

ENGLISH 371: POLICING BLACKNESS ON FILM

Time: Tuesday & Thursday 9:30–10:45 a.m.
 Classroom: Griffin 304
 Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 12:30 p.m.–2:30 p.m.
 Office: Griffin 250

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COURSE OVERVIEW

In this course, we'll explore how films stage the policing of blackness in the contemporary era. In a moment in which the visibility of police brutality, excessive force, and state murder of people of color has dramatically increased, contemporary filmmakers have responded by dramatizing the police state on the silver screen. Throughout the term, we'll consider not only how films represent blackness and police violence but also the political and historical insights and implications at the intersection of race and film. We'll engage critical terms from film studies related to image and sound, and we'll discuss a variety of theoretical approaches to race and cinema from biopolitical theory, critical race theory, black Marxism, prison studies, and trauma studies. While examining the cultural work of policing blackness on screen, we'll also focus on the historical impact of the police state on people of color from the antebellum era through the contemporary rise of the prison-industrial complex and mass incarceration, as well as sustained black resistance in the form of such movements as the contemporary movement for black lives.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Please view the following films outside of class. All are available for no cost to you on DVDs on reserve in the library. Most are available to rent or to download electronically for a cost through iTunes, Amazon, or Vudu. (You'll want to purchase rather than rent films about which you plan to write.) Some films are available through paid subscription streaming services, which I've indicated in parentheses.

BlacKkKlansman. Dir. Spike Lee. Perf. John David Washington, Adam Driver, Laura Harrier, and Topher Grace. Universal, 2018. DVD. (Available on *Cinemax* and *HBO*.)

Blindspotting. Dir. Carlos López Estrada. Perf. Daveed Diggs, Rafael Casal, and Janina Gavankar, and Tisha Campbell-Martin. Summit, 2018. DVD. (Available on *HBO*, *DirecTV*, and *Cinemax*.)

Detroit. Dir. Kathryn Bigelow. Perf. John Boyeda, Anthony Mackie, Algee Smith, and Will Poulter. Twentieth Century Fox, 2017. DVD. (Available on *Hulu*.)

Fruitvale Station. Dir. Ryan Coogler. Perf. Michael B. Jordan, Melonie Diaz, Octavia Spencer, and Kevin Durand. Anchor Bay, 2013. DVD.

Get Out. Dir. Jordan Peele. Perf. Daniel Kaluuya, Allison Williams, Bradley Whitford, and Caleb Landry Jones. Universal, 2017. DVD. (Available on *FX* and *Fubo*.)

The Hate U Give. Dir. George Tillman, Jr. Perf. Amanda Stenberg, Regina Hall, Russell Hornsby, and Anthony Mackie. Twentieth Century Fox, 2019. DVD. (Available on *HBO*.)

If Beale Street Could Talk. Dir. Barry Jenkins. Perf. KiKi Layne, Stephan James, Colman Domingo, and Teyonah Parris. Twentieth Century Fox, 2018. DVD. (Available on *Hulu*.)

Monsters and Men. Dir. Reinaldo Marcus Green. Perf. John David Washington, Anthony Ramos, Kelvin Harrison, Jr., and Chanté Adams. Universal, 2018. DVD. (Available on *Hulu*.)

Straight Outta Compton. Dir. Gary Gray. Perf. O’Shea Jackson, Jr., Corey Hawkins, Jason Mitchell, and Paul Giamatti. Universal, 2015. DVD.

TEXTS PROVIDED ON MOODLE

Please bring a copy of these sources to class.

Browne, Simone. “Introduction, and Other Dark Matters.” *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Durham: Duke UP, 2015. 1–24. Print.

Cacho, Lisa Marie. “The Violence of Value.” Introduction. *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected*. New York: New York UP, 2012. 1–33. Print.

Camp, Jordan T. “An Old World Is Dying.” Introduction. *Incarcerating the Crisis: Freedom Struggles and the Rise of the Neoliberal State*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2016. 1–18. Print.

Muhammad, Khalil Gibran. “The Mismeasure of Crime.” Introduction. *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2010. 1–14. Print.

Nichols, Bill. *Engaging Cinema: An Introduction to Film Studies*. New York: Norton, 2010. 5–15, 23–25, 29–36, 38–52, 55–56, 64–66. Print.

Schrader, Stuart. “Rethinking Race and Policing in Imperial Perspective.” *Badges without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2019. 27–51. Print.

Sharpe, Christina. “The Wake.” *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke UP, 2016. 1–22. Print.

Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta. “The Double Standard of Justice.” *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*. Chicago: Haymarket, 2016. 107–33. Print.

Wang, Jackie. “Carceral Capitalism.” *The New Inquiry*. The New Inquiry, 22 Jan. 2018. Web.

COURSE COMPONENTS

Reading Quizzes: Our texts will be both complex and challenging. Please read these texts carefully in order to be prepared to contribute to class discussion and to succeed on course assignments. I’ll randomly check your attendance in class and reading comprehension of the assigned material in the form of reading quizzes given at five unannounced points across the course of the semester.

Reading quizzes cannot be made up at a later date.

Close Readings: Because academic writing is the main method by which scholars share research and advance knowledge, you'll complete two writing assignments over the course of the term. These roughly 1,000-word writings are designed to develop your skills of close reading primary texts and synthesizing and responding argumentatively to primary and secondary texts. I'll distribute a prompt for each assignment in class at least two weeks in advance of the due date.

