

History 302
Historical Topics
**Creoles, Vampires, and Quadroon Balls:
Louisiana at the Movies**

Instructor:	Joseph C. Dorsey, Associate Professor
Class Meets:	T & Th, 3:00-3:50, University Hall, Room 217
Film Lab	Wed, 6:00-8:50, Room 217
Office:	Beering Hall, Room 6172
Office Hours:	T & Th, 4:30-5:30 or by appointment
E-mail:	jdorsey@purdue.edu

Course Description

With particular—but not exclusive--leanings toward the City of New Orleans, this special topics class focuses on the history, culture, and politics of the State of Louisiana through the lens of film—as entertainment, on the one hand, and as a pedagogical experience, on the other. Nearly all of the movies shown were filmed on location.

The Louisiana Purchase of was a sale of French colonial territory that took place during the presidency of Thomas Jefferson. Napoleon sold it for the equivalent of \$11,250,000 plus the cancellation of \$3,750,000 in French debt. All told at that time, the U.S. purchased, for a total of \$15,000,000, 828,000 square miles of property for less than 3 cents an acre. The territory consisted of all or part of fifteen current U.S. states and two Canadian provinces. Thus, in 1803 with the simple stroke of a pen, Jefferson *doubled* the size of the United States, though his primary concern initially was the acquisition of New Orleans alone, due to its strategic location as a port city with commercial ties to Mexico, Florida, and the Caribbean.

Why foreground or single out Louisiana? The explanation is rather simple, though the historical process that resulted in the state's unusual fame is not. The background of Louisiana is different from any other state in the United States, and New Orleans distinguishes itself as an example. Through an assortment of films, set as early as the mid-1700s, up to the current post-Katrina period, we will explore Louisiana's highly differentiated history of race, class, gender, and ultimately ethnic relations. Hence, in the history of the United States, especially the South, the Louisiana experience is unquestionably unique—not better or worse but certainly different.

Creole New Orleans is underscored because a colonial culture developed there that was very French and very African at the same time. Added to the mix were the ways that it was influenced by the arrival of later immigrants—Irishmen, Germans, and Poles, for example—together with the processes that led eventually to the political dominance of the Anglo-American community. The cultural politics of Anglo-American hegemony moved slowly but onward amid considerable Franco-African resistance. In more specific terms, white French-speaking Creoles and French-speaking African-descended Creoles, more often than not, formed a single cultural unit, as the case of Plessy versus Ferguson indicated clearly in 1896. How then, has the U.S. film industry, from the 1930s to the present, portrayed the remarkable richness, diversity, and complexity of this Southern, yet “un-Southern,” U.S. city and state? How, for example, did film directors and screenplay writers overcome,

certain political restrictions that attempted to prevent them from reconstructing the past with more sociopolitical and sociocultural accuracy, especially regarding films that were made between the 1930s and the 1950s?

Required Readings

1. Mary Bernard Deggs, No Cross, No Crown
2. Mary Gehman, The Free People of Color of New Orleans: An Introduction
3. Sybil Klein, Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color
4. Ann Rice, Feast of All Saints
5. Ned Sublette, The World that Made New Orleans

Required Films*

"Angel Heart"
"Band of Angels"
"The Courage to Love"
"Eve's Bayou"
"Feast of All Saints"
"Flame of New Orleans"
"The Foxes of Harrow"
"Interview with a Vampire"
"A Lesson before Dying"
"New Orleans"
"New Orleans, Mon Amour"
"Quadroon"
"Saratoga Trunk"
"Skeleton Key"
"Streetcar Named Desire"

*Subject to time constraints, i.e., there may not be enough time to view all of the movies listed above. Students are only responsible for films shown in class and film lab.

Expectations

For lectures and film showings regular attendance is required. Attendance will be taken. You are allowed three unexcused absences. Additional absences will result automatically in the lowering of your final grade. Only absences approved by the university (such as participation in sports events, and other school-authorized activities) are exempt from this policy. Exceptions will be made for emergencies with proper documentation. Six or more absences will result in a failing grade. Make-up quizzes and examinations will not be given, nor late papers accepted, without proof of illness or family death (not the illness, attempted suicide, or death of your half sister's best friend's third cousin). Habitual tardiness without justification will not be tolerated. If you cannot arrive on time, you should drop this class.

Students are expected to treat each other with respect and courtesy. Your voiced observations are extremely important to the value of this class as a collectivity. However, neither insulting language nor

outbursts of temper will be viewed favorably. Each of you will have opportunities to have your say but your views and opinions must be expressed respectfully and courteously—no matter how heated or controversial the topic.

You are responsible for all assigned readings before the class meets. Keep up with them. Though some of you may feel confident in the strength of your memory, good note-taking is an essential part of this class. In addition, in the infelicitous event of an absence, I strongly advise you not to rely on briefings from your class mates. Nor should you approach me to ask what you missed because of an unexcused absence. You alone are responsible for all information disseminated in a given class session, whether you are present or not.

Private conversations during lectures, class discussions, question-and-answer sessions, and film showings are rude and disruptive. Sudden exclamations of surprise, shock, satisfaction, glee, or distaste are permitted in the course of lectures and film showings but please keep them to a minimum. Also, turn off your cell phones.

