Politically Incorrect

Censorship, Outrage, and Public Dissent in American Cinema and Writing

Room and time: Attemsgasse 25, seminar room (op Floor, SR 34.D2), Wednesday, 3:15-4:15 · **Course number**: ENM.03535UB

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan Brandt · **Office hours**: Thur, 4-6 p.m. (Heinrichstr. 18, 1st floor) · **Email**: stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at

Description: The history of U.S. cinema and literature is also the history of censorship. Some of the most renowned (and nowadays canonized) works were banned or at least controversial at some point in time. What were the political and social reasons for such acts of public ostracism? How did censorship influence the reception of these texts and how did the public react to these forms of restriction? We will investigate some infamous cases of banned books, such as J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), Allen Ginsberg's poem "Howl" (1955), and Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991) as well as representative cases of film censorship, such as Victor Fleming's *Gone with the Wind* (1939). A main focus is on the techniques and aesthetics employed in Hollywood cinema after the imposing of the Hays Code in the mid-1930s? What distinguishes films of the Hays-Code-era from productions made in the pre-code era (e.g., Cedric Gibbons's adventure film *Tarzan and His Mate*)? In addition, we will look at a few films and TV shows which were (or *are*) regarded as socially controversial or 'politically incorrect'; examples include John Cameron Mitchell's *Shortbus* (2006), Seth MacFarlane's *Ted* (2012), and the animated cartoon series *South Park* (CBS, 1997 – today). What are the reasons for the public outrage and (often times) censorship concerning these texts? How does our knowledge that these works were (or *are*) considered controversial change our perception of them?

Teaching and Learning Method: This is an interactive course. Participation in group discussions as well as contributions to the discussion forum on the Moodle course site will be part of the final grade. Each meeting will be held by 'experts' who organize the session by means of questions, games, video clips, and group work. The most relevant facts will be conveyed in a short information block. The experts will upload their questions for the discussion forum 6 days in advance!

Materials: All print texts will be made available on **Moodle**.

Aims: The seminar sheds light on the historical and aesthetic background of censorship and political correctness in various periods of American cinema and literature, from the pre-code era to postmodernism.

Assessment: A.) regular attendance *(no more than 2 absences!)* and active in-class participation, as well as *eight* (!) substantial entries in the discussion forum (1/3); **B.)** presentation as part of an expert session plus 3-page handout and online questions (1/3); **C.)** research proposal (2 pages) and final paper (10 pages) (1/3). You need to pass each section to pass the course.

Deadline for Final Papers (including declaration of honesty)**:** Monday, July 13, 2020. You need to upload a digital version of your paper on Moodle and hand in a printed version. There is no (!) extension of this deadline. Please indicate on a *post-it* attached to the paper if you would like detailed feedback!

Important: This class is part of the *Certificate "American Film and Television Studies"* (Module 1.1 - American Film and Television Studies – Analysis and Theory).

Syllabus

11 March	Introduction – Censorship in U.S. Literature and Cinema
	Additional text (optional):
	Patrick Garry, excerpts from *An American Paradox* (1993).
	Nikolas J. Karolides et al., Introduction to *Censored Books* (2001).
	M.R. Winchell, Foreword to *God, Man & Hollywood: Politically Incorrect Cinema* (2008).
18 March	The Basics of Film Interpretation
	Main text (reading required):
	Amy Villarejo, "The Language of Film" (2013).
	Additional text (optional):
	Michael Ryan and Melissa Lenos, *Introduction to Film Analysis* (2012).
	Keywords: Camera Movement; Color; Framing; Lighting; Mise en scène; Montage; Sound.
25 March	Blasphemy and Indoctrination? The Case of Harry Potter
	Main text (reading required):
	Joanne K. Rowling, excerpts from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997).
	Additional text (optional):
	Nathan Hill, "Harry Potter and Other Evils, or How to Read from the Right" (1999).
	Keywords: Blasphemy; Fantasy; Magic; School Censorship; Sorcery; Young Adult Fiction.
1 April	Pre-Code U.S. Cinema – Nudity in *Tarzan and His Mate*
	Main example (viewing required):
	Tarzan and His Mate (dir. Cedric Gibbons, 1934)
	Additional text (optional):
	Clara Henderson, "When Hearts Beat like Native Drums" (2001).
	Keywords: Altered Ending; Hays Code; MGM; Nudity; Pre-Code; 'Savage' motif; Sexuality.