Examinations: There will be both a midterm and a final examination. The midterm examination will cover texts and concepts from the first half of the course, and the final examination will be cumulative. Because they are composed primarily of essay questions, you're welcome to use hard copy course texts and notes during the examinations. We'll discuss what to expect and how to prepare for the examinations in more detail as they approach.

GRADE BREAKDOWN

Reading Quizzes	15%
Short Response #1	20%
Short Response #2	20%
Midterm Examination	20%
Final Examination	25%

GRADE SCALE

A: 100%–90%
B: 89%–80%
C: 79%–70%
D: 69%–60%
F: 59%–0%

While individual assignments may receive half letter grades (pluses or minuses), final grades are calculated according to the above scale.

COURSE POLICIES

Cancellations/Weather: Please check your email regularly in case of class cancellations. If class is canceled, I'll send alternate directions via email.

Disabilities: I'm committed to ensuring that students have access to the conditions that they need to succeed in my course. If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, please contact me as well as the Office of Disability Services as soon as possible. More information can be found at <https://disability.louisiana.edu>.

Late Assignments: I don't generally accept late assignments. That being said, life happens. If you have a situation, please contact me as soon as possible so that we can make alternate arrangements.

Participation/Class Behavior: This course will be conducted in a seminar style, meaning that

participation from each student will be vital to everyone's success. Class discussion is a collective enterprise from which we all grow and from which we individually benefit on class assignments, so please strive to be on time to and present in class, meaningfully contribute to our communal inquires and discussions, comport yourself with appropriate behavior and mutual respect for your classmates, and come to class with the assigned materials and having done the assigned reading. If electronic devices are fundamental to your learning process, please feel free to use them in seminar. That being said, please be mindful of your ability to distract yourself and others when using electronics for other purposes during class time.

Plagiarism. Because academic writing purports to create new knowledge, plagiarism is considered a serious ethical violation. For this reason, plagiarism of any kind will result in, at a minimum, a failing grade for the assignment, and, at a maximum, dismissal from the University. The University's official definition of plagiarism is as follows: "Plagiarism is a specific type of cheating. It occurs when a student claims originality for the ideas or words of another person, when the student presents as a new and original idea or product anything which in fact is derived from an existing work, or when the student makes use of any work or production already created by someone else without giving credit to the source. In short, plagiarism is the use of unacknowledged materials in the preparation of assignments." If you have any questions or concerns about plagiarism, please contact me.

Writing Center. The Writing Center employs tutors who can help students with their writing at any stage of the process—from brainstorming to polishing their final drafts. This service is free, and I recommend it for even the most confident writers. More information can be found at <http://english.louisiana.edu/about-us/publications-centers/writing-center>.

COURSE SCHEDULE

DATE	READINGS	DEADLINES
Thursday 1/16	Syllabus and Nichols, <i>Engaging Cinema</i> (Moodle)	
Tuesday 1/21	<i>BlacKkKlansman</i> (0:00–1:07)	
Thursday 1/23	<i>BlacKkKlansman</i> (1:07–2:15)	
Tuesday 1/28	Taylor, "The Double Standard of Justice" (Moodle)	
Thursday 1/30	<i>Detroit</i> (0:00–1:11)	
Tuesday 2/4	<i>Detroit</i> (1:11–2:22)	
Thursday 2/6	Camp, "An Old World Is Dying" (Moodle)	
Tuesday 2/11	<i>Straight Outta Compton</i> (0:00–1:22)	Close Reading #1
Thursday 2/13	<i>Straight Outta Compton</i> (1:22–2:47)	
Tuesday 2/18	Browne, "Introduction, and Other Dark Matters" (Moodle)	
Thursday 2/20	<i>Monsters and Men</i> (0:00–0:46)	
Thursday 2/27	<i>Monsters and Men</i> (0:46–1:36)	
Tuesday 3/3	Sharpe, "The Wake" (Moodle)	
Thursday 3/5	<i>The Hate U Give</i> (0:00–1:03)	
Tuesday 3/10		Midterm Examination
Thursday 3/12	<i>The Hate U Give</i> (1:03–2:13)	
Tuesday 3/17	Schrader, "Rethinking Race and Policing in Imperial Perspective" (Moodle)	
Thursday 3/19	<i>If Beale Street Could Talk</i> (0:00–1:00)	

Tuesday 3/24	<i>If Beale Street Could Talk</i> (1:00–1:59)	
Thursday 3/26	Muhammad, “The Mismeasure of Man” (Moodle)	
Tuesday 3/31	<i>Blindspotting</i> (0:00–0:48)	
Thursday 4/2	<i>Blindspotting</i> (0:48–1:35)	Close Reading #2
Tuesday 4/7	Wang, “Carceral Capitalism” (Moodle)	
Thursday 4/9	<i>Fruitvale Station</i> (0:00–0:43)	
Tuesday 4/21	<i>Fruitvale Station</i> (0:43–1:25)	
Thursday 4/23	Cacho, “The Violence of Value” (Moodle)	
Tuesday 4/28	<i>Get Out</i> (0:00–0:48)	
Thursday 4/30	<i>Get Out</i> (0:48–1:44)	
Thursday 5/7 8:00–10:30 a.m.		Final Examination