PAPER 2  
DUE 10/5 BY THE START OF CLASS VIA COURSEWEB

Format

* • 5 page paper
* • Double-spaced
* • Times New Roman
* • 12 point font
* • 1 inch margins
* • Proper heading format and title
* • Works Cited https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/12
* • MLA Citations https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/2

Content

For your second Critical Essay, you may follow the line of thought presented in the following questions or explore your interests which may not be listed here. You must write about Blackboard Jungle (1955, dir. Richard Brooks). You must also include, at minimum, one direct quotation from one of the readings we have examined using proper in-text citation.

Remember this is a Critical Essay, not a Movie Review. DO NOT write a long plot summary. You should be able to summarize the plot in one or two sentences related to your argument. Your argument should be supported with evidence from the film using analysis of cinematic techniques. Be sure it is clear within your paper WHY your argument is important (what is at stake in your argument?). Make sure your paragraphs are connected—think about transitions. We have many texts from class that you can work with. You may use earlier readings from Sandoval-Sánchez, Wells, Berson, and Shary or this week’s readings from Hine, McLean, or Golub. Other resources are also widely available online or in the library if you choose (this is not necessary yet, just to be clear).

Prompts

Hine describes the concept of the “teenage mystique” as the perception of youth as looming troublemakers in the eyes of adults and themselves. How does the film reinforce this depiction of juvenile delinquents and reflect the ideology of the time period? Who is the intended audience of the film? Think about Golub’s critique on the marketing of the film at the time of its release and the use and recurrence of the popular “Rock Around The Clock” song. Which generation is glorified and which is demonized within the film? Does this remain constant throughout the film or is there a shift in this perspective?

How is the power dynamic of the student-teacher relationship negotiated and re-negotiated throughout the film? Who is the eventual winner of this battle? How does the representation of space factor into ideas of war, territory, and gang organization? Which spaces are contested? How does Blackboard Jungle’s depiction of space differ from the contested space in West Side Story? What other “battles” take place within the film?

McLean’s 1995 article critques the negative representation of U.S. high schools in films and media. In what ways does Blackboard Jungle support or challenge her argument? How does Brooks stylistically portray urban U.S. schools? How does the film represent media and its use the in the classroom? What argument might the film be making about its usefulness in education? Think also about the historical context of popular entertainment (comics, music, movies) seen as influencing youth violence during this time period. Consider this film for viewing in a contemporary classroom—what are the merits or drawbacks? Is the contemporary classroom the ideal audience/generation for this film?

Golub’s article situations the film within the context of the education crisis of the time. How are these concerns over the education system visible within the film? In what ways the later produced cartoon, Blackboard Jumble (1957) reflect these anxieties? Does the cartoon sympathize with or critique the film? the education system? the characterization of the teacher-hero?

Gender and race are, arguably, presented as ancillary concerns to the larger crisis of juvenile delinquency within the film. How are gender norms and expectations of women’s roles visible within the film? Does this change based on the societal role these women play? Think about the women we see in the film—how often are they featured, and in what context, compared to their male counterparts? how are they costumed? what is significant about their dialogue and relationships/interactions? Similarly how is race depicted within the film—which bodies are criminalized? marginalized? in what ways are these characters visible/invisible throughout the film? How does Sidney Poitier’s characterization of Miller conform or challenge race conceptions within the film?

Blackboards of Change

Antonino Domenico Febbraro

1605 Middle Road Glenshaw PA,15116

412-492-9415

Student ID # 3993300

Rachel DeSoto Jackson

CRN: 2161\_ENGCOMP\_0205\_SEC1110

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Erskine Johnson’s syndicated “Stage and Screen” 1954 column “predicted that the feature film [*Blackboard Jungle* (1955)] about novice teacher Rick Dadier (Glenn Ford) trying to connect with unruly vocational school students would leave ‘shocked faces in movie audiences’” (qtd. in Golub 19).

This quote expresses how the film, *Blackboard Jungle,* directed by Richard Brooks left audiences extremely surprised by the teenage violence and delinquency he depicted in the film. Most viewers of the film during the mid 1950s were shocked to learn that violence, as dramatically depicted in the film, was truly present in the public education system in America at the time. Was Brooks inaccurate with his representation of public schooling at the time? Or was Brooks spot on? Interestingly enough, statistics and evidence show that the filmmakers were indeed exactly right. What Brooks is trying to do in this film, is to point out to viewers that violent crimes do happen within the schools. The film *Blackboard Jungle* was done to incite a change in the American education system by depicting shocking real life incidents throughout the film.

The film specifically states, “The scenes and incidents depicted here are fictional. However, we believe that public awareness is the first remedy for any problem” (*Blackboard Jungle* 1955). Hence, making it evident that the main reason for making this movie is to make their viewers aware of the issues going on in the American education system. As an example, research done by the University of Virginia states that, “Congressional inquiries over a perceived increase in youth violence in schools can be found in every decade since the 1950s” (curry.virginia.edu). The film exploits evidence that violence and crime was problematic in the education system during the 1950s.

