1. Course Description

Chicano Cinema examines dimensions of the film industry with respect to the Chicano’s place - historically and culturally - within the genre. Since film has become a genre with cultural implications, methods have emerged enabling the student to “read” the messages shaped by those images as well as the manner in which the story is told. It is within this framework that this course is based. Questions proposed for this examination include: What area the images of Chicanos in commercial Hollywood films and how have they changed as a result of historical developments? What impact did these images have, not only on the viewing public, but on Chicanos themselves? This, however, is only one part of the story.

Because of historical social movements taking place in the 1960s and 70s, Chicanos themselves began the process of reclaiming their own films, their own images, a counter-cinema, if you will. In the last thirty years an emergence of Chicano film has developed with an eye for telling stories from the perspective of this community. Chicano cinema is an interdisciplinary course that makes use of fields of cultural anthropology, sociology, film criticism, and history in order to conduct its review of how and why Chicanos have been depicted as they have. These methodologies will be used to examine how Chicanos responded to these images and in the process contributed to their self-determination and popular culture.

Objectives

A. Engage students in an interdisciplinary study of subjects and issues central to consideration, aesthetically and culturally, of Chicano films. This will be accomplished through the screening of diverse films covering topics such as history, stereotyping, the role of the woman, forms of cultural expression such as the documentary, short narrative and feature, immigration, colonias, education, and border issues, just to name a few.

B. Contribute to the comparative, critical and analytical study of Chicano film as an art form through examination of Hollywood and Chicano film. Discussions will be used to examine differences in the two film forms.

C. Expand the student’s horizons of Chicano film. Moreover, the course will serve to counterbalance stereotypes, ethnocentrism, racism, and sexism by examining images of Chicanos (and Latinos) in Hollywood and Chicano film.
D. This course will promote critical written and oral communication skills as a response to Chicano film. This will be achieved through the preparation of critical film reviews, a critical essay where the student will develop a definition of Chicano film based on their viewing and readings from the class. It is hoped that the student will come away from the class with a more critical eye towards the film industry.

2. Course Format

This course will consist of lecture, screening of films in class, discussion of both films and reading materials. Students will be engaged in written work consisting of short critical reviews of film, a midterm and take home final. Students may be asked to make oral presentations based on their reviews for purposes of initiating discussion.

3. Readings

Chicano Cinema Readings will be found on Blackboard

Handouts will also be distributed to complement screenings

4. Methods of Evaluation

Final grades will be based on a point system and is broken down as follows:

- 100 - 91: A
- 90 - 81: B
- 80 - 71: C
- 70 - 61: D
- 60 - 51: F

Evaluation will be based on the following criteria: 1) a final – 40 points; 2) a midterm – 30 points; 3) one film critique – 15 points; and 4) regular attendance – 15 points. Please be informed that unexcused absences will mean losing credit (three points deducted for each absence). In addition, excessive tardiness may result in student being dropped from the class.

Recommendations for Technology Use

UTEP supports the use of technology in the learning process. However, I expect students to use laptops, for example, conscientiously. That is, for related classroom note taking.
Show respect, and do not use laptops for playing games, phones for texting, or doing homework for another class. If these activities are so important, its best you drop the class, or I will. Again, it’s a simple matter of respect. Be here because you want to be, because you want to learn and not because you are controlled by technology. UTEP has decided to follow the lead of other campuses in dealing with the misuse of technology.

Course Outline

August 28

1. Overview of course, requirements, etc.

Part 1: Stereotypes

September 4

2. Early Film Stereotypes
   Screen: Martyrs of the Alamo (1915, d. Christy Cabanne)

September 11

3. Hollywood and Revolution
   Screen: Viva Villa (1934, d. Jack Conway)
   Reading: Charles Ramirez Berg, Stereotyping in Films in General and the Hispanic in Particular (1998)

September 18

4. Continuing Stereotypes
   Screen: Latinos Beyond Reel (2014)
   Reading: finish the Berg article
Part 2: Chicano Cinema

September 25

5. Chicano cinema emerged in the late 1960s. A critique of Hollywood stereotyping influenced young Chicano filmmakers to tell a different story – a more authentic story – focusing on Mexican American characters who were not stereotyped in typical Hollywood fashion. This lecture will examine the emergence of this genre.

Reading: Johansen, Jason. “Notes on Chicano Cinema, (1979)”
Treviño, Jesus. “Form and Technique in Chicano Cinema, (1985)”

October 2

6. Oppositional Cinema. Chicano filmmakers looked to other styles of filmmaking that would serve as models for what Chicano cinema would become. Latin American film provided one source. Closer to home, another film, made during the Cold War and based on a labor strike outside Silver City, New Mexico, became an important source for the critical and message-driven films that would become Chicano film.

Screen: Salt of the Earth (1954, d. Herbert Bieberman)
Read: Lorence, James: “What Kind of Film was This?”

October 9

7. Midterm

October 16

8. First steps in Chicano film. The earliest films were independent. That is, without financial support from Hollywood studios. Many filmmakers preferred not to have such financial support because of the political tradeoffs. As a result, funds were acquired in different ways. Many were also first broadcast on PBS stations.
Screen: Please Don’t Bury Me Alive (1976, d. Efrain Gutierrez)

October 23

9. Documentary film: A non-fiction film form that remains popular among Chicano filmmakers. Here, we’ll screen one of the more popular.


October 30

10. Chicano cinema in Hollywood. When Hollywood finally took a chance with this film, Zoot Suit became the first studio-produced Chicano film. This is a unique film in that it tells a story based on historical events but in a manner rarely achieved. Though considered a musical, it is not (in the Broadway sense of the word), music is a key element in telling the story.

Screen: Zoot Suit (1981, d. Luis Valdez)

Part 3: Hispanic Hollywood

November 6

11. Hispanic Hollywood is concerned with the idea this new generation of filmmakers are still producing Chicano film but with Hollywood support. While still focusing on opposing stereotypes, many question if these films have lost the ideological focus that Johansen discusses in his article from part 2. The examples below will hopefully lead you to question whether these newer films have lost their edge and have become safe entertainment or has this stage led us to better storytelling?

Screen: Real Women Have Curves (2002, d. Patricia Cardoso)
Reading: Rodriguez y Gibson, Eliza, “Crossing Over: Assimilation, Utopia, and Bildungsroman on Stage and Screen in Real Women Have Curves” (2009)
November 13

12. Chicano Realism: the context of Chicano Studies has been captured through resistance to inequality and forged in a struggle for social justice. This week’s film captures one of the initial events that led to the rise of the Chicano Movement and Chicano Studies.

Reading: to be determined

November 20

13. From Literature to Film. An important tradition in filmmaking is taking a novel or short story and transforming the story and characters into a visual experience. We saw this in Zoot Suit and Real Women Have Curves. This next example reflects one of the most important Chicano novels of the late 29th century.

Screen: Bless Me Ultima (2013, d. Carl Foreman)
Reading: to be handed out

November 27

14. Another type of film style is the biography. One of the first attempts at a feature story is this last example which looks at the life of Cesar Chavez which examines, along with Dolores Huerta, the struggles in organizing a farm workers union in Central California. One should compare the recent documentary film on Dolores Huerta with our last example to get an idea how fiction and non-fiction storytelling work.

Screen: Cesar Chavez (2014, d. Diego Luna)
Reading: Take home final distributed

December 4

1. Closing remarks, finals due