook at <http://honor.rice.edu/honor-system-handbook/>. This handbook outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of your academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process.

# Disability Resource Center

If you have a documented disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with the Disability Resource Center (Allen Center, Room 111 / [adarice@rice.edu](mailto:adarice@rice.edu) / x5841) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs.

# Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus is only a guide for the course and is subject to change.

# Course Schedule

Week 1: From Africa to the Slave Trade

## Monday, January 25, 2021

Introductions and Creating our history outlines.

## Wednesday, January 27, 2021

Lecture: We were all Kings and Queens in Africa?

## Friday, January 29, 2021

Asynchronous Class Film: *Through a Lens Darkly*

Weekly Reading:

*Film Blackness* Introduction (pg.1-16)

*Slaves on Screen* (pg.1-15/Film as Narrative)

*Stamped* (Ch1-2)

Supplementary Materials:

*Horror Noire* (2020)

*Black Hollywood* (1984)

*They’ve Gotta Have Us* (2020)

Week 2: The Journey to the Americas

## Monday, February 1, 2021

Film Discussion for *Through a Lens Darkly*

## Wednesday, February 3, 2021

Lecture: Do I call you black or African?

## Friday, February 5, 2021

Asynchronous Class Film: *Roots Part One* (2016) and *Amistad* (1997)

Weekly Reading:

*Stamped* (Ch 3)

Supplemental Materials:

*Creating Black Americans* (Ch2-3)

*Book of Negroes Part One* (2014)

Week 3: Bondage and Resistance

## Monday, February 8, 2021

Film Discussion for *Roots Part One* (2016) and *Goodbye Uncle Tom* (1971)

## Wednesday, February 10, 2021

Lecture: Built by Black people?

## Friday, February 12, 2021

Asynchronous Class Film: *Jefferson in Paris* (1995)

Weekly Reading:

*Film Blackness* (Ch 2)

*Stamped* (Ch 7-8)

*Slaves on Screen* (Ch 2)

Supplemental Materials:

Bloomquist, Jennifer, “The Minstrel Legacy” (2015)

*Mandingo* (1975)

Week 4

Winter Storms—No Class

Week 5: Revolution

## Monday, February 22, 2021

Film Discussion for *Jefferson in Paris* (1995) and

## Wednesday, February 24, 2021

Lecture: How do we get free?

## Friday, February 26, 2021

Asynchronous Class Film: *Lydia Bailey* (1952) and *The Retrieval* (2013)

Weekly Reading:

*Stamped* (Ch 9-10)

Supplemental Materials:

Brundage, W Fitzhugh, *Beyond Blackface*, “At the Feet of Dessalines” (2011)

Week 6: Moving toward American Freedom (Civil War in America)

## Monday, March 1, 2021

Sprinkle Day-No Class

## Wednesday, March 3, 2021

Film Discussion for Lydia Bailey (1952) and The Retrieval (2013) and Lecture: Who freed the slaves?

## Friday, March 5, 2021

Asynchronous Class Film: *Glory* (1989)

Weekly Reading:

*Stamped* (Ch 11, 14-15)

Thomas, Ebony Elizabeth. *The Dark Fantastic,* “Toward a Theory of the Dark Fantastic” (2019)

Supplemental Materials:

*Creating Black Americans* (Ch 3-5)

Guerrorero, Ed. *Framing Blackness*, “Slaves, Monsters, and Others” (2012)

*Gone with the Wind* (1939)

*Birth of a Nation* (2016)

Week 7: End of Slavery in the Americas

## Monday, March 8, 2021

Sprinkle Day-No Class

## Wednesday, March 10, 2021

Film Discussion for *Glory* (1989) and Lecture: Where did all the black women go?

## Friday, March 12, 2021

Asynchronous Class Film: *The Beguiled* (2017)

Weekly Reading:

*Slaves on Screen* (Ch 4)

*Stamped* (16)

White, Deborah Gray, Ar’nt I a Woman “Jezebel and Mammy” (1999)

Fleetwood, Nicole R. *Troubling Vison* “Her Own Spook”(2011)

Supplemental Materials:

*Creating Black Americans* (Ch 6)

*The Beguiled* (1971)

*The Great White Hope* (1970)

Week 8: Reconstructions

## Monday, March 15, 2021

Film Discussion for *The Beguiled* (2017)

## Wednesday, March 17, 2021

Lecture: Where do Black people belong?

