

BLACKS IN FILM

Learning Outcomes

(What you are expected to learn in this course)

Preamble

People, study this document, **including the slide images**, carefully. I may test you on it.

Folks, in this course, like in all other courses—and as I always (repeat, *always*) explain in class at the beginning of every course I teach—my key purpose in this course is to cultivate in you a habitual “style of thinking,” rather than simply get you to memorize some facts (that you will, in all probability promptly forget once a test/quiz/exam is over). This style of thinking is one that is captured by a term that most, if not all of you, have heard of and it is called *critical thinking*.

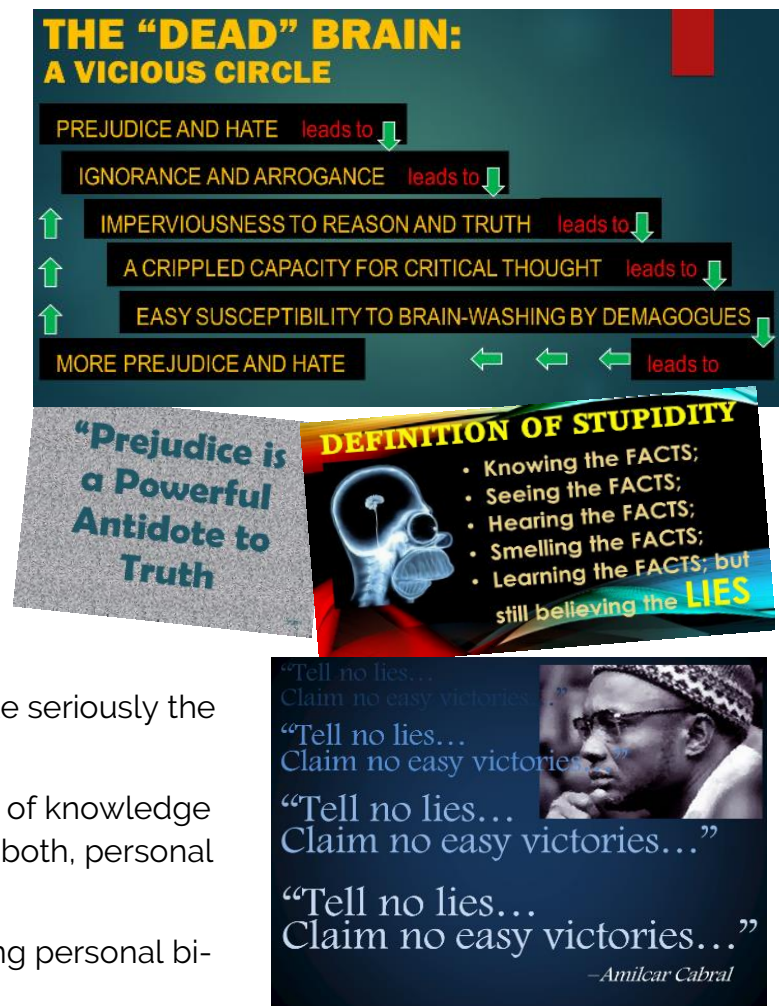
Many teachers claim that they want you to learn critical thinking in their courses. But what does critical thinking really mean?

In my courses I define it as the rigorous *interdisciplinary* intellectual practice of critically, skillfully, and consistently investigating, problematizing, conceptualizing, analyzing, synthesizing, theorizing, evaluating, and applying information against the backdrop of cognitive behavior characterized by, among other things:

- the scrupulous application of moral reasoning to ethical questions;



- professionalism (defined here as a web of interlinked behavioral habits, that include dedication, dependability, diligence, compassion, dignity, competence, civility, impartiality, honesty, and so on);
- a fiery passion for truth;
- a relentless commitment to fairness and justice (in one's own personal life, and in social terms);
- a profound belief in the value of honest research;
- intellectual humility;
- patience and open-mindedness to take seriously the views of peers;
- a deep commitment to the acquisition of knowledge and information on a variety of issues, both, personal as well as public;
- uncompromising honesty in confronting personal biases, prejudices, stereotypes, etc.;
- possession of limitless curiosity regarding all kinds of intellectual subject matter; and
- a refusal to make judgments that are not based on reasoned reflection.¹



¹ What is really sad is that as I look back over the years, I find that critical thinking has become really, really important today, more so than ever before—suggesting to me that the world is going backward, not forward. Why? Because of the invention of social media, which has explosively generated the phenomenon of "fake news" where it isn't only some innocent byproduct of uninformed social media users gossiping but has grown to become a potent weapon for politicians, and their allies, to employ in their effort to win elections, promote deleterious (from the perspective of the citizenry) socio-economic policies and agendas, and so on. Moreover, this gross misuse of literacy is a problem not just restricted to United States. It is a disease that has spread across the world, with, in some cases, horrendous human rights violations of the powerless (specifically, racial/ethnic, etc. minorities) because of the globalization of "identity politics" that ruling elites have discovered is a godsend in allowing them to maintain their hegemony to the detriment of *democracy*—defined here in the dyadic sense of both *procedural* democracy and *authentic* (or as it is sometimes described as "substantive") democracy. (See the *Online Course Glossary* for more on this true definition of democracy.)

