

HIS 350L: Historical Images of Africa in Films: Between Nollywood and Hollywood

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Since the late 1980s, the African film industry has undergone radical changes that reflect an increasingly globalized economy and the impact of structural adjustment policies. This revolution is characterized by the low-budget, direct to video films commonly referred to as *Nollywood*. While these films have come under criticism for their low production values and popularization of negative cultural stereotypes, the Nigerian video industry has risen to colossal proportions, sweeping across the continent and throughout the global diaspora. The purpose of this course is to examine the rise of Nollywood and the genesis of a popular African art form. Through a combination of films and readings, students will explore how Nollywood, in comparison with the established FESPACO film industry and Hollywood, depicts the society and culture of Nigeria, and Africa as a whole. Additionally, this course seeks to engage students in a debate about how popular films affect historical imaginations and memory. While these images have previously been the product of Hollywood and Francophone films, this course will introduce Nollywood as an alternative to how Nigerians and Africa as a whole understand their history.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. To increase the knowledge and understanding of African history, culture, and society.
2. To identify key themes in African history that transcend national boundaries.
3. To help students understand the social, cultural, political, and economic agents that have affected Africa's history.
4. To assess the viability of film as a historical source.
5. To understand popular perceptions about Africa depicted in films and how they lead to misunderstandings of the past.

READING LIST:

Haynes, Jonathan, ed. *Nigerian Video Films*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000.

Rosenstone, Robert A. *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Saul, Mahir and Ralph A. Austen, eds. *Viewing African Cinema in the Twenty-First Century: Art Films and the Nollywood Video Revolution*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010.

***There will also be several journal articles assigned throughout the semester. These will be available through the university library's online databases and posted to the course documents section of the class Blackboard page.**

ASSIGNMENTS:

Assignment	Due	Points
Attendance	Every class session	50
Book/Film Review	Week 6	100
Conference Report	Week 10	50
Final Paper	Week 15	200
Discussion Posts	See syllabus for deadlines	100

Attendance Guidelines:

Students must be present to view each film: therefore, attendance is mandatory. Late attendance will disturb the class. You must arrive on time. Make-ups will be granted only in the case of medical illness or university-related conflict. Such conflicts will require signed documentation from the Dean's Office explaining the reason for your absence and the student to view the missed film at the Fine Arts Library. Attendance will be worth 50 points of your final grade.

Film/Book Review Guidelines:

Each student is required to write review that incorporates two films and a selected reading.

Reviews should be between 1200 and 1500 words, typed, double-spaced and stapled.

Reviews should be analytical, and not just a retelling of the book and film narratives. The best way to do this is by synthesizing the film's narrative in your own mind and then critically examining such things as the historical content, style and the overall impression these had on you. Additionally, you will need to incorporate examples and evidence from the readings that either support or contradict the film. Feel free to express your own opinion, but do so in a clear and thesis statement. Organize and develop the main points you wish to make and re-emphasize them in your conclusion.

Do not simply reiterate the story line, but discuss the context, style and perspective of the film, and how the book either supports or refutes these themes.

Proofread your review before submitting it. See the format guidelines section of this syllabus for further information.

Turn your review in on time (that means at the beginning of class) because late reviews will be penalized half a letter grade for each day late. Emailed submissions will not be accepted. Your book review will be worth 100 points of your final grade.

Conference Report:

Every spring the University of Texas holds its annual Africa Conference. You must attend a minimum of two panels. A panel comprises a group of presenters. You have received time-off equivalent to the class period to do so, therefore, everyone should be able to attend a panel that fits their personal interests. You must write an analysis of what you thought about the panel speakers' presentations. Your response should reflect your thoughts, feelings and ideas concerning the speakers' presentations.

Ask yourself:

- What were the arguments of each presenter?
- Were the points valid?
- Were the arguments strong and cohesive?
- What did you like about the presentations?
- What did you feel was left out or incomplete?
- What were your reactions to their findings?

Papers should be between 900-1200 words, typed, double spaced, size 12 Times New Roman font, and stapled. Proofread your conference report before submitting it. See the format guidelines section of this syllabus for further information.

Turn in your conference report at the beginning of class following the conference. Late papers will be penalized half a letter grade for each day late. Emailed submissions will not be accepted. Your conference reports will be worth 50 points of your final grade.

Final Paper:

Each student is required to write a research paper that addresses one or more of the key themes of the class (i.e. imperialism, Orientalism, social and cultural identities, historical imagination) through the use of films and written texts. While students are allowed to use films and texts from class, they are also required to explore the growing body of literature about African cinema as well as the increasing number of African films becoming available. Research papers should have a clear thesis statement and organizational structure.

Research papers should be between 2500-3000 words, typed, double spaced, size 12 Times New Roman font, and stapled. Proofread your research paper before submitting it. See the format guidelines section of this syllabus for further information.

Turn your research paper in on time (that means at the beginning of class) because late papers will be penalized half a letter grade for each day late. Emailed submissions will not be accepted. Your research paper will be worth 200 points of your final grade.

Blackboard Discussion Guidelines:

Students are required to respond to discussion board assignments throughout the semester and read and respond to their classmates' posts. Discussion posts need to be approximately 6 sentences in length (150 words), and reflect the topic of discussion and an engagement of the course material. All posts must conform to proper etiquette and show respect for fellow students. Any student who violates appropriate university rules of conduct will be subject to removal from the class. The discussion board posts are worth 50 points of your final grade. No late posts will receive credit.

