## MALEDICTA:
**“BAD” LANGUAGE, RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER IN AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE**

RUS 369, REE 325, LIN 350, CL 323, MAS 374, WGS 340, AMS 321

### COURSE SYLLABUS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Prof. Thomas. J. Garza</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offices</td>
<td>Calhoun CAL 406 and Rainey HRH 4.190 (box in CAL 415)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phones</td>
<td>471-3607 or 471-6574</td>
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<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tjgarza@austin.utexas.edu">tjgarza@austin.utexas.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office hours</td>
<td>M 2-3:30 (HRH), T 9:30-11 (CAL) and any other time by appointment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class time</td>
<td>TTh 2-3:30 p.m. in CAL 100</td>
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**Teaching Assistants:** Jason Alea, Abbie Weil, and Maryam Shariati

**Office:** CAL 429E

**Phone:** 471-3607

**E-mail:** jason.alea@yahoo.com, thunderroad@gmail.com, and shariati@utexas.edu

**Office hours:** TBD

### Required texts: [all available at the UT Co-op]


- Course packet of readings [CP], available at Speedway Printers (Dobie Mall)

### Supplementary text: [available at the UT Co-op]

Ma•le•díc•ta: (Latin. n., pl. maledictum, sg.), curse words, insults; profane and obscene language of all kinds.

When is a word “bad”? Why does it seem that one person can use a “bad” word with impunity, and another cannot? Why are certain words used specifically to hurt, insult, or demean another person? How do race, socio-economic class, and gender play into the use of “bad” language in the US? This course undertakes the examination of modern usage of language that has been designated as “bad” through social convention. Usage of forms of obscenities and invective in common usage will be examined in an attempt to come to an understanding of how the products of US popular culture portray maledicta in situational contexts. Through an examination of various texts culled from print, film, and music, participants will study the context and use of “bad” language and attempt to determine the underlying principles that dictate its social effect and determine its impact on the audience. Though the majority of texts and usage will be taken from English-language sources, several non-English examples of maledicta from Mexican Spanish, Russian, and other languages will also be examined for contrast and comparison.

I. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and Participation: You are expected to attend class meetings regularly, participate actively in discussions, do all assigned readings and film viewings, and prepare written and revision assignments. Critical analysis, synthesis and cogent argumentation are essential to the success of the course; precise articulation – orally and in writing -- of your understanding of the texts we consider this term is essential to your own success. [As REE/RUS or MAS participants in this course, you will be required to work with a quotient of the texts in the original Russian or Spanish.]

Special Accommodations: Any student with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259. Any necessary accommodations should be presented to the instructor in written form from the SSD at the beginning of the course, unless the need for special accommodations becomes necessary during the course.

Response Paper: Each participant will submit a brief response paper (5 pages) to one of a series of statements from the course material presented in class. The paper will be due on Thursday, February 16.

Reflection Paper: A short (5 pages) essay on a pre-assigned topic, or one approved by the instructor, involving at least two of the texts covered in the course. This essay is to be handed in on Tuesday, April 5.

Revision Project: Course participants, working in groups of 2 or 3, are required to hand in by the last day of class, a revision project, 10-15 pages in length, treating any of the film or literary texts covered during the semester, or a text chosen by the participant with the approval of the instructor. Sample treatments will be given out and discussed well in advance of the due date. Groups are required to communicate with the instructor about the treatments well in advance of the due date, as well as to turn in a brief, one paragraph prospectus justifying the choice of text before beginning the revision project.
II. GRADING

There are four components to the final course grade. These components and their relative weights are:

- Reflection Paper (5 pp.) 20%
- Response Paper (5 pp.) 20%
- Revision Project (no less than 10 pp.) 40%
- Active enthusiastic participation 20%

III. HONOR CODE

The University of Texas Honor Codes reads:

“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.”

Every class participant is expected to adhere to these principles throughout the course, in dealing with the instructors, fellow students, and in completing all assignments for the course.

COURSE OUTLINE

JANUARY/FEBRUARY

WHEN LANGUAGE STRIKES BACK

- The History of “Bad” Language
- Defining Bad Language: “I Know It When I Hear It”
- The F-Word: What is Bad Language Linguistically?
- “Banned in Boston”: Books, Language, and Censorship
- You Can’t Say That! The Case of Lenny Bruce
MAY

TAKE BACK WHAT YOU SAID!