## Friday, March 19, 2021

Asynchronous Class Film: *Within Our Gates* (1920)

Weekly Reading:

*Stamped* (Ch 17-18)

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark,* “Black Matters” (1992)

Supplemental Materials:

*Creating Black Americans* (Ch 7)

*Raisin in the Sun* (1961)

*The Color Purple* (1985)

Week 9: Freedom

## Monday, March 22, 2021

Film Discussion for *Within Our Gates* (1920) and Lecture: They don’t want Black people to have anything? (shortened)

## Wednesday, March 24, 2021

Center for Teaching Excellence

Asynchronous Class Film: *Daughters of the Dust* (1991)

## Friday, March 26, 2021

Sprinkle Day-No Class

Weekly Reading:

*Stamped* (Ch 19-22)

West, Carolyn, “Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire, and Their Homegirls” (2012)

Supplemental Materials:

Hall, Jacqueline Dowd. “The Long Civil Rights Movement”

*Sounder* (1972)

Week 10: The Long Jim Crow

## Monday, March 29, 2021

Film Discussion for *Daughters of the Dust* (1991)

## Wednesday, March 31, 2021

Meeting about Proposal Questions: Sign up for a time. Unless otherwise requested all meetings will occur during this class time.

Lecture: How did we get here? And Black people are now American? View Recorded Lecture Panel

## Friday, April 2, 2021

Asynchronous Class Film: *Stormy Weather* (1943)

Weekly Reading:

*Stamped* (Ch 23-26)

Urwand, Ben “The Black Image on the White Screen” (2016)

Supplemental Materials:

*Creating Black Americans* (Ch 8-9)

*The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1974)

*Creating Black Americans* (Ch 9)

*Adama* (2015)

Week 11: Citizenship

## Monday, April 5, 2021

Film Discussion for *Stormy Weather* (1943)

## Wednesday, April 7, 2021

Lecture: It will be better in the city?

## Friday, April 9, 2021

Asynchronous Class Film: *Green Pastures* (1936) and *Eve’s Bayou* (1997)

Weekly Reading:

*Stamped* (Ch 27-28)

Topline, Robert Brent, History by Hollywood, “Introduction” (1996)

Supplemental Materials:

*Creating Black Americans* (Ch 10)

**Essay Proposal (Sunday, March 28th Midnight)**

Week 11: Black Religion

## Monday, April 12, 2021

Film Discussion for *Green Pastures (1936) and Eve’s Bayou*

## Wednesday, April 14, 2021

Lecture : Guest Lecture-Emerson Zora Hamsa

## Friday, April 16, 2021

Asynchronous Class Film: *Night Catches Us* (2010) and *Black Girl* (1972)

Weekly Reading:

*Film Blackness* (Ch 3)

*Stamped* (29-31)

Supplemental Materials:

*Creating Black Americans* (Ch 11)

*A Hero Aint Nothing But a Sandwich* (1978)

*Mississippi Burning* (1988)

*Imitation of Life* (1959) (1934)

*Cornbread Earl and Me* (1975)

*BlacKkKlansman* (2018)

*The Black Klansman*/ *I Crossed the Color Line* (1966)

Uptight (1968)

*Malcolm X* (1992)

*Detroit* (2017)

Week 12: The Second Reconstruction

## Monday, April 19, 2021

Film Discussion *Night Catches Us* (2010) and *Black Girl* (1972)

## Wednesday, April 21, 2021

Lecture: More freedom, more equality?

## Friday, April 23, 2021

Asynchronous Class Film: *Crooklyn* (1994) and *Fresh* (1994)

Weekly Reading:

*Stamped* (Ch 32-33)

Supplemental Materials:

*Creating Black Americans* (Ch 14-15)

*New Jack City* (1991)

*Do the Right Thing* (1989)

*Cry Freedom* (1987)

Hollywood Shuffle (1987)

Week 13: The Third Reconstruction

## Monday, April 19, 2021

Film Discussion for *Crooklyn* (1994) and *Fresh* (1994)

## Wednesday, April 21, 2021

Lecture: Criminality is the city?

## Friday, April 23, 2021

Asynchronous Class Film: *The Girl with all the Gifts* (2016)

*Slaves on Screen* (Ch 5)

*Film Blackness* (Ch 4)

*Stamped* (36-Epilogue)

Supplemental Materials:

*Creating Black Americans* (Epilogue)

*Bamboozled* (2000)

*School Daze* (1988)

*Fruitvale Station* (2013)

*Just Mercy* (2020)

*George Washington* (2017)

*Pariah* (2011)

*Losing Isaiah* (1995)

**Annotated Bibliography (Sunday, April 25th Midnight)**

Week 14: Black Lives Matter

## Monday, April 26, 2021

Film Discussion: *The Girl with all the Gifts* (2016)

## Wednesday, April 28, 2021

Lecture: A change has come?

## Friday, April 30, 2021

Weekly Reading:

Work on your Essay

**Final Essay (Monday, May 10th by Midnight)**