

DOCUMENTING DIFFERENCE

AAS 320 / RTF 359S

Fall 2018

Unique #: 32188 / 08594
Seminar time: T/TH 12:30-2pm
Seminar location: PAR 208

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will explore the theory, history, practice and poetics of minority documentary. With a particular emphasis on Asian and African American examples, students will engage documentary as a vital practice of minority activism and self-preservation. Students will be introduced to influential documentaries across a wide range of styles and modes (expository, observational, performative, reflexive, poetic, interactive) and will explore critical topics in documentary production and reception: fictions of realism, authenticity and objectivity; histories of ethnography; questions of documentary ethics; aesthetic strategies of documentary art and activism; politics of self-representation; mockumentaries and the lampooning of “truth.” Class assignments will be a combination of written and creative work, and students will have the opportunity to create their own short documentary or documentary prospectus for their final project.

COURSE GOALS

After successfully completing this course, students will have the ability to:

- discuss how the documentary has and should be defined
- debate claims of documentary authenticity, realism and objectivity
- understand documentary tactics of propaganda and persuasion
- contemplate complex questions of documentary ethics
- identify major historical trends in minority documentary, as well as key minority doc texts
- recognize various documentary styles and modes, including their relative advantages and limitations
- critique minority representation across a range of documentaries, from the popular to the subcultural
- appreciate activist documentary practices and strategies, related to both content and form
- grasp the particulars, politics and peculiarities of Asian American documentary

REQUIRED TEXTS

All readings will be posted on Canvas. Students are responsible for retrieving and printing them.

COURSE GRADING

Requirements	% of Final Grade
Quizzes and Journals	25%
Midterm Essay (and Rewrite)	25%
Final Project	25%
Attendance/Participation	25%

Grading Scale: This class will use the standard +/- grading scale.

GUIDELINES

Quizzes: On Thursdays, during “lecture weeks,” there will be a short quiz on that week’s reading assignments and related themes. These quizzes are designed to test your comprehension of fundamental concepts and may take a variety of forms, from multiple choice to short answers. Note: With advanced notice, take-home quizzes and small creative projects may be substituted for an in-class quiz. Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

Journals: During “screening weeks,” in lieu of reading assignments, students will write in their Canvas course “journal”—a journal in the form of “documentary” logs being a natural choice in a documentary studies class. In it you will record your reactions to class screenings. Your journal should be thoughtful and specific—and should include both “factual” details and critical insights into what you are seeing. Often you will be given a specific question(s) to address. However, at times you will be at liberty to write about what most interests you most. Your journal entries will be housed on Canvas and are due by Noon on Wednesday during screening weeks. Journal entries will be reviewed throughout the semester. Students are encouraged to read and engage each other’s work.

Midterm Essays: Students will document the experiences of an individual of interest, via a 4 page “oral history” essay. This entails: 1) conducting an interview with the chosen individual; and, 2) composing an essay that provides an analytic framework for their story, situating their voice within this framework. You will not be able to write about their entire life story, but instead will focus on one or two themes discussed by the interviewee, analyzing their testimony based on knowledge gained in the course from readings, lectures, films, and discussions. In doing so, you will be required to use secondary sources to flesh out your essay. Note: These essays will be revised and resubmitted for a final grade. Further instructions to be provided at a later date.

Final Project: Drawing on knowledge gained from the course, students will have the opportunity to create their own (5-10min.) short documentary accompanied by a brief 3 page paper reflecting on the project and its relation to course materials. Students will also have the option of writing a documentary prospectus: a detailed narrative, ~8 pages in length, offering a comprehensive description of a hypothetical documentary project. The documentary prospectus should actively engage course materials and include:

- a narrative describing your documentary—its topic, format/style and approach
- rationale for choosing your particular documentary topic, format/style and approach
- discussion of intended audience and audience effect, including tactics of persuasion
- discussion of related documentary texts (and how yours will differ from them)
- discussion of your hypothetical research strategy and production tasks
- discussion of potential ethical issues involved in your documentary’s production
- a bibliography of primary and secondary sources, including at least 3 class texts

Further details related to these final project options will be provided later in the semester.

Attendance: Students are expected to attend all class meetings. Please be respectful of your classmates and the professor by arriving on time. Unexcused class absences will adversely affect your attendance grade.

Participation: Class Participation is a grade that must be earned; it requires more than being a warm body in class. For a high grade, you must be an active participant. This means consistently asking and answering questions, and listening attentively and respectfully to the instructor and to your classmates. This also means keeping up with class readings, screenings and assignments and coming to class prepared to engage.

Cultural Diversity Flag: This course carries the flag for Cultural Diversity in the United States. Cultural Diversity courses are designed to increase your familiarity with the variety and richness of the American cultural experience. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from assignments covering the practices, beliefs, and histories of U.S. cultural groups that have experienced persistent marginalization.

Writing Flag: This course carries the Writing Flag. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise one of your assignments, and you will be asked to read and discuss your peers' work. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your written work. Writing Flag classes meet the Core Communications objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, and Personal Responsibility, established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

CLASS POLICIES

Incompletes: Students are not permitted to take an Incomplete for this course, except in the case of a documented health or family emergency discussed in advance with the professor. If you feel you are falling behind in your work, it is your responsibility to meet with the professor and formulate a plan of action well in advance of the end of the semester so that you can complete the course successfully.