- What is the Impact of “Bad” Language?
- “Bad” Rewritten

SYLLABUS OF ASSIGNMENTS

Tuesday, January 17

Introduction to “Maledicta”
Overview of syllabus, texts and course requirements

- Cee Lo Green’s “F*** You” v “Forget You”

For next meeting, read Ch. 1 “Falling Foul” and Ch. 2 “Precisely Foul” in ED

Thursday, January 19

Definitions of Terms: Obscenity v. Profanity

- What are “maledicta”?
- Why do we swear the way we do?
- View scenes from Reservoir Dogs (1992) and South Park (1999)
For next meeting, read Ch. 1 and 4 “Bad Language: Realism versus Relativism” and “Bad Words” in BL, and “Swearing” by Anderson and Trudgill in CP.

Thursday, January 26

**Setting the Stage II: What Exactly IS “Bad” Language?**

- Markers of *maledicta*
- Role of the listener/recipient

Listen to excerpts from James Joyce’s *Ulysses*

For next meeting, read Ch. 4 and 5 “Where the F***” and “The Wild Thing” in ED, and Sheidlower’s “Introduction: About the F-Word” in CP.

Vladimir Vysotsky ca. 1975

Thursday, February 2

**Regulating Language and The Greasy Pole**

- Problems in regulating language
- Coming to consensus on how and what to regulate

For next meeting, read “Banned Books: From *Harriet the Spy* to *The Catcher in the Rye*” by Brunner in CP.

Tuesday, February 7

**Banned In Boston! Literature under Siege**

- What were criteria for the bans?
- Read excerpts from *A Farewell to Arms, Leaves of Grass, Manhattan Transfer*, and others – banned in Boston
Thursday, February 9

**What Does the 1st Amendment Protect?**

- Free Speech v Freedom of Speech
- Maledicta
- View scenes from *The People Vs. Larry Flynt* (1996)
- Listen to “protected speech” in the US

Don’t forget: Short Essays due!

**Thursday, February 9**

- Reading Literature – with or without Bad Language

- What does national culture say about profanity?
- View scenes from *The People Vs. Larry Flynt* (1996)
- Listen to “protected speech” in the US

For next meeting, read “The Trials of Lenny Bruce” by Doug Linder in *CP*.

Tuesday, February 14

**What Does the 1st Amendment Protect?**

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**Thursday, February 16**

**The Case of Lenny Bruce**

- Lenny Bruce performance
- Review case history and verdict
- Was Lenny Bruce a scapegoat?

For next meeting, read “Richard Pryor,” and “Shock Jock” in *CP*.

**Tuesday, February 21**

**Lenny Bruce’s Inheritors: From Richard Pryor to Howard Stern**

- 1987 and a Youth "Revolution" in film

For next meeting, read “Nigger” [from Wikipedia(!)] in *CP*. 
Tuesday, February 28 **Language and the Media**

- Does it matter *where* bad language occurs?
  - Watch segment from “The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour”

For next meeting, read transcript of George Carlin’s “Filthy Words” and “A Tribute to George Carlin” in *CP*.

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Tuesday, March 6 **Music, Lyrics, and Bad Language**

- Relationship between music lyrics, obscenity, and censorship
  - Listen to selected songs from various “watch lists”

For next meeting, read the introduction to *Raising Kids in an X-Rated Society* by Tipper Gore in *CP*.
Thursday, March 22  Rap, Music, and the Written Word (Graffiti)

- Language of Rap: Poetry, Lyric, Message
  - Listen to the songs on PRSC “hit list”

For next meeting, read “The Blue Tube: Foul Language on Prime Time Network TV” and “PTC Study Shows Almost 70% Jump in Bad Language on Broadcast TV” in CP.
Thursday, April 5

Early Cinematic Occurrences

• “Frankly My Dear…”
  View scene from *Gone with the Wind* (1939)

• Hand in longer papers today!
  - For next meeting, read “Useful Notes: The Fifties” in *CP*.

Tuesday, April 10

The 1950s and How Language is Managed

- The New Age of Television and Language

For next meeting, read “One Eternal Round - Movie Ratings and Content Judging Profanity in Film” by Kevin B. and “Motion Picture Association of America Rating System” in *CP*.
Thursday, April 26  

**Post-Porno: Women and Language**
- The rise of the b-word and its dilution
- View scene from *Aliens*

For next meeting, read Ch. 11 “Bootleggers and Asterisks” in *ED*, and wikiHow “How to Stop Swearing” (in *CP*).

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Tuesday, May 1  

**Can Bad Language Be Rewritten?**
- Why the shift in language use?
- View scenes from *Pulp Fiction* and *Summer of Sam* (1999)

For next meeting, read Ch. 7 “Images and Engagement” in *BL*.

For next meeting, read Ch. 11 “Bootleggers and Asterisks” in *ED* and “Dialogue Graffiti” in *CP*.

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Tuesday, May 3  

**Conclusions and Final Thoughts**
- Closing Comments
- Final Projects due
Have a f***ing great summer!