RTD 489
Blaxploitation Films of the 1970s:
Origins, Evolution, & Demise
Spring 2015
Tuesdays 3:00-6:30pm
COMM. 1046

Professor: Dr. Novotny Lawrence
Office: 1056B Communications
Office hours: M 1:30-4:30, R 1:30-4:30, & by appointment
Office Phone: 453-6992
Email: novotnyl@siu.edu


Additional required readings will be distributed during the semester.

Course Description: This course is an historical and critical examination of the blaxploitation movement of the 1970s. The course includes, but is not limited to, exploring the factors that led to the emergence of the films, the height of their popularity, and the subsequent demise the movement. In exploring these topics we will discuss blaxploitation’s historical significance in addition to its impact on generic conventions, economics, marketing, exhibition, and critical reception.

Course Format: The coursework will consist of lectures, readings, class discussions, and screenings. Note: Students are expected complete ALL reading assignments prior to class.

Requirements and Grading: There will be 2 quizzes based on lectures, class discussions, reading assignments, and screenings. The total point value of the scheduled quizzes is 50 points. Additional quizzes may be administered at my discretion. Note: Some quizzes may be unannounced. I will NOT administer make-up quizzes under any circumstances.

There will be a midterm examination worth 100 points and a cumulative final exam worth 150 points. Note: Make up exams will only be given under extenuating circumstances such as severe illness, death in family, and university recognized religious holidays. Students will be asked to provide documentation to support the
circumstances. A dentist appointment, medical check-up, work, tickets to a concert, plane/train tickets home, etc… are not acceptable reasons to miss an exam. These things are controllable and are thus, inexcusable.

There will be one short writing assignment worth 25 points.

There will be one research paper worth 100 points. The paper topic will be assigned later in the semester.

Finally, students will also be evaluated on in-class participation. It is simply not enough to show up to class; students must bring their voices and be prepared to use them. Students will be required to express and support their commentary using information from the lectures, readings, and screenings as well as the filmic language taught in the course. Participation is worth 25 points.

DO NOT ASK FOR EXTRA CREDIT! In the event that extra credit is given it will be assigned to the entire class at the discretion of the instructor.

The total number of points for the course is 450. Grades will be assigned as follows:

90% or more of total points: “A”
80% - 89%: “B”
70% - 79%: “C”
60% - 69%: “D”
59% or below: “F”

Course Policies: Attendance is mandatory and will be taken each class session. Students are required to arrive on time as latecomers disturb the class. More than 1 unexcused absence will result in a 10% decrease of your final grade for EACH additional absence. Excessive tardiness will also adversely affect your grade. If you arrive to class more than 5 minutes late you will be marked absent for that class session. Arriving to class tardy 2 times will result in a charged absence. Late arrivals may not sign the attendance sheet until the end of class. If you leave class early or return late from breaks your name will be removed from the attendance sheet. Make certain that you sign the attendance sheet. It is too late to receive credit for attendance at any time after a class session. Forging another student’s signature on the attendance sheet will result in penalties ranging from an automatic “F” in the course to expulsion from the University.

Students will remain attentive during lectures, class discussions, and screenings and refrain from talking or other disruptive behavior. I reserve the right to cancel your attendance for any day that you are talking in class or rude to either me or to your classmates. Furthermore, although some people often think of film screenings as social events, you will be working during screenings as in a film class they are important components of the lectures. Therefore, behaviors that demonstrate a lack of engagement in the films being shown such as talking, sleeping, reading the newspaper, working on
assignments for another class, and/or leaving class for extended periods of time during film screenings will result in a charged absence.

**Mobile Phone Policy:** It is extremely important that students are engaged during every phase of the class. With that in mind, turn all mobile devices including phones, tablets, etc . . . , off before entering the classroom. Using such devices during class for surfing the web, texting, tweeting, checking Facebook, Instagram, or other activities is strictly prohibited and will result in the cancellation of the student’s attendance for that class session. **Moreover, if any student violates the mobile device policy then I will administer a pop quiz to the entire class on the subject of my choice.** Any repeat (more than 1 act of non-compliance) violators of the mobile phone policy must immediately leave the class and will not be allowed to return until they have met with me personally. Failure to comply with the mobile phone policy again after that meeting will result in permanent dismissal from the class.

Additionally, all notes must be taken by hand. Laptop computers, word processors, or other devices are not to be used unless a student provides documented proof of extenuating circumstances.

