

From Birth of a Nation to Denzel Washington's Oscars: Hollywood and race

Start date 2 December 2022 **End date** 4 December 2022

Venue Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge
CB23 8AQ

Tutor Colin Shindler **Course code** 2223NRX014

Director of ISP and LL Sarah Ormrod

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Tutor biography

Colin Shindler has maintained an active interest in 20th century American and British social and cultural history whilst pursuing a wide-ranging career as a writer and producer in television, radio and motion pictures, and as an author of books and journalism for 40 years. He also teaches a variety of adult education courses at Madingley and Higham Hall in Cumbria on film and its relation to modern British and American social and cultural history. His latest book *Barbed Wire and Cucumber Sandwiches: The Controversial South Africa Cricket Tour of 1970* was short listed for the MCC/Wisden Cricket Book of the Year. He is probably best known for his childhood memoir *Manchester United Ruined My Life* which was short listed for the William Hill Sports Book of the Year Award. He wrote the screenplay for the feature film *Buster* starring Phil Collins & Julie Walters and was the producer of such television dramas as *Lovejoy*, *Wish Me Luck* and *A Little Princess* for which he won a Bafta award and *Young Charlie Chaplin* starring Twiggy which was nominated for a U.S. Prime Time Emmy. He lectured for the Cambridge University History Faculty on film and history between 1998 and 2019. His recent radio plays have been on the German film director Leni Riefenstahl (*Leni Goes to Hollywood*, R4 August 2021), P.G. Wodehouse (*How To Be An Internee*) and Private Eye & The Profumo Affair (*Rumours*). His books include *Hollywood Goes To War: Films & American Society 1939-1952* and *Hollywood in Crisis: Films & American Society 1929-1939*. His non-fiction novel *Garbo & Gilbert in Love* was an imaginative reconstruction of the infamous relationship of the two MGM stars. He is currently writing *Hollywood Nazis*, the television dramatisation of his non-fiction novel set in Hollywood during the making of the controversial Warner Brothers film *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*.

Course programme

Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the Terrace Bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00	Dinner
20:30 – 22:00	Screening: <i>Home of the Brave</i> (1949)
22:00	Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

Saturday

07:30	Breakfast (for residents only)
09:00 – 10:30	<i>Birth of a Nation</i>
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	The Black Characters in <i>Gone with the Wind</i>
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 16:00	Free time
16:00	Tea
16:30 – 18:00	<i>Pinky & the Post War Era</i>
18:00 – 18:30	Free time
18:30	Dinner
20:00 – 21:30	Screening: <i>Imitation of Life</i> (1959)
21:30	Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

Sunday

07:30	Breakfast (for residents only)
09:00 – 10:30	Sidney Poitier
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Hollywood & Race after Poitier
12:45	Lunch

The course will disperse after lunch

Course syllabus

Aims:

The course will allow you to:

1. Look at black participation in Hollywood from a historical perspective
2. Examine the huge influence of Sidney Poitier
3. Evaluate whether the power struggle in Hollywood between white and non-white has permanently changed.

Content:

The changing attitudes of the Hollywood studios towards people of colour. Each session takes a particular period in American history and looks at the key films made about non-white people through which can be seen how Hollywood began its long slow process of progress towards the goal of racial harmony. Even by the standards of 1914, *Birth of a Nation* was a racist film but *Gone with the Wind* which was made a quarter of a century later reflected the desire of its producer David Selznick to avoid all the mistakes of this previous civil war film. Conscious of what was happening to the Jews of Germany in the 1930s, he went out of his way to remove what he saw as the racist material from Margaret Mitchell's novel. GWTW is now, contentiously, regarded as a racist film. *Pinky* was way ahead of its time (1949) in portraying racist attitudes in the South, but the eponymous heroine is a black woman played by a white actress. The small steps of progress continued until the end of the century with each one eventually regarded as a no sort of progress at all. Seeing these films on this course from the perspective of 2022 will enable students to make their own judgements on Hollywood's treatment of race in the 20th century.

Presentation of the course:

There will be two evening screenings of two rarely seen relevant Hollywood films.

There will be five sessions of lecture and discussion illustrated by appropriate film clips.

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

1. Identify specific films in which issues of race at the time are apparent
2. Describe the process of black advancement which was supported by the studios
3. Name specific films which were significant in the advancement of racial equality
4. Identify black actors who demonstrated a political consciousness

Reading and resources list

Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: an interpretive history of blacks in American films
by Donald Bogle. Publisher: Continuum London 2003

White Screens, Black Images: Hollywood from the dark side
by James Snead; edited by Colin MacCabe & Cornel West. Publisher: Routledge New York;
London, 1994.

African American cinema through black lives consciousness
edited by Mark A. Reid. Publisher: Wayne State University Press, Detroit 2019

Post-soul black cinema: discontinuities, innovations, and breakpoints, 1970-1995
by William R. Grant. Publisher: Routledge, New York 2004.

Online resources:

[African Americans in film : issues of race in Hollywood - Birmingham City University \(bcu.ac.uk\)](http://bcu.ac.uk)

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/from-servants-to-outlaws-100-years-of-black-representation-in-hollywood-films-1.5953758>

<https://library.tctc.edu/history/africanamericantvfilm>