

## **Comparative Asian /Black American Cinema**

V11.0800 / Call # 74275 / Section 002

Professor Jason King

Asian / Pacific American Studies Spring 2002

Wednesdays 3:30-7:35 p.m., 145 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Room 206

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Office Hours: room 806G, 715 Broadway, Monday 4-6, Wed 2:00-3:00 (by appt. only)

### **course description**

Focusing on film since the 1960s, this course is a seminar focusing on contemporary mass media representation and racial identity, as viewed comparatively through the struggles of African-American and Asian-American communities. There are similarities and differences to the way these communities have sought to combat misrepresentation and/or invisibility through and against the Hollywood narrative.

Our goal is to evaluate, through comparison and contrast, African American and Asian American filmmakers' respective engagements with the independent documentary format, the genre of satire, and with experimental aesthetics as strategies of resistance. Along the way, we will address issues in the politics of popular culture and representation that include visibility, accountability, role modeling, minstrelsy, stereotyping and appropriation.

Questions of sexuality, gender, and class will be prominent in all our classes as we engage feminist and queer critiques of identity. Background knowledge of the history of African-American and/or Asian-American communities and of the history of American popular film is suggested.

### **to purchase (essential):**

- Course Packet - available for purchase at Advanced Copy Center, 552 LaGuardia Place (2 blocks south of West 4<sup>th</sup> Street) (212) 388-1001.

### **recommended books (optional):**

- Michel Foucault. [This is Not a Pipe](#)
- Ed Guerrero. [Framing Blackness : The African American Image in Film](#)
- Jun Xing. [Asian America Through the Lens : History, Representations and Identities](#)
- Darrell Y. Hamamoto and Sandra Liu, eds. [Countervisions: Asian-American Film Criticism](#)
- Manthia Diawara, ed. [Black American Cinema](#)
- Gina Dent, ed. [Black Popular Culture](#)
- Robin DG Kelley and Earl Lewis, eds. [To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans](#)
- Ronald Takaki. [A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America](#). Chs 5, 8, 10, 13, 14
- Ronald Takaki. [Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans](#)

### **course requirements:**

- Come prepared to participate in class. Bring the readings with you at all times. This class is organized as a seminar so I will be looking for sustained in class participation, active listening, and devoted reading and viewing of all materials. You should also see me regularly in office hours. Chronic lateness and / or unexplained absences will seriously affect your

final grade. An excused absence is one of two things: a religious holiday or family emergency that you cleared with me in advance, at least via Email; or an illness with a doctor's note.

### reaction papers

There are 10 reaction papers due over the course of the semester. Each paper has to be 1 page in length (11 point font, Times New Roman, 1 inch margins on each side). If the spirit moves you, you can write more than 1 page but you are only required to write 1 page per week. You will be given a study guide with questions on the readings that you must integrate into your responses.

- ❖ 5 papers reacting to the readings. Only react to readings that are longer than 5 pages. These reaction papers must be handed in on the day that the reading is due.
- ❖ 2 papers reacting to the films you've seen the week before in class. If you choose, you can hand in two additional papers reacting to the readings instead of these 2 reaction papers to the films.
- ❖ 1 paper on Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America. Due March 6.
- ❖ 1 paper on Negrophobia by Darius James or Yankee Dawg You Die by Philip Kan Gotanda. Due April 3.
- ❖ 1 paper of your choice.

### final paper

- Choose a film we have not considered in class and assess its representation of African-American and/or Asian-American experience. 5-7 pages. 11 point font, Times New Roman, 1 inch margins. Include a "works cited" section. **Due April 10<sup>th</sup>**.

### january 23<sup>rd</sup>

- ❖ **Ethnic Notions (dir. Marlon Riggs, 1986, 60 mins)**
- ❖ **Slaying the Dragon (dir. Deborah Gee, 1988, 58 mins)**

*...introduction to class, representation and reality, truth in art...*

### january 30<sup>th</sup>

- ❖ **Birth of a Nation (dir. D.W. Griffith, 1915, 165 mins)**

*...black representation; minstrelsy; black American communities' struggles against stereotypes; the "problem" of narrative and genre...*

- Thomas Cripps. "The Evolution of Black Film" in Black Film as Genre (13-62)
- Thomas Cripps. "The Year of Birth of a Nation" in Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900-1942 (41-69)

### february 6

- ❖ **Broken Blossoms (dir. D.W. Griffith, 1919, 90 mins)**

*...Asian representation; Asian American communities' struggles against the yellow peril stereotype; the "problem" of narrative and genre...*

- Robert G. Lee. "Yellowface" and "Inner Dikes and Barred Zones" in Oriental: Asian Americans in Popular Culture (1-14, 106-144)

### february 13<sup>th</sup>

- ❖ **Yellow Tale Blues (dirs. Christine Choy and Renee Tajima, 1990, 36 mins)**
- ❖ **Terminal U.S.A. (dir. Jon Moritsugu, 1993, 60 mins)**

... representing the Asian American family; the model minority stereotype; mobilizing positive images as the 'real' in Asian-American cultural politics...

- Robert G. Lee. "The Cold War Origins of the Model Minority" and "The Model Minority as Gook" in Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture (145-203)
- "A Memo from MANAA to Hollywood" (press release)

#### february 20th

❖ **Color Adjustment (dir. Marlon Riggs, 1991, 20 min excerpt)**

❖ **Black Is, Black Ain't (dir. Marlon Riggs, 1995, 87 mins)**

...representing the black family; documenting black identity and racial difference...