At the end of the film there is an incident between West and Mr. Dadier. In this scene West pulls out a knife in an attempt to stab Mr. Dadier. This scene can be related to a similar real life event of this time period. According to news writer Angus Johnson, on November 18, 1942:

Erwin Goodman, 36-year-old mathematics teacher of William J. Gaynor Junior High School in Brooklyn, was shot and killed in the school corridors on Oct. 2 by a youth whose hand he had clasped in thankfulness for acting as peacemaker a few minutes earlier. (thenation.com)

This is shocking to most people that a student, like West, would try to physically harm a teacher. However, things like this do happen, and this is what the film is trying to draw attention to.

Another scene that shocks viewers of *Blackboard Jungle* is the scene in which a student attacks Miss Hammond in an attempt to rape her. Statistics presented by the Federal Bureau of Investigation shows that from the year 2000 to 2005 there were a total of 1,662 reported forcible rapes throughout schools in the United States (fbi.gov). Along with 8,193 forcible fondling incidents reported in the school system (fbi.gov). This evidence supports the idea that rape is in fact an issue in the American schooling system. The filmmakers of *Blackboard Jungle* produced this to incite a change in the education system. However, decades later, it is still an issue in school systems.

Along with rape, another shocking statistic from the Federal Bureau of Investigation is that 35,715 intimidation crimes have been reported in the American education system from the year 2000 to 2005 (fbi.gov). Additionally, in that same time frame there were one hundred and seven reported blackmailing incidents (fbi.gov). Analogously, in *Blackboard Jungle,* West intimidates Anne Dadier. West does so by sending anonymous letters to Anne telling her to watch her husband. This puts thoughts in her head of her husband being unfaithful to her. Once again, *Blackboard Jungle* shows how the film is giving attention to yet another realistic problem in the American education system.

Another intimidating and shocking scene is the destruction of Mr. Edward’s record collection by his students, after he shows them to his class for a lesson in mathematics. Records show that a total of 106,281 vandalism or destruction of property incidents were reported in the American school system from 2000 to 2005 (fbi.gov). Furthermore, from the year 2000 to 2005, 47,108 drug and narcotic violations were reported in the American school system (fbi.gov). In *Blackboard* *Jungle*, Artie West was high on drugs as Miller states, “Take it easy, chief. He’s crazy, he’s high, he’s floating on Sneaky Pete wine” (*Blackboard Jungle*). The film once again is trying to show the public that vandalism and drug abuse is a real problem in schools in the United States, which may be alarming to most audiences.

Another alarming, however, more of an acknowledged issue in the American education system is the issue of bullying. Bullying is characterized into three types, verbal, physical, indirect, and cyber bullying (stopbullying.gov). The most common type of bullying is verbal bullying, which includes name-calling and spreading lies (stopbullying.gov). Statistics show that 71% of students admit to bullying as a problematic issue at school (makebeatsnotbeatdowns.org). *Blackboard Jungle* depicts bullying as an issue through the name-calling between the students. This is seen when Artie West says to Morales, “Alright, sit down…spic” (*Blackboard Jungle*). Also, verbal bullying is evident from student to teacher when Morales mocks Mr. Dadier’s name by saying, “Oh, Daddy-Oh”(*Blackboard Jungle*). These scenes show how the filmmakers are trying to make it evident that verbal bullying is a realistic issue in schools.

Likewise, physical bullying is also a realistic issue in the education system. 36.6% of bullying involves shoving and pushing, and 34.2% of bullying involves punching and kicking (stopbullying.org). Physical bullying is presented in *Blackboard Jungle* when one of the students hits Morales on the top of the head with a magazine. Mr. Dadier then tells the students to knock it off, in which the students respond by telling him they were “just messing around.” Mr. Dadier then states:

Yeah, I know you’re just kidding. That’s how things start. Like a street fight. Somebody pushes somebody in fun. Somebody pushes somebody back, and soon you got a street fight with no kidding… (*Blackboard Jungle*).

The filmmakers here are pointing out something very interesting. Most adults view pushing and shoving as “messing around” and nothing serious. However, as Mr. Dadier says, it is the “messing around” that then leads to real issues. 70% of students report being bullied from being pushed, shoved, hit, and punched (stopbullying.org). The film is pointing out to the public that these little issues become bigger issues, and are seen in the education system.

Another extremely common, but not thought of as a real issue, is sexual harassment. In the film, Miss Hammond is sexually harassed when she is going up on stage to take attendance. The students in the auditorium all start to whistle and howl at Miss Hammond. This may seem harmless, however, according to research done by Nan Stein, Ph.D. from the Medical University of South Carolina, this is not harmless. According to Stein 53% of women from grades eight through eleven have experienced sexual harassment in the form of howling, whistling, or other sexual gestures (musc.edu). The filmmakers are pointing out that sexual harassment is a real issue in the American education system through the representation of Miss Hammond. Whistling and howling seems inoffensive, but it is still a form of sexual harassment and is still relevant in the school system.

By depicting shocking real life scenes, the film *Blackboard Jungle* attempts to incite a change in the American education system. Statistics show that the scenes presented in the film are of real matter in the real world, even decades later today. The filmmakers illustrate incidents throughout the film that may leave audiences shocked, in hopes of making viewers aware of actual issues in the education system. Perhaps, the “shocked faces in movie audiences” that Erskine Johnson describes, are not because of the violent scenes in the film, but in response to the fact that these scenes depict real problems within the American education system. *Blackboard Jungle* was done to try and excite a change in the education system. Maybe a better name for the film would be “Blackboards of Change.”

Works Cited

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