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 are 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 also 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

1. 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, immigration, colonias, education and border issues, just to name a few.

2. 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.

3. 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.
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 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 Reader (to be purchased at Paper Chase, 3233 N. Mesa, Suite 202).

Occasional 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 [take home]; 2) four film critiques – 40 points; 3) regular attendance – 20 points. In addition, excessive tardiness may result in student being dropped from the class. **Note:** 3 points will be deducted each week a film critique is late.

**GRADUATE CREDIT FOR THIS COURSE:** In order to obtain graduate credit for this course, you must satisfactorily complete a graduate level project with a topic and parameters approved beforehand by the course instructor.

Academic Dishonesty is prohibited and considered a violation of the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures. This includes but not limited to: cheating, plagiarism and collusion. Violations will be taken seriously and referred to the Dean of Students for
disciplinary action. The result of such action may be suspension or expulsion. Please consult http://hoop.utep.edu for more information.

5. Recommendations for Technology Use

UTEP supports the use of technology for 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, communicating with friends or doing homework for another class. If these activities are so important, it’s probably better that you drop the class, or I will just drop you. The same goes with other wireless devices such as PDA’s, MP3 players, phones, and beepers. 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. Sadly, it has come to this because of people who take things for granted. UTEP had followed the lead of other campuses around the country in having to deal with the misuse of technology in classes.

Course Outline

January 22

1. Course introduction

January 29

2. Early film stereotypes developed during the silent era of filmmaking. Here the class will learn what constitutes a stereotype by examining a key event in Texas history. What are the implications of stereotyping not only for the audience but also for ethnic and racial relations?

Screen: Martyrs of the Alamo (1915, d/w/ Christy Cabanne)

1st critique assigned (due February 5)

February 5

3. Hollywood and Revolution. The role of stereotyping continues in this examination of a historical figure. Specific roles were by now situated for roles and images regarding Mexicans. This film is an interesting example because for Mexican students who know the role of Pancho Villa will “see” an image they are not
familiar with while native born Mexican American students who do not know Villa as a historical figure might not see any contradictions.

Screen: Viva Villa (1934, d. Jack Conway)

February 12

4. Social Problem Films. This genre was an attempt by Hollywood to examine social issues in the U.S. Countless topics were covered by numerous directors and writers. With respect to Mexicans, there was a serious attempt to cover issues affecting them but the outcomes of these films were not. While stereotyping may have declined, expectations of where Mexicans were seen in society did not.

Screen: The Lawless (1950, d. Joseph Losey)
Reading: Charles Ramirez Berg, “Bordertown, the Assimilation Narrative, and the Chicano Social Problem Film” (1992)

February 19

5. Counter-Cinema: Redefining Images. By the 1950s, the Cold War was well established and the anti-communist hysteria was also affecting the country. The Mexican-origin community was also affected by the times. Independent film played a key role in capturing this reality by telling the story of a strike that occurred outside Silver City, NM. It is an attempt to redefine the image of Mexicans on screen that rejects stereotyping or passive portrayals of the community.

Screen: Salt of the Earth (1954, d. Herbert Biberman)
Reading: James J. Lorence “What Kind of Film Was This?” (1999)
2nd critique assigned (due February 26)

February 26

6. The Emergence of Chicano Cinema. A lecture on the response to Hollywood portrayals of the Mexican community. How did this critique develop? How were Chicanos influenced to take it upon themselves to develop their own cinema; one that would be a counter-cinema to what Hollywood had been offering.

Reading: Jason Johansen. “Notes on Chicano Cinema” (1979)
Jesus Treviño, “Form and Technique in Chicano Cinema” (1985)
March 5

7. Chicano Cinema Takes its First Steps. Most early Chicano filmmakers did not receive support from Hollywood studios and thus found their own way of telling their stories with little money. The results may not have been very polished and the stories flawed but they demonstrate what one can accomplish.

Screen: Yo Soy Chicano (1972, d. Jesus Treviño)

March 12  Spring Break

March 19

Reading: Gregg Barrios. A Cinema of Failure (1985)
3rd critique assigned  (due March 26)

March 26

9. Pachucos and Other Stories. The decade of the 1940s saw the rise of the Pachuco and with this came a style of dress, a way of speaking, an embrace of diverse musical styles, and a cold experience with law enforcement and racial profiling. This lecture will give background for next week’s film.


April 2

10. Chicano Cinema in Hollywood. 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 for telling the story.

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

April 9

11. Hispanic Hollywood. Chicano film but with a twist. The following films represent the second generation of Chicano films. The question for you is: do these films
maintain the oppositional format of the earlier Chicano films? These films with Hollywood support are more polished and even include more positive characters; however, is Johansen’s point on the function of Chicano cinema lost or blurred? Mi Familia is an interesting case.

Screen: Stand and Deliver (1987, d. Ramon Melendez)
4th critique assigned (due April 16)

April 16

12. Hispanic Hollywood continued

Screen: La Bamba (1987, d. Luis Valdez)

April 23

13. Chicana Storytelling. Gender is a factor in our lives. Chicanas have also had their stories to tell and this example addresses gender issues within a traditional home and choices that conflict with family structure. The question for some critics has been the role of tradition and the role of assimilation. We will examine both.

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

April 30

14. 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.


Final handed out (due December 11)