

San José State University
English and Comparative Literature

Fall 2019 English 117A: American Film, Literature and Culture
Seeing “the Primitive” in 20th Century American Literature and Film

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Office Location:	Faculty Office Building (FOB), Room 217
Office Hours:	Mondays 12:30-1:30 pm and by appointment
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Class Time:	Fridays 9:30 am -12:15 pm
Class Location:	Boccardo Business Center (BBC) 130
Prerequisites:	Writing Skills Test (WST), completion of Core General Education, and completion of, or co-registration in, 100W.
GE/SJSU Studies Category:	Area S: “Self, Society, and Equality in the U.S.” <i>Note: Courses used to satisfy Areas R, S, and V, must be taken from three separate SJSU departments, or other distinct academic units.</i>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Throughout the 20th century, artists, writers, and scholars were fascinated with people and places that they considered “exotic,” “savage,” and outside the bounds of civilized society. Using similar practices, 20th century writers and filmmakers sought to observe and record so-called “primitive” bodies, behaviors, and ritual acts. For instance, a classical Hollywood film like *King Kong* was made for a different audience than a documentary like *Nanook of the North*, but both films capitalized on images of “real primitives” to captivate American viewers.

In this course, we will investigate the relationship between literary and cinematic representations of people who were considered “primitive” or “native” in 20th century U.S. culture. We will apply similar questions about visual observation and ideology to a wide range of texts, from popular fiction and travel writing to fiction and documentary films. As we watch and read, we will pay close attention to the ways so-called “primitive” peoples are represented and how those representational strategies change (or not) over time.

Over the course of the semester, you will be asked to actively think, read, and write about the ideologies at work in concepts like race, culture, gender, civilization, primitivism, and objectivism. Some of these concepts might now seem safely at a distance from our lives, but others are not. While some of the work of this class will be about reading and understanding the ideas of others, your other task will be to examine your own ideas, beliefs, values, and experiences.

OUR CLASS ATMOSPHERE

Our classroom is a learning environment where everyone's right to explore ideas needs to be respected. There is nothing wrong with disagreement and debate. In fact, saying that you disagree with someone and why you do is crucial for really doing the work of critically thinking.

What *is* wrong is being disrespectful to anyone in our class or actively suppressing a colleague's ability to think, collaborate, and write. We will be practicing how to engage with each other with mutual respect.

Using your cell phone or other technology in our classroom can be, but is not always, extremely disrespectful. Everyone here is an adult and so it would be wrong of me to dictate that you cannot check the time on your cell phone or use it to look up a word or concept that you don't know. However, we live in a culture where texting or staring at your phone while we are trying to learn something can be interpreted as rude. *Please respect me, your colleagues, and the learning environment we all want to create by using technology respectfully in our classroom.*

SCREENINGS

We will watch many films *during our class* this semester. Watching a film in a college classroom may be unlike any other film viewing experience you have had before. Usually, when you go to the movie theater or watch a film at home, your purpose is to be entertained. You eat snacks and get comfortable in your seat. **When you watch a film in a film studies class, on the other hand, your purpose is to subject it to analysis.** That means that you will be watching the film with a pencil in hand, methodically recording the events of the film in what is called a "plot segmentation". You will be writing in the dark (a skill that you learn through practice) and you will need to focus.

GE AREA S COURSE GOALS AND STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After successfully completing the course, students shall be able to:

- GE 1.** describe how identities (i.e. religious, gender, ethnic, racial, class, sexual orientation, disability, and/or age) are shaped by cultural and societal influences within contexts of equality and inequality;
- GE 2.** describe historical, social, political, and economic processes producing diversity, equality, and structured inequalities in the U.S.;
- GE 3.** describe social actions which have led to greater equality and social justice in the U.S. (i.e. religious, gender, ethnic, racial, class, sexual orientation, disability, and/or age).; and
- GE 4.** recognize and appreciate constructive interactions between people from different cultural, racial, and ethnic groups within the U.S.

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

English 117A serves four of the five learning objectives of the Department of English and Comparative Literature, by having students demonstrate the ability to

- E 1.** read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of "close reading" or close analysis in both the study of literature and the study of film;
- E 3.** write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and the nature of the subject;

- E 4.** develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively;
- E 5.** articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts.

