

The American Film Musical: Race, Gender, Migration

Yale Summer Session B: July 2 – August 3, 2018

Tuesday/Thursday 1 – 4:15pm

Location: TBA



Instructors: Leana Hirschfeld-Kroen, Randa Tawil

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Please send me an email to arrange an appointment. We will meet at Maison Mathis café (304 Elm St.).

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Communication: Email is the best way to reach us if you have questions or concerns, or to schedule appointments. We will answer weekday emails within twenty-four hours and any emails that we receive over the weekend by 5 pm on Monday.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Is there anything more American than the musical? Since its beginnings in minstrelsy, vaudeville, and comic operetta, this hybrid mass cultural form has been asking that question by grappling with race, gender, and immigration in the United States and beyond. This course follows up with the question: how do musicals discursively and materially construct the United States? That is, on the one hand, what can we learn from the plots of these musicals, filled with state building, tales of diaspora, and interracial love stories? And on the other hand, what can we learn from the means of their production: how to find 150 Asian-American extras in LA, how to match the perfect face with the perfect voice, and how to turn Margarita Cansino into All-American bombshell Rita Hayworth? These approaches intersect and are in conversation;

however, each calls upon the strength of a different field. In this course we will challenge our students to interrogate these familiar films, to dwell in the trouble of mass culture's repressions, appropriations, and utopian imaginaries, but also to figure why it is so easy to mindlessly hum those tunes.

COURSE POLICIES

Grading:

Primary Source Paper – 30 %

Final Project – 30 %

Participation -- 20 %

Responses -- 15 %

Final Presentation -- 5 %

Participation: Absences (including excessive tardiness) will affect your grade negatively, while active participation will affect your grade positively. Penalty for late work: We can grant deadline extensions, but only if you send us an email explaining extenuating circumstances in advance of the official due date. Work submitted later than the deadlines listed above will lose half a letter grade per day.

Screenings: During in-class screenings, we want to cultivate critical and interactive viewing, so we encourage observations, laughter, questions, and of course, singing along. These films were made with the intention of immersing their audiences in a Technicolor fantasy world. We are not the contemporary audiences of these musicals, however. We are approaching these films as cultural texts that we want to decipher together.

Class Format: Each class will begin with a short lecture by the instructor on that week's theme or topic. Then, we will open the class up to discussion of that week's films and readings. There will be a ten-minute break halfway through. The second half of each class will consist of a film screening. On most weekends, we will assign you a film to watch on your own, in order to discuss it on Tuesday.

Writing Tutoring: the Yale Center for Teaching and Learning (301 York Street) offers one-on-one guidance with writing your final essays. They can help non-native speakers just learning how to write academic papers in English and native speakers hoping to better structure their essays. The center is located on the mezzanine level of Sterling Library. When you go through the York Street entrance, take the stairs up immediately to your right. Tutoring drop-in times are: Monday 11am – 1pm Tuesday 2pm-4pm Thursday 6pm-8pm

Academic Honesty Policy: Yale has a zero-tolerance policy regarding cheating and plagiarism. All work you submit for this class must be your own. No one else may write your papers and assignments for you. Additionally, if you are quoting from another text or relying on another author's ideas, you must CITE them. Failure to cite or quote the ideas of others will be considered an instance of plagiarism. You will receive a failing grade on the assignment and may be expelled from the class depending on the gravity of the case. If you are not sure how to quote

from a text or cite another's ideas properly, do not hesitate to meet with me, and we can go over it together.

ASSIGNMENTS

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Reading Responses: (1 page single-spaced) Students will be responsible for turning in three reading responses throughout the course. These responses should include at least two readings, or one reading and one film. In class we will discuss how to write a good reading response. Responses should include

1. Main argument of the author/synopsis of the movie
2. How the pieces are in conversation
3. Critical questions for further reading/viewing

Paper assignment 1 (6-8 pages): Using at least 1 reading and 1 film we have assigned so far (*The Jazz Singer*, *Stormy Weather*, *Illusions*, *Oklahoma*, or *The Harvey Girls*), either 1) conduct a close reading of a musical number or 2) make a claim about how Americanness is constructed in one of these films, providing historical, visual, and narrative support for your argument.

Final Paper: (6-8 pages): Choose a movie musical we have watched /read about for class so far or from a list we provide and write about a few different levels (industrial, historical, creative, representational, generic, musical) at which it engages themes we have begun to address together. For example: assimilation, otherness, passing and masquerade, cultural appropriation, gender and technology, opposed binaries united in song, segregated screens, cold war containment, and orientalism. For this paper, we encourage you to seek outside sources. You will present in class on your final project during week 5.

Weekly Meetings

Week 1: Introduction. America is a Musical

Tuesday July 3rd

What are the best ways to study cultural objects, and what is the point of studying the American Musical? How has the musical as a cultural form and historical object engaged with taboos, history, politics, and identity?

Screening: *The Jazz Singer* (1927, 89 minutes)

Readings:

- Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia"

- Michael Rogin, “Blackface, White Noise: The Jewish Jazz Singer Finds His Voice”

Thursday July 5th: Musicals in Black and White

How did musicals in Hollywood walk the color-line? In a segregated society with strict racial codes, did musicals in Hollywood reinforce the color line or challenge it? How did segregation effect the development of the Hollywood musical?