- Sut Jhally & Justin Lewis. "Introducing *The Cosby Show*" and "Conclusion: Unpopular Messages in an Age of Popularity" in Enlightened Racism: Television Audiences, The Cosby Show and the Myth of the American Dream (1-14, 131-144)
- bell hooks. "The Politics of Radical Subjectivity" in Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics (15-22)

#### february 27th

❖ **Hairpiece: A Film for Nappy Headed People (dir. Ayoka Chenzira, 1985, 10 mins)**

❖ **I'm the One that I Want (dir. Lionel Coleman, 2000, 96 mins)**

... contemporary identity politics; de-essentializing race; moving beyond positivity and negativity...

- Kobena Mercer. "Black Hair/Style Politics" in Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies (96-128)
- Connie K. Kang. "All American Girl and Images of Asians in the Media" in MultiAmerica: Essays on Cultural Wars and Cultural Peace (359-365)

#### march 6th

❖ **Rosewood (dir. John Singleton, 1997, 140 mins)**

...mobilizing realistic depictions of racial violence as the "truth" of racism and/or colored experience; framing spectacular violence and terror...

- Judith Butler. "Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia" in Reading Rodney King, Reading Urban Uprising (15-22)
- Richard Newman. "Rosewood Revisited" in *Transition*, Issue 80 (32-39)
- Ed Guerrero. "Rosewood" in *Cineaste*, Winter 1997 (45, 3 pages)

### SPRING BREAK

#### march 20th

❖ **Sa I Gu: From Korean Women's Perspectives (dirs. Christine Choy and Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, 1993, 36 mins)**

❖ **Another America (dir. Michael Cho, 1995, 58 mins)**

...the independent and documentary tradition in Asian-American filmmaking; race after the L.A. riots; framing mundane or everyday violence...

- Darrell Hammamoto and Sandra Liu, eds. "Introduction" in Countervisions: Asian-American Film Criticism (1-20)

- John Lee and Nancy Abelmann. "The 1992 Los Angeles Riots and the 'Black-Korean Conflict'" in Koreans in the Hood : Conflict with African Americans (75-87)
- Sharon Park. "Sa-I-Gu" in *Amerasia Journal* Vol 19, no 2 (161-163)

march 27<sup>th</sup>

❖ **Bamboozled (dir. Spike Lee, 2000, 136 mins)**

*...mobilizing stereotypes as a practice of resistance; evaluating satire as a genre of critique against racism...*

- Greg Tate. "Bamboozled: White Supremacy and a Black Way of Being Human" in *Cineaste* 2001, vol 26, Issue 2, 15 (2 pages)
- Armond White. "Post Art Minstresly", *ibid.* pg 11 (3 pages)
- Zeinabu Irene Davis. "'Beautiful-Ugly' Blackface: An Esthetic Appreciation of 'Bamboozled', *ibid.* pg 16 (3 pages)

april 3<sup>rd</sup>

❖ **Symbiopsychotaxiplasm Take One (dir. William Greaves, 1968, 60 mins)**

*...searching for the black aesthetic; experimentalism in independent African-American film; can film look black or look Asian? or can (or should) film represent the distinctiveness of black or Asian-American culture on a formal level? . . .*

- Larry Neal. "The Black Arts Movement" in *TDR* T40 (29-40)
- bell hooks. "An Aesthetic of Blackness: Strange and Oppositional" in Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics (103-113)
- Paul Arthur. "Springing Tired Chains: Experimental Film and Video" in Struggles for Representation: African American Documentary Film and Video (268-297)

april 10<sup>th</sup>

❖ **Sea in the Blood (dir. Richard Fung, 2000, 26 mins)**

❖ **Shopping for Fangs (dir. Quentin Lee, 1995, 80 mins)**

*...searching for Asian American aesthetics...*

- Peter Feng. "In Search of Asian American Cinema" in *Cineaste* Winter Spring 1995, 32 (4 pages).
- David Mura. "A Shift in Power, A Sea Change in the Arts" in The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s (183-204)
- Augie Tam, ed. "Is There An Asian American Aesthetic?" in *Artspiral*. (handout)
- Richard Fung. "Center the Margins" in Independent Asian American Media Arts (62-67)
- Fred Wei-han Ho. "Tradition and Change, Inheritance and Innovation, Not Imitation!" in *East Wind*. (handout)

april 17<sup>th</sup>

❖ **Ganja and Hess (dir. Bill Gunn, 1973, 110 mins)**

*...countercinema and abstraction; mobilizing experimental aesthetics as a strategy of resistance; representation and the ambivalence of looking...*

- Ludwig Wittgenstein. Philosophical Investigations (193-214)
- James Hannaham. "Pea, Ball, Bounce" (interview with Kara Walker) in *Interview*

april 24<sup>th</sup>

❖ **All Orientals Look the Same (dir. Valerie Soe, 1986, 2 mins)**

❖ **Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai (dir. Jim Jarmusch, 1999, 116 mins)**

*...refacing narrative; disrupting narrative, genre and character...*

READ:

- Michel Foucault. This is Not a Pipe (excerpt, handout)

may 1<sup>st</sup>

❖ **Slowly This (dir. Arthur Jafa, 1995, 26 mins)**

❖ **Daughters of the Dust (dir. Julie Dash, 1991, 5 min excerpt)**

❖ **Belly (dir. Hype Williams, 1998, 5 min excerpt)**

❖ **Crooklyn, Clockers, Girl 6 (dir. Spike Lee, 1993; 1994; 1996; 3 min excerpts)**

❖ **Various music videos**

*...the contemporary avant-garde...*

GUEST SPEAKERS: TBA

- Arthur Jafa. "69" in Black Popular Culture