

**HISTORY 399: HONORS SEMINAR
SEEING RACE IN MODERN AMERICA**

Fall 2020
Section 001
MO/WE 12:30-1:45

Professor: Greg Carter
Office hours: By appointment (Also, WE 2:00-3:00)
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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Science fiction movies (and television shows) since the late 1960s reflect the anxieties of their times, even as they promote colorblind attitudes. They often use visual symbolism to communicate messages about race and racism. And fan activities (cosplay, shipping, social networking) link their sci-fi realms and the current racial climate. Still, the questions we use to analyze the more distant past remain useful for popular culture: How do we train our eyes to see race accurately? What historical precursors inform this process? Which representations have worked in favor of racial equality? Can detecting stereotypes lead to broader, anti-racist practice? This Honors seminar will focus on these questions in discussions and by reading and analyzing a range of interdisciplinary sources.

In particular, this course brings together two phenomena prominent in the past four decades: the science fiction movie franchise, *Star Wars*, and the increased acceptance of interracial intimacy. In both realms, the prohibition of interracial (or, by proxy, inter-species) intimacy has maintained the differences between racial groups. Just as many assume the movies lack racial issues, some have claimed that the United States has reached a “postracial” state where racial difference is irrelevant. Our objective is to uncover the link between George Lucas’s creation and our real world. Since that the link becomes apparent in reception of the movies, we will examine the perceptions, attitudes, and activities of *Star Wars* fans along with contextualizing the movies within the post-civil rights era and comparing contemporary representations with established tropes.

I began developing this version of the class when it looked like classes would be meeting online in Fall 2020. On one hand, it draws from a narrow set of popular culture evidence, but my hope is that the material will be easier to manage under this newer format. Please pardon any snags!

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REQUIRED MATERIALS:

All of the required readings will be article-length, and I will provide links to where they originated, or PDF files on Canvas. Required videos or podcasts will also be available online. You will need a Twitter account and (login credentials for) a Disney+ account.

WORKLOAD STATEMENT:

- Required reading: three hours a week (45 hours total)
Each week, the amount of reading and viewing varies. I will give guidance on how to approach them, most likely in the form of study sheets. But it is up to you to manage your time and become familiar with the material.
- Class meetings: twice a week for 75 minutes (40 hours total)
We will meet via Collaborate Ultra twice a week. (You can find more information about this platform here: <https://kb.uwm.edu/99445>.) Devices may be used for note taking, but conspicuous surfing may result in a penalty to your participation grade. Put away nonessential devices for the whole class period, to prevent distractions. To workshop each of our draft papers, you will set a one-on-one office hours appointment with me.
- Three essays: two hours a week (30 hours total)
Three five- to six-page papers will cover topics from the readings and discussions. I will give assignment sheets for each on the first day of the course’s three units. Later, you can expect to share your progress with the class. Two weeks before the paper is due, you and I will workshop your draft paper. Essay grades will reflect the writing, but also your investment in the writing process. Unexcused late assignments will lose 10% for missing the initial deadline, and another 10% for every twenty-four hours after that. Assignments arriving 72 hours late will receive an “F” (60%).
- Twitter: one hour a week (15 hours total)
As an asynchronous participation tool, you will post at least one hundred tweets tagged #hist399. This works out to one a day for fifteen weeks. Strike a good balance between initiating conversations and replying to others. Avoid retweets without contextualization. Whether revelations while reading/viewing, updates on your papers, interesting finds, or questions to the class, these posts should be thoughtful, informative, and concise. Start by following me (@PrOfCarter) and tagging all posts with #hist399.

GRADE DISTRIBUTION:

Essay 1	20%
Essay 2:	20%
Essay 3:	20%
Synchronous participation:	25%
Asynchronous participation:	15%

COURSE SCHEDULE

Unit One: The Original Trilogy

Week 1: September 2-5 - What Is Star Wars?

Wednesday

Read: Time, "Star Wars: The Year's Best Movie."¹

View: Looper, "The Entire Star Wars Story Finally Explained."²

Week 2: September 6-12 - Is There Interracial Intimacy in Star Wars?

Monday

NO CLASS.

Wednesday

Read:

- Sun, "From the Hays Code to 'Loving'."³
- Mooney, "Of Death Stars, Sarlaccs and Sexting."⁴
- Kearns, "Princess Leia: Feminist Icon or Sexist Trope?"⁵

View Vox.com, "How the Catholic Church Censored Hollywood's Golden Age."⁶

Week 3: September 13-19 - Who Are the Racial Tokens in the Original Trilogy?

Monday

Read Nama, *Black Space*, 10-20.