TEXTS TO ACQUIRE

<i>Tarzan of the Apes</i> , Edgar Rice Burroughs	ISBN: 0140184643
<i>Black Panther: A Nation Under our Feet #1</i> , Ta-Nehesi Coates	ISBN: 9781302900533
<i>Of Mules and Men</i> , Zora Neale Hurston	ISBN: 9780061350177
<i>A Small Place</i> , Jamaica Kincaid	ISBN: 9780374527075

I have provided these ISBN numbers so that you have the opportunity to locate the edition that I am using (for the purposes of matching our pagination and sharing supplementary materials published within the text). However, **if you find these texts somewhere else for cheaper, feel free to get them!**

All other readings will be available to you as PDFs on Canvas.

GRADE BREAKDOWN & ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Canvas Assignments & Discussions	20%
Film Notes	20%
Two Critical Analyzes	20%
Visual Analysis Project	20%
Final Reflection	20%
Total	100%

Canvas Assignments & Discussions

Each week, you will have the opportunity to engage with the texts you are reading and watching before you come to class. These Canvas assignments are designed to give you credit for doing that work as you move through the course.

Film Notes

Each time you watch in film in class, you will create what is called a “plot segmentation”* of the film. A plot segmentation is a method of taking notes that film scholars use to methodically record the events of the film in the order that they occur along with other observations about visual aspects like costumes, staging, lighting, shot composition, editing, or special effects, or audio aspects, like music, sound effects, volume, and tone.

In other words, every time you notice something about what you are watching and hearing, you should write it down!

**Please note: I have included a sample plot segmentation at the end of this syllabus for your reference.*

Critical Analyzes

You will be asked to write two Critical Analysis papers this semester and to submit them on Canvas. These brief analyzes are opportunities to make connections between the concepts we have discussed and

the texts we have watched and read in class.

You will receive a prompt with more specific instructions and requirements before the first analysis essay is due and we will discuss the expectations more fully in class.

Visual Analysis Project

For this project, you will select a sequence from one of the films that we have watched in class and storyboard an alternate version of that sequence that would create a significantly different effect for viewers. You will need to include a one-page cover sheet with your storyboard describing the original sequence, the choices you made to strategically re-envision that sequence, and why you made those choices. You should cite at least one secondary source in that cover sheet (both in the text and in a works cited entry at the end) that has informed your decisions.

We will discuss this assignment in much more detail in the last half of the semester and you will have class time to workshop your storyboard before you submit it.

Final Reflection

Instead of a traditional final exam, you will have the opportunity to reflect about what you have learned this semester, how you might apply that information in other areas of your academic and work life, and what you would like to learn next.

This reflection will be due to Canvas *during* our scheduled final exam time. *That means that we will not meet in person during our scheduled final exam time.* We will discuss the reflection in more detail closer to the due date.

HOW YOUR WORK WILL BE ASSESSED & EVALUATED

Assessment

You will get different kinds of feedback in this course. You will receive feedback from me and from your colleagues. When you submit an assignment, you will receive a numerical score, a scoring guide, and written feedback. When we talk after class or in my office hours, you will receive verbal feedback from me, about a particular assignment or your general performance in the course if you wish.

Evaluation

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi:

In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs.

The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System"). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A = excellent; B = above average; C = average; D = below average; F = failure.

In written assignments for English 117A, this scale is based on the following criteria:

A [90-92=A-, 93-96=A, 97-100=A+] = Excellent: The "A" essay is articulate and well developed

with fluid transitions and a clear and persuasive use of evidence, which is drawn from the literary text itself, lecture materials (when appropriate), and research materials. An "A" essay contains a fresh insight that teaches the reader something new about the subject matter.

B [80-82=B-, 83-86=B, 87-89=B+] Above average: The "B" essay demonstrates a good understanding of its subject, a clear and persuasive use of evidence, a certain level of ease of expression, and solid organization. However, it usually lacks the level of originality and creativity that characterizes the insight found in an "A" essay.