PART ONE: Learning Outcomes

Having explained my general approach to teaching, what follows, however, is a more precise delineation of learning outcomes that I will work toward in this particular course, from the these perspectives:

- (a) Course Content—I;
- (b) Course Content—II;
- (b) Generic Disciplinary Competencies;
- (c) Generic Intellectual Skills/Commitments; and
- (d) Intended but *Unmeasurable* Learning Outcomes.



Course Content—I

Folks, within the limitations of a one semester 200-level course, course participants **who have successfully met all course requirements (including regular class attendance)** will be able to, by the end of this course:

- explain how the ubiquity of a vehicle for mass entertainment does not preclude it as an object of scholarly scrutiny and research;
- describe the sociological impact of cinema on society (beyond its entertainment value) with a specific focus on the manufacturing of the "Other.";
- describe the basic *social realist* themes undergirding the cinematic portrayal of blacks (to be understood as a generic term for the purpose of this course) in cinema;
- provide brief biographies of a select number of black film directors making films today; and
- describe key concepts in the study of cinema and filmmaking.

Course Content—II

Folks, this course is also part of the General Education curriculum, therefore, within the limitations of a one semester 200-level

Open-Mindedness and Critical Thinking

The five characteristics of *intellectual humility* as a gateway to open-mindedness (one of the keys to critical thinking):

- Having respect for other viewpoints
- Not being intellectually overconfident
- Separating one's ego from one's intellect
- Willingness to revise one's own viewpoint
- Willingness to try new experiences (including an openness to new information)

If your mind is so closed, why is your mouth always so open?

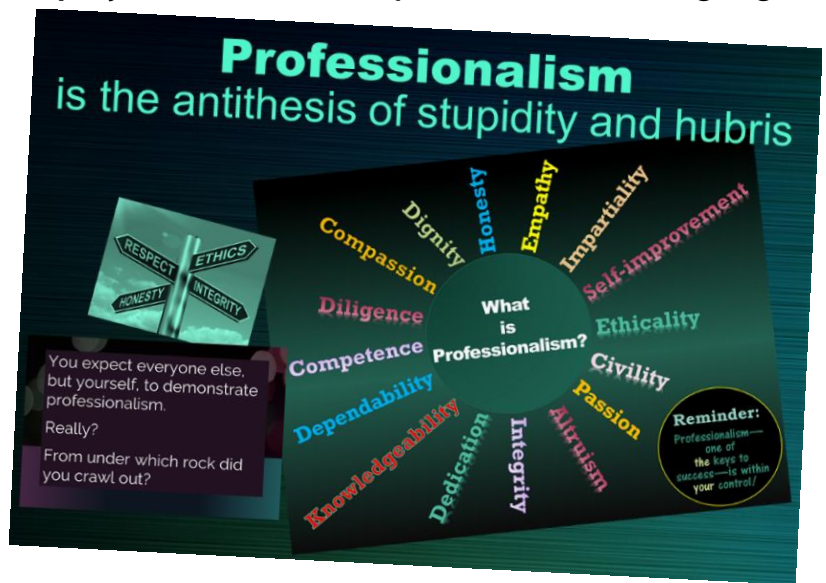
DON'T BE AFRAID TO BE OPEN-MINDED. YOUR BRAIN ISN'T GOING TO FALL OUT.

THE SAME OLD THINKING. THE SAME OLD RESULTS.

Test your open-mindedness by taking the intellectual humility test, here: <http://www.shanesnow.com/articles/intellectual-humility/>

course, course participants **who have successfully met all course requirements** (including regular class attendance) will be able to, by the end of this course:

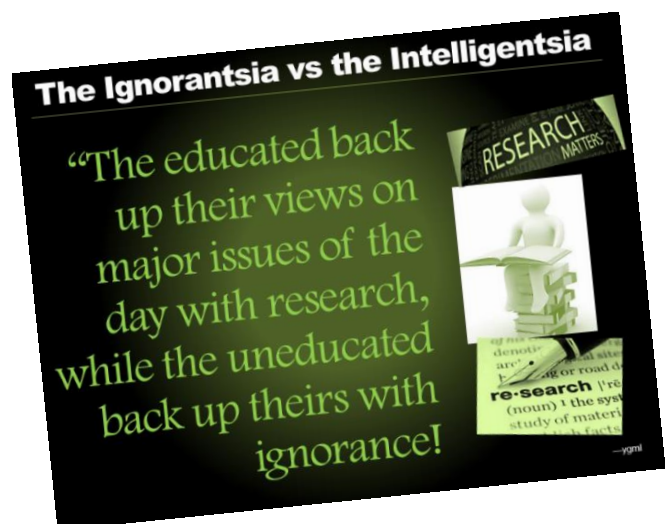
- explain how democracy is a dynamic and evolving concept (meaning a constant work in progress), and that in its present definition at the beginning of the twenty first century the recognition of the plural character of U.S. society, in principle (if not in practice) is no longer in dispute.
- describe the essential elements of the academic procedures/processes of a research university.



Generic Disciplinary Competencies

Folks, within the limitations of a one semester 200-level course, course participants **who have successfully met all course requirements (including regular class attendance)** will be able to describe, by the end of this course these theoretical and normative concepts of relevance to African American Studies, and the General Education curriculum:

- democracy;
- race/racism;
- double consciousness;
- class/classism;
- patriarchy and sexism;
- the comparative method;
- *authentic* democracy versus *procedural* democracy;
- the constitutional separation of powers and checks and balances;
- civic engagement; and
- civil society.



Generic Intellectual Skills/Commitments

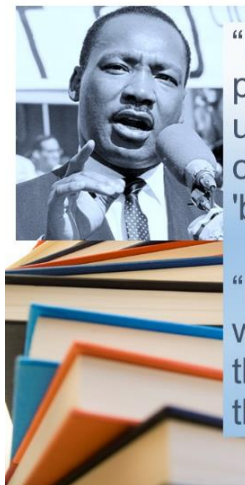
Guys, within the limitations of a one semester 200-level course, course participants **who have successfully met all course requirements (including regular class attendance)** will have *enhanced*, by the end of this course, their

- writing skills in accordance with accepted professional scholarly standards;
- commitment to academic integrity, intellectual honesty, and academic freedom;
- reading skills (based on the awareness that true reading requires thoughtful engagement with the text);
- verbal articulation skills in an academic setting;
- research skills (information literacy);
- visual literacy skills;
- ability to think critically².

Intended but Unmeasurable Learning Outcomes

People, within the limitations of a one semester 200-level course, course participants **who have successfully met all course requirements (including regular class attendance)** will

- have acquired (or enhanced) a commitment to a lifelong pursuit of the life of the mind based on *intellectual humility*.
- have developed a perspective on democracy that goes beyond simply the procedural: an uncompromising insistence on the substantive, at the heart of which lies human rights, civil rights, and social justice for all (regardless of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and so on).



"If we are not careful, our colleges will produce a group of close-minded, unscientific, illogical propagandists, consumed with immoral acts. Be careful, 'brethren!' Be careful, teachers!..."

"Education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction...."

Martin Luther King, Jr.—"The Purpose of Education" from Morehouse College student newspaper, *The Maroon* (April, 1947)

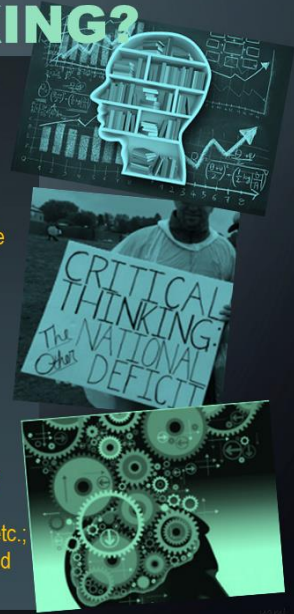
² Go back and read the definition of critical thinking at the beginning of this document.

- have acquired (or enhanced) a strong commitment to apply moral reasoning to ethical dilemmas they will confront.
- have acquired a behavioral commitment to not simply tolerance but acceptance of human cultural diversity—irrespective of skin color or any other similar marker—as not only a necessary expression of adaptations of the human species to their diverse geographic environments, across the millennia, but as the basis (by means of voluntary and involuntary cultural “border-crossings” across time and space) of all civilizational progress.

WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING?