View Syfy Wire, "Logan's Run: Everything You Didn't Know."⁷

SUBMIT UNIT ONE DRAFT PAPER/SET OFFICE HOURS APPOINTMENT.

Wednesday

Read Nama, *Black Space*, 20-41.

View Julien, Baadasssss Cinema [0:00-6:00].⁸

Week 4: September 20-26 - Is Darth Vader black?

Monday

Read Martin, "Shades of Evil," 1-9.

View Miramax, "Chasing Amy / 'Star Wars' (HD)..."⁹

Wednesday

Read Martin, "Shades of Evil," 9-19.

View Digital Daily, "Melissa Harris Perry Says Star Wars Is Racist."¹⁰

¹ <https://time.com/4153583/star-wars-the-years-best-movie/>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2WWazlCpXZ8>

³ <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/hays-code-loving-hollywood-s-896342>

⁴ <https://themovieblog.com/2019/12/12/of-death-stars-sarlaccs-and-sexting-the-curious-sexual-energy-of-star-wars/>

⁵ <https://opinionessoftheworld.com/2012/08/01/princess-leia-feminist-icon-or-sexist-trope/>

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXZGKhpv8eg>

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZx9SU1git8>

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eMscT5DAc>

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3XTHVC1Nf0>

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDFnrNtqAjo>

Week 5: September 27-October 3

Monday

View *Star Wars, Episode IV: A New Hope*.

Wednesday

View *Star Wars, Episode IV: A New Hope*.

SUBMIT UNIT ONE REVISED PAPER.

Unit Two: The Prequel Trilogy

Week 6: October 4-10 - What Thinly Veiled Racist Reasons Do Fans Give for Hating the Prequels?

Monday

Read Brooker, *Using the Force*, xi-xviii, 79-85.

View WatchMojo.com, "Top 10 Reasons Why the Star Wars Prequels are Hated."¹¹

Wednesday

Read Brooker, *Using the Force*, 85-100.

View JAR Media, "The Top 5 Things the Star Wars Prequels Did Horribly, Horribly WRONG."¹²

Week 7: October 11-17 - What Overtly Racist Reasons Do Fans Give for Hating the Prequels?

Monday

Read Goldstraw, "The Phantom Menace: When Fandom Got Toxic."¹³

SUBMIT UNIT TWO DRAFT PAPER/SET OFFICE HOURS APPOINTMENT.

Wednesday

Read Nordine, "Jar Jar Binks Actor Ahmed Best Opens Up About Racism-Fueled Backlash."¹⁴

View SoulPancake, "That Moment I Opened Up About Suicide."¹⁵

Week 8: October 18-24 - What About Minority Fans?

Monday

Read Stanfill, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Fandom and Fan Studies."

View Team Coco, "Triumph Attends the Premiere Of 'Star Wars: Attack Of The Clones'."¹⁶

Wednesday

Read Pande, "Who Do You Mean by 'Fan'?"

View Amiyrah Martin, "Black Star Wars Fans - We Do Exist!"¹⁷

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvosjX9Zt1U>

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rtQoMuvGKd0>

¹³ <https://theovertake.com/~beta/the-dark-side/>

¹⁴ <https://www.indiewire.com/2019/01/jar-jar-binks-actor-ahmed-best-racism-suicide-contemplation-1202032520/>

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qfNiSkd3Hfl>

¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKT7bx-fmtk>

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6sh0Tzmmk8>

Week 9: October 25-31

Monday

View *Star Wars, Episode I: The Phantom Menace*.

Wednesday

View *Star Wars, Episode I: The Phantom Menace*.

SUBMIT UNIT TWO REVISED PAPER.

Unit Three: The Sequel Trilogy

Week 10: November 1-7 - Can You Criticize Something that Excludes You, and Also Love It?

Monday

Read diversehighfantasy, "Racism in the Star Wars fandom: The Tumblr Years."¹⁸

Wednesday

View John Hope Franklin Center at Duke University, "Left of Black with André Carrington."¹⁹

Week 11: November 8-14 - Why Is This Toxic, Sexist, Racist Ship so Popular?

Monday

Read Bay, "Weaponizing the Haters."

Wednesday

Read Kornhaber, "50 Shades of Rey."²⁰

View:

- Ship Wars: R/ylo vs Finnrey.²¹
- Moth's Audio and Videos, "Finn, Kylo Ren, and The Empathy Gap."²²

Week 12: November 15-21 - Does Lucasfilm Recognize Minority Fans?

