

"Struggles for Representation: A Critical Look at Black American Cinema"

Teacher Seminar, 14.01.2011

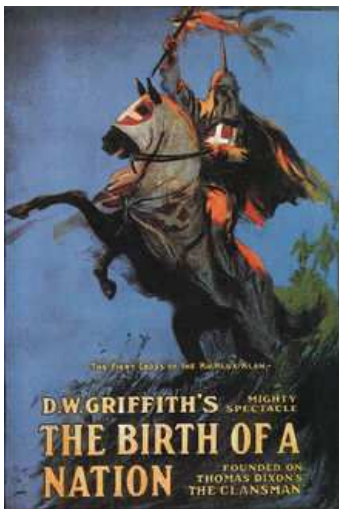
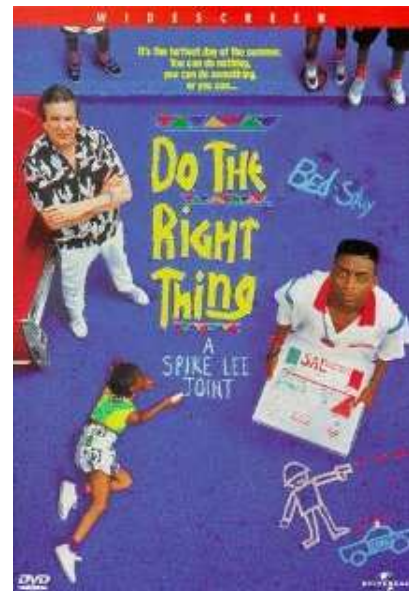
Speaker: PD Dr. Kerstin Schmidt, LMU München

Organizer: Amerika-Haus-Bibliothek, B.A.Z. Amerika-Haus

Registration fee: € 10

In the winter of 1992, nearly a hundred years after motion pictures were invented, the first nationally distributed feature film by an African-American woman was released in the United States. This film, Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*, quickly became a sensation, mostly though by word-of-mouth propaganda. The *New York Times*, for instance, called it a film of "spellbinding visual beauty," and the *Village Voice* noted that viewers "came in massive groups. They came multiple times."

Dash's movie is a milestone in the long, often troubled and highly contested history of Black film in the U.S. This seminar will serve as an introduction to the rich history of African-American film and trace its development throughout the 20th century, focusing on issues of representation and ideology, public space and ghettoization, race/racism, Black feminism, and the African-American experience in American culture.



We will start by looking briefly at D.W. Griffith's 1915 *The Birth of a Nation*, an explicitly racist and, arguably, the "most controversial movie picture of all times." Noted for its innovative camera techniques and narrative achievements, Griffith's landmark film determined the standard representation of Blacks on the American screen. Later movies by African-American directors can be regarded as attempts to "write against" this racist tradition and instead offer new models and images of – and for – Black people on screen. The history of Black film can hence be read as a "struggle for representation," from Gordon Parks's blaxploitation film *Shaft* (1971) through Spike Lee's critical assessment of "the right thing" to Julie Dash's visual and lyrical portrait of the persistence of African cultural traditions abroad and the tension between tradition and assimilation in African-American culture.

Schedule:

9.00 – 10.30 Part I

- Introduction: The Social, Political, and Historical Context
- Discussion Section
- An Overview: Movies "about, by, and for" African-Americans in 20th-Century American Film
- Discussion Section

Coffee Break

11.00 – 13.00 Part II

- Case Studies with film clips:
 - D.W. Griffiths, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)
 - Gordon Parks, *Shaft* (1971)
 - Spike Lee, *Do the Right Thing* (1989)
 - Bruce Beresford, *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989)
 - Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust* (1992)

13.00 Ending