Services for Students with Disabilities: The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. Students with physical or learning disabilities should provide the professor with a letter requesting reasonable academic accommodation, and work directly with the professor to determine what accommodations are needed. This letter can be obtained from Services for Students with Disabilities, located in the Student Services Building. For more information, contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259, 471-4641 TTY, or visit their website at: <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>.

The 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.

Scholastic Dishonesty: The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. For more information on scholastic dishonesty, please visit the Student Judicial services website at deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs.

Religious Holidays: Religious holy days sometimes conflict with class and examination schedules. If you miss a work assignment or other project due to the observance of a religious holy day you will be given an opportunity to complete the work missed within a reasonable time after the absence. It is the policy of the University of Texas at Austin that you must notify your instructor at least fourteen days prior to the classes scheduled on dates you will be absent to observe a religious holy day.

Course Content: At times, we will be discussing/viewing material that may be disturbing to some students. In a class dedicated to minority documentary, the engagement of significant, but sometimes difficult, issues related to race, gender, etc., is to be expected. If you ever feel the need to step outside during one of these discussions / viewings, you may do so without academic penalty. You will, however, be responsible for material you miss.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Note:

- Readings should be completed *prior* to the class period for which they are assigned.
- Lecture Weeks will consist primarily of lecture/discussion, with quizzes on Thursday.
- Screening Weeks will consist primarily of screenings/discussion, with journal entries due on Wednesdays by noon.

Week 1 Introductions

8/30 Course & class introductions

Week 2 Lecture Week

9/4 **Race and Reality**
Reading: Omi and Winant "Racial Formations"
In-class excerpt: *Race: the Power of an Illusion*

9/6 **Fictions of the Real/Reel**
Reading: Beattie, "'Believe Me, I'm of the World': Documentary Representation"

Week 3 Screening Week

9/11 **Documentary Modes**
Screening: Examples of 5 Documentary Modes
Review: Beattie, "Believe Me, I'm of the World" (pgs. 20-25)
In-class excerpts: *Hoop Dreams* and others (TBD)

9/13 **Documentary Modes Cont'd**
In-class excerpts: *Tongues Untied* and others (TBD)

Week 4 Lecture Week

9/18 **Visualizing Race**
Reading: Hall, "The Spectacle of the Other" (select pages)

9/20 **The Trouble with Ethnography: Spectatorship, Power and Knowledge**
Reading: Beattie, "Constructing and Contesting Otherness: Ethnographic Film"
In class excerpts: *Nanook of the North* and *Bontoc Eulogy*

Week 5 Screening Week

9/25 **Screening: *Cannibal Tours* (O'Rourke 1988): Cannibal tours**

9/27 Discussion: *Cannibal Tours*

Week 6 Lecture Week

10/2 **Narrating the Nation: TV News and the Limits of (Documentary) Discourse**
Readings: and Sasha Torres, "In a Crisis We Must Have a Sense of Drama"
In class excerpt: *The Fifties*

- 10/4 **Evidence, Investigation, and the Phenomenon of “Fake News”**
Reading: Beattie: “The Evening Report: Television Documentary Journalism;” and Av
Westin, “The Color of Ratings,”
In class excerpt: *Whose Streets?*

Week 7 Screening Week

- 10/9 **Screening: *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* (Choy and Tajima-Peña, 1987)**

- 10/11 **Discussion: *Who Killed Vincent Chin?***

Week 8 Lecture Week

- 10/16 **Peer exchange**
****Midterm Essays Due in Class****

- 10/18 **Border Crossings: Transnational Technologies**
Reading: Section from Madhavi Mallapragada’s *Virtual Homelands: Indian Immigrants
and Online Cultures*
In class excerpt: *Nalini by Day, Nancy By Night* or *Bombay Calling*

Week 9 Screening Week

- 10/23 **Border Crossings: Intersectional Identities**
Reading: Lorde, “Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” Gloria
Anzaldúa, “La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Toward a New Consciousness”
In class excerpt: *Las Marthas*

- 10/25 **Screening: *Call Her Ganda* (Raval, 2018)**

Week 10 Lecture Week

- 10/30 **Discussion: *Call Her Ganda***
Reading: Curran Nault, “The Spectre of Filipinx Femmepire: *Call Her Ganda* and the Activist
Afterlife of Jennifer Laude”

- 11/1 **Guest Lecture: Hao Cao**
****Final Midterm Essays Due in Class****

Week 11 Lecture Week

- 11/6 **Doc or Not: Mockumentary**
Luis Buñuel, “Land Without Bread” or Robert Reid Pharr, “Makes me Feel Mighty Real”
In-class excerpt: *Land Without Bread* or *Watermelon Woman*

- 11/8 **Doc or Not: Reality TV**
Reading: Beattie, “Up Close and Personal: Popular Factual Entertainment” and Strings
and Bui, “She is Not Acting, She Is” (read by next Tuesday)
In-class excerpt: *Black.White*

Week 12 Screening Week

- 11/13 **Screening: Episode of *RuPaul’s Drag Race***

11/15 **Discussion: *RuPaul*** and reality TV

Week 13 Lecture Week

11/20 **TBD**

11/23 **THANKSGIVING**

Week 14 Screening Week

11/27 **Screening: *Paris is Burning* (Jennie Livingston, 1990)**
(*The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson* as possible alternative)
Reading: hooks, “Is Paris Burning?” and Tavia N’Yongo on *Paris*

11/29 **Course Synthesis via Discussion of *Paris is Burning***

Week 15 Final Project Presentations

12/4 Final Project Presentations

12/6 Final Project Presentations Continued