Finally, do not begin to pack your belongings before class has been dismissed as this can also be disruptive to the instructor and to your classmates.

**Academic dishonesty** (cheating) will not be tolerated under any circumstances. The College of Mass Communication and Media Arts prohibit the use of someone else’s work. Do not copy another person’s work/quiz/exam. Any student caught engaging in academic dishonesty is subject to penalties set forth by the College of Mass Communication and Media Arts in accordance with SIU.

**Students with disabilities:** Any student with a disability that prevents the full participation in the course should please contact me as soon as possible to discuss making the necessary accommodations to enable full participation in the course.

**Building Emergency Response Protocols:**

**University’s Emergency Procedure Clause:**

Southern Illinois University Carbondale is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for study and work. Because some health and safety circumstances are beyond our control, we ask that you become familiar with the SIUC Emergency Response Plan and Building Emergency Response Team (BERT) program. Emergency response information is available on posters in buildings on campus, available on BERT’s website at [www.bert.siu.edu](http://www.bert.siu.edu), Department of Public Safety’s website [www.dps.siu.edu](http://www.dps.siu.edu) (disaster drop down) and in the Emergency Response Guideline pamphlet. Know how to respond to each type of emergency.
Instructors will provide guidance and direction to students in the classroom in the event of an emergency affecting your location. **It is important that you follow these instructions and stay with your instructor during an evacuation or sheltering emergency.** The Building Emergency Response Team will provide assistance to your instructor in evacuating the building or sheltering within the facility.

**Students With a Disability:**
Instructors and students in the class will work together as a team to assist students with a disability safely out of the building. Students with a disability will stay with the instructor and communicate with the instructor what is the safest way to assist them.

**Tornado:**
During the spring semester we have a **Storm Drill.**

Pick up your belongings and your instructor will lead you to a safe area of the basement. No one will be allowed to stay upstairs. Stay away from windows. The drill should not last more than 10 minutes. You must stay with your instructor so he/she can take roll. Students need to be quiet in the basement as the BERT members are listening to emergency instructions on handheld radios and cannot hear well in the basement.

**Fire:**
During the fall semester we have a **Fire Drill.**

Pick up your belongings and your instructor will lead you to either the North or South parking lot depending on what part of the building your class is in. You must stay with your instructor so he/she can take roll. As soon as the building is all clear, you will be allowed to return to class.

**These drills are to train instructors and the Building Emergency Response Team to get everyone to a safe place during an emergency.**

**Bomb Threat:**
If someone calls in a bomb threat, class will be suspended and students will be asked to pick up their belongings, evacuate the building and leave the premises. Do not leave anything that is yours behind. We will not allow anyone back into the building until the police and bomb squad give us an all clear. **DO NOT USE YOUR CELL PHONES.** Some bombs are triggered by a cell phone signal.

**Shooter in the Building:**
If it is safe to leave, move to a safe area far from the building away from where the shooter is located. If anyone has any information about the shooter, please contact the police after they have gone someplace safe.

If it is not safe to leave, go into a room, lock the door and turn out the lights. Everyone should spread out and not huddle together as a group. Don't stand in front of the door or in line of fire with the door. Students' chair and desks should be piled in front of the glass and door as a barricade and the teacher's desk, podium and anything movable can
be pushed against the door. This is intended to slow down any attempts to enter the classroom. If it looks like the shooter is persistent and able to enter, make a lot of noise and have the students use everything in their backpacks to throw at the shooter to distract him.

Silence all cell phones after one person in the room calls the police and informs them of their location and how many people are in the room. **Be quiet and wait for the police to arrive.** The police are looking for one or more shooters, and they have no way of knowing if the shooter is in the room people are hiding in. For this reason, when the police enter the room, no one should have anything in his/her hands and each person **MUST** raise his/her hands above his/her head.

**Earthquake:**
In the event of an earthquake, you are advised to take cover quickly under heavy furniture or crouch near an interior wall or corner and cover your head to avoid falling debris. Outside the building are trees and power lines and debris from the building itself that you will need to stay away from. In the building, large open areas like auditoriums are the most dangerous. Do not try to escape on a stairway or elevator. Do not hide under a stairway. We do not recommend that you stand in a doorway because the door could shut from the vibrations and crush your fingers trapping you there.