Monday

Listen Hard NOC Media, "Hard NOC Life: The Rise of Star Wars Celebration" [0:00-26:45].²³

Wednesday

Listen Hard NOC Media, "Hard NOC Life: The Rise of Star Wars Celebration" [26:45-53:30].

Week 13: November 22-28

Monday

SUBMIT UNIT THREE DRAFT PAPER/SET OFFICE HOURS APPOINTMENT.

Wednesday

NO CLASS.

¹⁸ <https://diversehighfantasy.tumblr.com/post/190278683781/racism-in-the-star-wars-fandom-the-tumblr-years>

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXMqIHE2PQU>

²⁰ <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/03/reylo/471768/>

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=buQTK8QJmYA>

²² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oivNk1NYr-w>

²³ <https://thenerdsofcolor.org/2019/04/19/hard-noc-life-the-rise-of-star-wars-celebration/>

Week 14: November 29-December 5 - Did Rise of Skywalker Take the Easy Way Out?

Monday

Read:

- Lacina, "The Latest Star Wars Film Satisfies the Right Wing. Will the Left Start Trolling?"²⁴
- Pulliam-Moore, "John Boyega's Post-Star Wars Honesty Is a Good Thing."²⁵

Wednesday

Read Baron, "Star Wars: Did Disney Depoliticize Episode IX?"²⁶

View Screen Junkies, "Honest Trailers / Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker."²⁷

Week 15: December 6-12

Monday

View *Star Wars, Episode VIII: The Last Jedi*.

Wednesday

View *Star Wars, Episode VIII: The Last Jedi*.

SUBMIT UNIT THREE REVISED PAPER.

ACADEMIC ADVISING IN HISTORY:

All L&S students have to declare and complete an academic major to graduate. If you have not yet declared a major, you are encouraged to do so, even if you are at an early stage in your college education. If you are interested in declaring a major (or minor) in History, or if you need academic advising in History, please visit the Department of History undergraduate program web page at <http://www4.uwm.edu/letschi/history/undergrad/> for information on how to proceed.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:

CHEATING AND PLAGIARISM ARE UNACCEPTABLE AND WILL RESULT IN COURSE FAILURE. If requirements are unclear, or if you find an assignment overwhelming, it is best to consult me beforehand, so we can work out something. Here is a guide to organizing your research and writing process so that you minimize the risk of plagiarism:

<https://guides.library.uwm.edu/noplaiarism>.

²⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/01/18/latest-star-wars-film-satisfies-right-wing-will-left-start-trolling/>

²⁵ <https://io9.gizmodo.com/john-boyegas-post-star-wars-honesty-is-a-good-thing-1840773091>

²⁶ <https://www.cbr.com/star-wars-did-disney-depoliticize-episode-ix/>

²⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7dq_wo5eto

GER AREAS:

This course counts towards the fulfillment of the university's general education requirements (GER) in the social sciences.

Social Science

1. Definition: A branch of science dealing with study of human behavior and the organization, development, and consequences of human activity.
2. Criteria: A course should reflect one or more of the following intellectual foci as its primary instructional purpose:
 - a. the study of intrapersonal, interpersonal and/or socio-cultural factors associated with individual behavior, collective action, or societal development;
 - b. the study of human collectivities, organizations, institutions, and cultures, their infrastructures and interrelationships;
 - c. the study of capacities for and/or techniques of creating behavior acquisition and change;
 - d. the study of methodologies designed for conducting inquiry into human behavior, collective action, societies, or cultures; or
 - e. exploration of the alternative theoretical frameworks which have been used to offer meaningful explanations of social phenomena.

This course counts towards the GER because it holds as its primary instructional purpose the study of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and/or socio-cultural factors associated with individual behavior, collective action, or societal development in the context of the visual representations of racial difference. Using the discipline of History to examine the civil rights movement provides an opportunity to study human collectivities, organizations, institutions, and cultures, their infrastructures and interrelationships. At the same time, by examining the perceptions, attitudes, and activities of audiences, this course presents alternative theoretical frameworks, offering meaningful explanations of social phenomena. Papers and quizzes will reinforce this mission. Specifically, this course satisfies the criteria of the social science area of the GER by having as a major learning goal that of understanding the organizational and institutional structures that brought about change in racial representations (criterion b) and for how institutional change has brought about behavioral change, especially the attitudes and actions of those groups who initially resisted change racial representations and who may seek to reverse its results (criterion c).

SYLLABUS LINKS:

At this link, you will find links to all the policies the Secretary of the University would like you to have readily available. It includes, among others: students with disabilities, academic misconduct, and the latest COVID-19 statements: <https://uwm.edu/secu/syllabus-links/>