Purdue's policy against academic dishonesty is strong and long-standing. Cheating on tests, purchasing papers, plagiarism, and other writing practices of dubious integrity will be punished to the fullest extent of this policy.

Grade Distribution

First Reflection Paper	15%	(2-3 pages)
Second Reflection Paper	15%	(2-3 pages)
Third Reflection Paper	30%	(3-to-5-page essay)
First Web Assignment	10%	(1-3 pages, "Creole")
Second Web Assignment	10%	(1-3 pages, "Plaçage")
Third Web Assignment	10%	(1-3 pages, "Notre Dame Archives")
Participation, Homework, etc.	10%	(including attendance)

1. Required site for first web assignment:

<http://www.frenchcreoles.com/CreoleCulture/creoleexperience/Famous%20Creole%20photo%20collage.html>

2. Recommended sites for second web assignment:

a. <http://www.citizendia.org/Pla%c3%a7age>

b. <http://hdl.handle.net/1811/32216>

c. <http://www.frenchcreoles.com/CreoleCulture/quadrooms/placage%20and%20Creole>

3. Required site for third web assignment:

<http://www.archives.nd.edu/cgi-bin/ggindex.pl?k=Louisiana&n=+&p=&c=&d=&x=A&x=D&x=C&x=M&x=O&x=G&x=P&x=U>

Reading Schedule

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Topics</u>	<u>Readings, Film Clips, etc</u>
Aug 21	Louisiana: A Different Southern History	Xeroxed handout
Aug 22	"Interview with a Vampire"	Film Lab
Aug 23	1st Web Assignment Due: "Meaning of Creole"	Film Clips

Aug 28	Discussion of "Interview" and Film Clips	Xeroxed handout
Aug 29	"Band of Angels"	Film Lab
Aug 30	Discussion of "Band," Handout, & Film Clips	Film Clips
Sep 04	Discussion of "Band," "Raintree," & Handout	Begin <u>Feast</u>
Sep 05	"Feast of All Saints," 1 st video (i.e., Pt I)	Film Lab
Sep 06	2nd Web Assignment Due: "Meaning of Plaçage"	<u>Feast</u> , cont.
Sep 11	Discussion of Novel & Film	Finish <u>Feast</u>
Sep 12	"Feast of All Saints," 2 nd video (i.e., Pt. 2)	Film Lab
Sep 13	Discussion of French, Spanish, & African Presence	Sublette, Pt. 3
Sep 18	The Impact of New Orleans on U.S. History	Sublette, Pt. 4
Sep 19	"Quadroon"	Film Lab
Sep 20	1st Reflection Paper Due	Begin Gehman
Sept 25	Filmic Cop Outs? White Quadroons & Octoroons	Continue Gehman
Sept 27	"Saratoga Trunk"	Film Lab
Sept 28	Behind the Scenes in "Saratoga"	Begin Klein
Oct 02	Immigration and Wealthy White Creoles	Finish Gehman
Oct 03	"The Foxes of Harrow"	Film Lab
Oct 04	Filmic Suppression of Afro-Creole Identity in "Foxes"	Begin Deggs
Oct 09	October Break: Class not held	Continue Deggs
Oct 10	"The Courage to Love"	Film Lab
Oct 11	The Book and the Movie	
Oct 16	3rd Web Assignment Due: "Race & Catholicism"	Finish Deggs
Oct 17	"A Lesson before Dying"	
Oct 18	Rural Louisiana in the 1940s: Creole Divides	

Oct 23	Immigration and Working-class White Creoles	
Oct 24	“Streetcar Named Desire”	Film Lab
Oct 25	A Filmic Closeting of Southern Sexuality	
Oct 30	Origins of the Occult in Louisiana	
Nov 31	Eve’s Bayou	Film Lab
Nov 01	Creole Identity Outside New Orleans	Finish Sublette
Nov 06	Contemporary Louisiana and the Occult	
Nov 07	“Angel Heart”	Film Lab
Nov 08	Race Relations in Contemporary New Orleans	
Nov 13	Race Relations and Occult in the Countryside	
Nov 14	“Skeleton Key”	Film Lab
Nov 15	2nd Reflection Paper Due	
Nov 20	Jazz and Blues in New Orleans	
Nov 21	“New Orleans”	Film Lab
Nov 22	Thanksgiving; No Class	
Nov 27	Jazz and Blues in New Orleans, cont.	
Nov 28	“New Orleans, Mon Amour”	Film Lab
Nov 29	Discussion of Hurricane Katrina	
Dec 04	Hurricane Katrina, cont.	
Dec 05	“Faubourg Tremé: Black New Orleans”	Film Lab
Dec 06	Last Class Session: Review for 3 rd Reflection Paper	
Dec 11	Final Examination Week	
Dec 12	3rd Reflection Paper Due	
Dec 13	Final Examination Week	

Important Announcements

1. This syllabus is subject to change, according to class needs and the discretion of the instructor.
2. Several films shown in this class (and available on library reserve) contain scenes and language use that some may find objectionable. Viewer discretion and enrollment discretion are advised, i.e., if you are squeamish, or if your religious beliefs are strongly fundamentalist, consider dropping this class.
3. In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines, and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other amendments. Here are ways to get information about changes in this course: Blackboard Vista web page; my email address: jdorsey@purdue.edu; and the front desk of the Department of History (765) 494-4132.