C [70-72=C-, 73-76=C, 77-79=C+] = Average: The "C" essay makes a good attempt at all the assignment's requirements. It has a reasonable understanding of its subject matter but its ideas are frequently simplistic or over-generalized. The writing style is also more bland and repetitive than the style shown by "A" and "B" essays and it often contains flaws in grammar, punctuation, spelling and/or word choice. It may also use textual evidence out of context.

D [60-62=D-, 63-66=D, 67-69=D+] = Below average: The "D" essay is poorly organized and generally unclear. It has inappropriate or inadequate examples, is noticeably superficial or simplistic, and/or contains some serious mechanical and grammatical problems. A "D" essay may also reveal some misunderstanding of the assignment requirements.

F [59 or below]= Failure: An "F" essay has not addressed the requirements of the assignment and is unacceptable work in terms of both form and content.

ENGAGE ACTIVELY IN OUR LEARNING COMMUNITY

Attendance and active engagement in this class is necessary. I want to know what you think. I want other students to know what you think. If you miss class, please hold yourself responsible for contacting someone in our learning community to get a recap of our discussion and find out what films you might need to view on your own time.

YOUR RESOURCES

Office Hours

Each week, I hold office hours, which means I sit in my office (FOB 217) ready and waiting to talk with you about what you need, what you want to accomplish, and how I can help you do that. You can either drop during my office hours (by or email me to make an appointment.

SJSU Writing Center

The SJSU Writing Center is located in Room 126 in Clark Hall. It is staffed by professional instructors and upper-division or graduate-level writing specialists from each of the seven SJSU colleges. The Writing Specialists have met a rigorous GPA requirement, and they are well trained to assist all students at all levels within all disciplines to become better writers.

Peer Connections

Peer Connections is your campus-wide resource for *mentoring* (time management, note taking, study skills, getting involved, etc.), *tutoring* (undergraduate writing, lower division Math, Science, History, Humanities, etc.), and *supplemental instruction* (review and study sessions for select courses). Peer

Connections also has a study space, desktop computers, and success workshops on a wide variety of topics. For more information on services, hours, locations, or a list of current workshops, please visit the website at <http://peerconnections.sjsu.edu> for more information.

Work Schedule

WEEK	READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS
1: August 23 Introductions	In class: Learn about the course and meet your learning community
2: August 30 American Hollywood depicts “primitives”	To Prepare: Complete Canvas assignments 1 & 2 Read “Introduction” to <i>Gone Primitive</i> (Torgovnick, 1990) and “Introduction” to <i>The Third Eye</i> (Rony, 1996) CANVAS In Class: Screen film <i>King Kong</i> (Cooper & Schoedsack, 1933) Collaborative analysis of both film and reading Monday September 2: Plot Segmentation due to Canvas by 11:59 pm
3: September 6 Seeing “savages”	To Prepare: Begin reading <i>Tarzan the Ape Man</i> (Burroughs, 1914) Short reading on film form, CANVAS In Class: Collaborative analysis of <i>King Kong</i> and readings
4: September 13 Civilization, savagery, and ideal masculinity	To Prepare: Read <i>Tarzan the Ape Man</i> (Burroughs, 1914) and take substantial reading notes In Class: Collaborative analysis of <i>Tarzan</i>
5: September 20 Origins of 20 th century ethnographic documentary looking	To Prepare: Read “Visual Anthropology in a Discipline of Words” (Mead, 1975) and “The Ethnographer’s Tale” (Nichols, 1991) CANVAS In Class: Screen selection of clips from <i>Nanook of the North</i> (Flaherty, 1922), Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson shorts, and <i>The Hunters</i> (Marshall, 1957) Collaborative analysis Monday, September 23: Critical Analysis #1 due to Canvas by 11:59 pm
6: September 27 Reinventing “the primitive” and the superhero	To Prepare: Read <i>Black Panther: A Nation Under our Feet Book 1</i> (Coates, 2016) In Class: Screen <i>Black Panther</i> (Coogler, 2017) Complete Plot Segmentation Collaborative Analysis Monday September 30: Plot Segmentation due to Canvas by 11:59 pm