FORMAT GUIDELINES:

All assignments must be stapled, typed, double spaced, have 1" margins and size 12 Times New Roman font. Assignments that do not follow these guidelines will not be accepted.

A part of writing history includes clearly communicating your ideas. As such, written assignments must conform to standard rules of written English including the organization of essays, grammar and punctuation. Students who require assistance can use the undergraduate writing center in the FAC free of charge.

PLAGARISM:

How do you avoid committing plagiarism? Here are some basic tips:

1. Historians use a variety of citation formats, including footnotes, endnotes, and indicating their source directly in their text within parentheses. Within those formats, they use a variety of styles. Ask your instructor for guidance on a uniform system of citations--and follow that advice.
2. Take notes carefully. Whenever you copy a direct quotation, protect yourself by putting quotation marks around it. Attach a full, accurate citation to any borrowed passage, whether quoted or paraphrased, and keep it attached as you write.

3. Although borrowed ideas must be fully acknowledged in a citation, you do not need to provide a citation for information that your reader can reasonably be expected to know. When in doubt, include a citation.

4. You can avoid plagiarism by learning how to paraphrase. It is much easier to avoid plagiarism that involves verbatim copying or handing in the same paper twice than it is to avoid plagiarism that involves paraphrase, probably the trickiest area of all. Certainly it is the area where most instances of plagiarism occur. Plagiarism includes taking direct quotes or ideas from a source without giving the original author credit through citation.

CLASS POLICIES:

- **Make-Ups:** Make-ups will be granted only in the case of medical illness or university-related conflict. Make-ups will only be given when a request is made prior to the date of the exam or assignment except for documented medical emergencies.
- **Assignments:** All assignments must be submitted on due dates. Half a letter grade per day is deducted thereafter. Failure to read the assigned materials will incur **negative grading** and treated as an evidence of **cheating**. Answers to questions will be used to reveal the failure to read.
- **University of Texas Honor Code:** The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community. Any student found guilty of scholastic dishonesty may receive an “F” in the course and be remanded to the appropriate University of Texas authorities for disciplinary action. For more information, view Student Judicial Services at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs>.
- **Use of Class Materials:** No material presented in lecture may be directly or indirectly published, posted to the Internet, or rewritten for publication or distribution in any medium. Neither these materials nor any portion thereof may be stored in a computer except for personal and non-commercial use. All information derived from the internet must be adequately cited.
- **Student Privacy:** The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) require that student privacy be preserved. Thus the posting of grades, even by the last four digits of the social security number, is forbidden. All communication will remain between the instructor and the student, and the instructor will not be able to share details of the student’s performance with parents, spouses, or any others.
- **Documented Disability Statement:** The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For

more information, contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 232-2937 (video phone).

GRADING SCALE:

93-100: A	90-92: A-		
87-89: B+	83-86: B	80-82: B-	
77-79: C+	73-76: C	70-72: C-	
67-69: D+	63-66: D	60-62: D-	0-59: F

Section I. Introduction African Film

- A. Early African Films (FESPACO)**
- B. The Genesis of Nollywood**
 - a. *Zinabu* (1987) – Ghanaian film
 - b. *Living in Bondage* (1992) – First Yoruba feature
 - c. *Glamour Girls* (1994) – First English language feature
 - d. *This is Nollywood* (2007) – Documentary about Nollywood
 - e. *Nollywood Babylon* (2009) – Most recent documentary about Nollywood
- C. Nollywood vs. Traditional African Cinema**
 - a. FESPACO vs. direct to video Nollywood productions
 - b. Aesthetic comparisons/contrasts to European art films
- D. Nollywood vs. Kannywood vs. Bongowood in Anglophone Africa**
 - a. Issues of cultural homogeneity and heterogeneity – English, Igbo, and Yoruba film
 - i. Northern vs. Southern Nigerian film
 - ii. Tanzanian model of Nollywood
 - b. Ghanaian film and Nollywood
 - i. The end of government sponsored film – issues of cultural control
 - ii. Relationship between the two giants of Anglophone African film
 - c. Genres of Nollywood – Horror, urban legends, comedy, mythic parable, romance, witchcraft melodrama, Christian morality tale, historical epic
 - d. The supernatural as a key element of Nollywood films

Section II. Orientalism and Depictions of Colonialism

- A. Missionary/Colonial influence on film**
 - a. Newsreels and government sponsored films
- B. The “whitewashing” of Africa by Hollywood**
 - a. Depictions of colonialism
- C. Africa otherness in Hollywood films**
 - a. Depictions of African society and culture
- D. African exceptionalism in film**

Section III. Portrayals of Post-Colonial Africa

- A. FESPACO vs. Nollywood – ideological cinema vs. portrayals of everyday life**
- B. Rise of South Africa in African film**
- C. Corruption and Violence in Africa**
- D. Urban vs. Rural Identities**
 - a. Depictions of Lagos in Nollywood/Hollywood**
 - b. Village/City Dichotomy**
 - c. “Tradition” vs. Modernity**
- E. Gender Roles in Nollywood Films**
 - a. *The Narrow Path***