22 April   Guest Lecture – Hollywood Cinema and the Hays Code
 Philippa Gates (WLU, Waterloo/Kitchener, Canada)
  "Sex, Drugs, and the Code: Censoring but Saving Hollywood"
 Keywords: Drugs; Hays Code; Hollywood; Production Code Administration; Sin.

29 April   Naturalist Fiction – Euthanasia and Disillusionment in *Of Mice and Men*
 Main text (reading required):
  John Steinbeck, excerpts from *Of Mice and Men* (1936).
 Additional text (optional):
  Thomas Scarseth, "A Teachable Good Book" (2001).
 Keywords: American Dream; Euthanasia; Friendship; Great Depression; Realism/Naturalism.

6 May   Independent Study Unit- Research Proposal
 Stay at home and create a 2-page research proposal for a potential final paper.

13 May   Exploitation Cinema – Tod Browning's *Freaks* and the Carnival of the Grotesque
 Main example (viewing required):
  Freaks (dir. Tod Browning, 1932).
 Additional text (optional):
  David Church, "Freakery, Cult Films, and the Problem of Ambivalence" (2011).
 Keywords: Carnival; Circus; Disability; Exploitation Cinema; Freakery; Grotesque; Monstrosity; Taboo.

DUE DATE RESEARCH PROPOSAL →

20 May   Hollywood Cinema and the Question of Race – Ethnic Stereotypes in *Gone with the Wind*
 Main example (viewing required):
  Gone with the Wind (dir. Victor Fleming, 1939).
 Additional text (optional):
  Mark R. Winchell, "The Bourgeois Sentimentality of *Gone with the Wind*" (2008).
 Keywords: Civil War; Ethnicity; Hays Code; Mainstream Cinema; Oscars; Racism; Sentimentalism; Stereotypes.

27 May   Critiques of Postwar Conformism – The Silent Horrors of "The Lottery"
 Main text (reading required):
  Shirley Jackson, "The Lottery" (1948).
 Additional text (optional):
  Jack Stark, "Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery'" (2001).
 Keywords: Conformism; Nazi Ideology; Southern Gothic Fiction; Postwar Era.

3 June   Obscenity, Iconoclasm, Juvenile Rebellion –
      The Catcher and the Rye and the New Lost Generation
 Main text (reading required):
  Jerome D. Salinger, excerpts from *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951)
 Additional text (optional):
  Norbert Blei, "If You Want to Know the Truth…" (2001).
 Keywords: Bildungsroman; 'Howl' Obscenity Trial; Juvenile Delinquency; Non-Conformism; Profanity; Rebellion.

10 June   Pornography, Consumerism, and the Yuppie – *American Psycho* and the Splatter Genre
 Main text (reading required):
  Bret Easton Ellis, excerpts from *American Psycho* (1991).
 Additional text (optional):
  Carla Freccero, "Historical Violence, Censorship, and the Serial Killer: The Case of 'American Psycho'" (1997).
 Keywords: Consumerism; Performance Culture; Pornography; Serial Killers; Violence; Yuppie.

17 June   New Queer Cinema – Sexuality and Emancipation in *Shortbus*
 Main example (viewing required):
  Shortbus (dir. John Cameron Mitchell, 2006).
 Additional text (optional):
  Nick Davis, "The View from the Shortbus, or All Those Fucking Movies" (2008).
 Keywords: Brooklyn; Code Rating; Erotic Comedy; Explicitness; Queer Cinema; Sexuality.

24 June   Politically Incorrect Comedies - The Infantile Humor of *Ted*
 Main example (viewing required):
  Ted (dir. Seth MacFarlane, 2012).
 Additional text (optional):
  Marika Wrzosek, "The R-Rated Comedy *Ted*" (2016).
 Keywords: Foul Language; Lewdness; politically correct; Psychology; R-Rated; *South Park*.

FINAL PAPER DUE DATE: July 13, 2020 →