WEEK	READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS
7: October 4	<p>To Prepare: Complete Canvas exercise on film form</p> <p>In Class: Collaborative Analysis of <i>Black Panther</i></p>
8: October 11 INSTRUCTOR ABSENT	<p>In Class: OPTIONAL SCREENING facilitated by your classmates</p>
9: October 18 Looking for “the primitive” self	<p>To Prepare: Read selection of D.H. Lawrence essays and short story (Canvas)</p> <p>In Class: Discussion and analysis</p>
10: October 25 Recording the customs of the “negro” American South	<p>To Prepare: Read selection from <i>Of Mules and Men</i> (Hurston, 1935)</p> <p>In Class: Collaborative Analysis</p>
11: November 1 Through the eyes of “the native”	<p>To Prepare: Reading on Canvas TBA Work on drafting last Critical Analysis</p> <p>In Class: Screen <i>Navajo Film Themselves</i> (1966) and <i>Navajo Talking Picture</i> (Bowman, 1986)</p> <p>Monday, November 4: Plot Segmentation & Critical Analysis #2 due to Canvas by 11:59 pm</p>
12: November 8 Revising ethnographic looking	<p>To Prepare: Reading TBA Canvas</p> <p>In Class: Screen <i>N!ai, the Story of a !Kung Woman</i> (Marshall, 1980) Complete Plot Segmentation</p> <p>Monday, November 10: Plot Segmentation due to Canvas by 11:59 pm</p>
13: November 15 Against Tourism	<p>To Prepare: Read <i>A Small Place</i> (Kincaid, 1988)</p> <p>In Class: Collaborative Analysis</p>
14: November 22 Exploding the ethnographer’s gaze	<p>To Prepare: Read selection from <i>Woman, Native, Other</i> (Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1989)</p> <p>In Class: Screen <i>Sur Nam Viet Given Name Nam</i> (Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1989)</p>
15: November 29	<p>THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY BREAK- CAMPUS CLOSED</p>
16: December 6	<p>To Prepare: Preparation assignments for Visual Analysis Project CANVAS Bring storyboard to class to workshop</p> <p>In Class: Workshop</p> <p>Sunday, December 8: Visual Analysis Project due to Canvas by 11:59 pm</p>
17: Tuesday,	<p>UNIVERSITY SCHEDULED FINAL EXAM TIME</p>

WEEK	READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS
December 17 7:15-9:30 am	Submit Final Reflection to Canvas by 9:30 am

PLEASE NOTE: Instead of traditional final exam, you will submit an end-of-the semester reflective writing exercise to Canvas by the end of our final exam period.

Sample Plot Segmentation

THE WIZARD OF OZ: PLOT SEGMENTATION

C. Credits

1. Kansas

- a. Dorothy is at home, worried about Miss Gulch's threat to Toto.
- b. Running away, Dorothy meets Professor Marvel, who induces her to return home.
- c. A tornado lifts the house, with Dorothy and Toto, into the sky.

2. Munchkin City

- a. Dorothy meets Glinda, and the Munchkins celebrate the death of the Wicked Witch of the East.
- b. The Wicked Witch of the West threatens Dorothy over the Ruby Slippers.
- c. Glinda sends Dorothy to seek the Wizard's help.

3. The Yellow Brick Road

- a. Dorothy meets the Scarecrow.
- b. Dorothy meets the Tin Man.
- c. Dorothy meets the Cowardly Lion.

4. The Emerald City

- a. The Witch creates a poppy field near the city, but Glinda rescues the travelers.
- b. The group is welcomed by the city's citizens.

- c. As they wait to see the Wizard, the Lion sings of being king.
- d. The terrifying Wizard agrees to help the group if they obtain the Wicked Witch's broomstick.

5. The Witch's castle and nearby woods

- a. In the woods, flying monkeys carry off Dorothy and Toto.
- b. The Witch realizes that she must kill Dorothy to get the ruby slippers.
- c. The Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Lion sneak into the Castle; in the ensuing chase, Dorothy kills the Witch.

6. The Emerald City

- a. Although revealed as a humbug, the Wizard grants the wishes of the Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Lion.
- b. Dorothy fails to leave with the Wizard's hot-air balloon but is transported home by the ruby slippers.

7. Kansas—Dorothy describes Oz to her family and friends

E. End credits