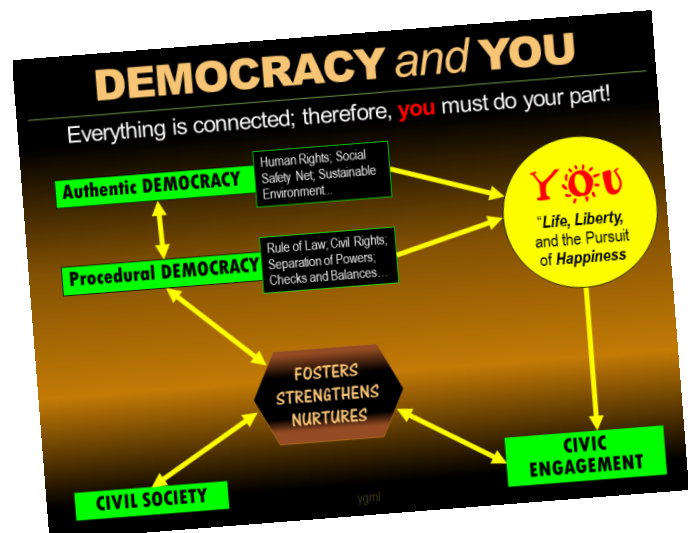
It is the rigorous interdisciplinary intellectual practice of critically, skillfully, and consistently investigating, problematizing, conceptualizing, analyzing, synthesizing, theorizing, evaluating, and applying information against the backdrop of cognitive behavior characterized by, among other things:

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- professionalism (defined here as a web of interlinked behavioral habits, that include dedication, dependability, diligence, compassion, dignity, competence, civility, impartiality, honesty, and so on);
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- possess a vision of human material development (and behave accordingly) that is honestly mindful of the demands of planetary environmental sustainability.
- come to view education broadly as a life-long process that encompasses much more than training for specific career goals: ranging from the pursuit of the life of the mind to ethical, informed, and engaged citizenship at all levels—locally, nationally, and globally—in the service of improving the human condition.

PART TWO: Assessment



This is not a course in the natural sciences, technology, mathematics, and the like. Therefore, cognizant of the fact that this course is within that body of knowledge that is both *non-positivistic* and *discursive*—hence, often precluding the one-to-one pairing of an assessment tool with a learning outcome—the assessment of learning outcomes in this course will be accomplished by a *dynamic* combination of several, or all, of these tools:

- specific in-class verbal questioning;

- instantaneous in-class (non-evaluative) written responses;
- ad hoc analysis of general class discussions;
- written out-of-class assignment;
- audio-visual assignments;
- quizzes;
- tests;
- systematic perusal of student notebooks; and a final exam.

What is Interpersonal Democracy?

It refers to interpersonal relations among individuals in a society that are governed by the principle of equality of opportunity for respect, acceptance, and non-discrimination—regardless of age, class, color, ethnicity, gender, and other similar social structural markers.

Yes, I am old school. I have good manners. I show respect and I always help those who need me — regardless of their skin color, their gender, their age, their disability, or anything else that has no bearing on their humanity. No. It is not because I am old fashioned. It's because I was raised properly! —Aparna

1. Manners.
2. Morals.
3. Respect.
4. Character.
5. Common Sense.
6. Trust.
7. Patience.
8. Class.
9. Integrity.
10. Love. —Aparna

"I offer you peace.
I offer you love.
I offer you friendship.
I see your beauty.
I hear your need.
I feel your feelings.
My wisdom flows from the Highest Source.
I salute that Source in you.
Let us work together. For unity and peace." —Mahatma Gandhi

What is Civil Society?

It is that nebulous public sphere—outside of the arenas of the state, the family, and the corporate marketplace—constituting the lifeblood of a true democracy, where the citizenry *voluntarily* come together for a variety of purposes and in a variety of forms, such as:

- Not-for-profit organizations
- Non-governmental socio-economic/ political organizations
- Women's organizations
- Professional associations
- Community groups/organizations
- Block clubs
- Cultural clubs/organizations
- Social/ political movements
- Not-for-profit businesses
- Non-governmental sports organizations
- Think-tanks and private research institutes
- Not-for-profit media (cinema, radio, TV, the press, etc.)
- Not-for-profit private educational institutions
- Labor unions
- Protest movements
- Philanthropic organizations
- Business associations
- Student organizations
- Religious institutions.... and so on.

Meet civil society

What is Civic Engagement?

It is engagement in altruistic activities outside of the arenas of the state, the family, and the corporate marketplace that are aimed at advancing the common good; thereby enhancing the quality of life for all. Examples of civic engagement include:

- **Political participation** (e.g. voting and standing for public office)
- **Community advocacy** (e.g. demanding better schools)
- **Social activism** (e.g. protesting for social justice)
- **Volunteerism and community service** (e.g. helping to run food banks)
- **Public scholarship** (researching and writing to promote causes and activities for the common good)
- **Philanthropy** (e.g. donating for disaster relief).... and so on.

BE THE CHANGE

join unite engage participate

Today We March... Tomorrow We Vote