**Rave Mobile Safety Alert System:**
We recommend that you sign up for the Rave Mobile Safety Alert System. It is a new system that replaces the WENS system to alert you through emergency text messages on your cell phone and emails for emergencies on campus, weather reports and emergency school closures. You have to sign up. If you were signed up for WENS it does not roll over. You have to sign up for Rave Mobile Safety Alert System. Go to hrss.siu.edu (Human Resources Self-Services System), login with your regular SIU login username and password, click on Personal Information, fill out the information or update the information and save it. For more information, visit dps.siu.edu, contact SalukiTech at 453-5155 or salukitech@siu.edu.

**CPR/Defibrillator and First Aid Class:**
If you would like to take a CPR/Defibrillator and/or First Aid class, contact LaVon Donley-Cornett, lavong@siu.edu or call 453-7473.

**Women's Self Defense Classes** are offered to female students faculty and staff by the Department of SIU Public Safety. For more information contact Officer Mary Stark marys@dps.siu.edu.
Course Outline (Tentative and subject to change)

Week 1 Jan. 20
Course Introduction
Lecture: A History of African American Stereotyping in Motion Pictures
Screening: Classified X (Mark Daniels, 1998)

Week 2 Jan. 27
Readings: Toms chaps. 1, 2, & 3
Lecture: Civil Rights, Hidden Histories, and Cinema
Screening: Eyes on the Prize: “Awakenings” (Henry Hampton, 1987)

Week 3 Feb. 3
Readings: Toms chaps. 5 & 6, Equality chapt. 1
Lecture: Precursors to Blaxploitation
Screening: In the Heat of the Night (Norman Jewison, 1967)

Week 4 Feb. 10 Quiz 1
Reading: Toms chapt. 7, Equality chaps. 2, 3, 4
Lecture: The Emergence of Blaxploitation Cinema
Screening: Cotton Comes to Harlem (Ossie Davis, 1970)

Week 5 Feb. 17
Reading: “The Detective Film as Genre” (pdf), Equality chaps. 5 & 6
Lecture: Independent Blaxploitation
Screening: Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song (Melvin Van Peebles, 1971)

Week 6 Feb. 24 PAPER ASSIGNMENT
Reading: Equality chapt. 7
Lecture: Hollywood Takes Notice
Screening: Shaft (Gordon Parks, Sr., 1971)

Week 7 Mar. 3 Exam 1-covers readings, lectures, discussions, & screenings
Reading: none
Lecture: The Aftermath of Shaft: Critical Reception, Sequels, and Reimaginings
Screening: Shaft (Jon Singleton, 2000)

Mar. 10 NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK

Week 8 Mar. 17
Reading: Toms, pgs. 231-239, Equality chapt. 8
Lecture: The Drug Dealer as Anti-Hero
Screening: Superfly (Gordon Parks, Jr., 1972)
Week 9 Mar. 24
Reading: Toms, pgs. 239-251
Lecture: Blaxploitation Gets Horrifying!
Screening: Blacula (William Crain, 1972)

Week 10 Mar. 31
Readings: “Deadlier than Dracula!”: Blacula and the Horror Genre (pdf)
Lecture: Interlude: The Revolution was NOT Televised
Screening: The Spook Who Sat by the Door (Ivan Dixon, 1973)

Week 11 Apr. 7
Readings: “Subverting the System: The Politics and Production of The Spook Who Sat by the Door” (pdf)
Lecture: Revisions in Black: The Pimp as New Gangster Hero
Screening: The Mack (Michael Campus, 1973)

Week 12 Apr. 14 Quiz 2
Reading: “‘Now that You’ve Seen the Rest... Make Way for the Biggest and the Best!’: The Mack and the Gangster Genre” (pdf)
Lecture: Bring on the Heroines!
Screening: Coffy (Jack Hill, 1973)

Week 13 Apr. 21
Reading: Women of Blaxploitation chapt. 1 & 2, Toms, pgs. 251 -256
Lecture: A New Heroine Emerges
Screening: Cleopatra Jones (Jack Starrett, 1973)

Week 14 Apr. 28 PAPER DUE!!!
Reading: Women of Blaxploitation chapt. 3 & 4
Lecture: The Trend Continues
Screening: Friday Foster (Arthur Marks, 1975)

Week 15 May 5
Reading: Women of Blaxploitation chapt. 7 & 8
Lecture: The Demise of Blaxploitation
Screening: TBD

Week 16 Final Examination-cumulative, Thursday May 14th 2:45pm-4:45pm, 1046 COMM.