Screening: *The Negro Soldier* (1944, 40 min) + *Stormy Weather* (1943, 78 min)

Reading assignments:

- Hayes Code Memos: Casting Paul Robeson in *Showboat* (1936)
- Arthur Knight, “Black Folk Sold: Hollywood’s Black-Cast Musicals,” *Disintegrating the Musical: Black Performance and American Musical Film*
- Kirsten Pullen, “Light Egyptian: Lena Horne and the Representation of Authentic Black Femininity,” *Like a Natural Woman: Spectacular Female Performance in Classical Hollywood*

Week 2

Tuesday July 10: Settler Dreams on the Hollywood Lot

How have Hollywood Musicals participated in Settler Colonialism discursively and materially? How is whiteness created through representations of the West? How are women figured in this battle? We will examine how these musicals show them “civilizing” the American West.

Screening: *Harvey Girls* (1946, 107 min)

Readings:

- Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native”
- Warren Hoffman, “Playing Cowboys and Indians: The Forging of Whiteness in Oklahoma! and Annie Get Your Gun,” *The Great White Way*
- Amy Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity,” *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (2002)

Thursday July 12: Stars and extras - Women’s Voices 1

First Paper Due

How has Hollywood manufactured dreams of success and identity-formation through its star system? What do actors have to shed and add to their bodies, voices, accents and performance styles in order to become All-American stars? Does the popular “Cinderella story” trope in musicals whitewash a fantasy balancing act of assimilation and exceptionalism?

Screening: *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952, 103 min) + *Illusions* (1982, 60 min)

Readings:

- Adrienne McLean, “From Cansino to Hayworth to Beckworth: Constructing the Star Person(a),” *Being Rita Hayworth: Labor, Identity, and Hollywood Stardom*
- Carol Clover, “Dancin’ in the Rain” (1995) : 722-747
- Anthony Slide, Chapter 10: “Ethnic Extras,” *Hollywood Unknowns: A History of Extras, Bit Players, and Stand-Ins*

Weekend (home) screening: *Kismet* (1956, 133 min)

Week 4

Tuesday July 24: The Dawn of The American Century Part 1: Orientalism Abroad and the American Musical Abroad

American writers, artists and scholars have held created fantasies about the “Orient” throughout US history. This week, we will explore this long history of Orientalism in American musical theater, and explore how orientalism ideology changes as US interests in the Middle East grow over time. As oil becomes a desired commodity, and the US begins its interventions in the region, how do musicals allow the public to participate in this political endeavor?

Screening: *The King and I* (1956, 113 min)

Readings:

- Edward Said, Orientalism (segment)
- Christina Klein, Chapter 5: “Musicals and Modernization: The King and I,” *Cold War Orientalism*
- Caren Kaplan, “Getting to Know You: Travel, Gender, and the Politics of Postcolonial Representation in Anna and the King of Siam and The King and I” in *Late Imperialism*

Thursday July 26: The Dawn of the American Century: Orientalism at Home and the American Musical

How do musicals imagine “Asia” and the Asian-American citizen? Do Asian-Americans get to be citizens? How do musicals allow every-day white Americans to feel authority over Asia?

Screening: *Flower Drum Song* (1961, 132 min)

Readings:

- Anne Anlin Cheng, “Beauty and Ideal Citizenship: Inventing Asian America in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Flower Drum Song (1961), *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief*
- Christina Klein, Chapters 6: “Asians in America: Flower Drum Song,” *Cold War Orientalism*: 191-263.

Weekend screening: *Gidget Goes Hawaiian* (1961, 101 min)

Week 5

Tuesday July 16: Cold War on the Hot Beach: American Teenagers and Hawaiian Dreams

Where do Americans teens go to have fun and not get into trouble? As the Islands of Hawaii are made into an American state, how do American anxieties of containment, exotism, and teenage rebellion get absorbed into that state that is being absorbed into the nation? What part do musicals play in this?

Screening: *Blue Hawaii*

- Readings: Delia Konzett, "South Seas Fantasies: Settler Colonialism, Race and the National Imaginary," *Hollywood's Hawaii: Race, Nation, and War*
- Allison Whitney, "Gidget Goes Hysterical," *Sugar, Spice, and Everything Nice: Cinemas of Girlhood* (2002)

Thursday July 19: Technology and the Musical: The Telephone - Women's Voices II

How does the musical advertise and spectacularize different sound and image technologies in order to draw attention to its own spectacular use of music, color, and form? For this day, we will use the telephone as a case study, from its industrial history to domestic use.

Screening: *Bells Are Ringing* (1960)

Readings:

- Ted Schantz, "Telephonic Film," *Gossip, Letters, Phones: The Scandal of Female Networks in Film and Literature* (2008)
- Sara Rimer, "Once a friendly fixture, a Telephone Operator Finds Herself Obsolete," *New York Times* (June 4, 1996): <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/06/04/us/once-a-friendly-fixture-a-telephone-operator-finds-herself-obsolete.html>

Viewing assignments: 3 short industrial films

1. "Long Distance!" (ca. 1941, 15 min) www.archive.org/details/long_distance
2. "Once Upon a Honeymoon" (1956, 15 min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOD-ZhoWcc8>
3. AT&T Archives: Operator! (1969, 15 min) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bAC4MvP_C-I

Weekend assignment: Listen to *Hamilton* soundtrack

Week 5: Broadway rewrites; Hollywood remembers

Tuesday July 31

Students will present on the subjects of their final papers. Give an example or summary of your paper's argument by applying it to a clip of the musical you are writing about.

Thursday August 2

Final paper due. We will discuss two recent musicals that have been credited with revitalizing the genre and have inspired heated debates about race and what it means to be American: *Lalaland* and *Hamilton*. Engaging these musicals through the many problematic musical traditions they have inherited as well as their innovations, we will re-examine themes we have addressed throughout the class, including the blurred lines between stage and screen, orientalist opulence, whiteness defined by racial musical appropriation, technological reflexivity, Hollywood as migration mecca, and immigration as the origin of national formation.

Screening: *La La Land* (2016, 128 min)

Readings: TBA