March 10, 2005

21A.226 Ethnic and National Identity
SECOND WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT

This assignment asks you to choose two, three or four films dealing in some way with ethnic / national identity. Write about one or two themes the films share. You should analyze some of the non-verbal images (e.g., cinematography, music) as well as dialogue and any other textual material.

You may choose Hollywood, Independent (Indie), or foreign films. You may choose documentary films, but be warned, these are more difficult to work with. The films should be feature-length (90 minutes or more), but if you want to use a shorter one, see me and we can discuss it.

"Ethnic / national identity" encompasses all the topics we are addressing in this course.

A highly recommended approach is to look at films dealing with identical or similar themes produced at different times. Relations between Indians and whites depicted in *Stagecoach* could be contrasted with *Broken Arrow*, *Little Big Man*, and *Dances With Wolves*.

Note that films you choose do not have to be about actual ethnic and national groups. Science Fiction, Horror movies, Animation, and Fantasy are also possible genres. Series like *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* contain material on ethnic and national identity, as do the *Lord of the Rings* movies, as do lots of animated films about animals. Warning: while these movies are fun to watch, they will be somewhat harder to analyze.

Keep in mind that films are intentionally produced for consumption by people willing to pay money to see them. You might want to speculate about this aspect of films—how films are shaped to fit what the film industry thinks a mass audience wants to see, in order to make the most money. Also keep in mind that NO film is entirely accurate in its depiction, not even a documentary. Do not take these images and representations at face value—you are to view and analyze these movies critically.

Nor should you assume that your understanding of the subject matter is accurate. Support all of your assertions about national and ethnic identity with references (or qualify them by saying things like "it has been my experience…"). That is, while drawing on your own intuitions and past experience about the material being presented is permissible, this is *not* analysis, and should play a minor role in your write-up. Again, let the reader know when you're doing this by saying something like "it is my impression that..."

After choosing your theme or themes, think about the assumptions, moral lessons, contradictions, and omissions in the films' treatment of these themes. Remember that you are an anthropologist, not a judge or policy-maker. Your job is to analyze and interpret, not praise or blame. But of course if a film moralizes about ethnic / national identity, you will probably want to analyze this aspect.

Remember: you are writing about *images*—about representations of ethnic and national identity in movies and films, a component of popular culture (cultural production for mass consumption). You are not writing about the real world.

In your write-up do not re-hash plots, dwell on character development, or focus on the cinematic style. This is not a film studies course. Discuss plot or narrative style, etc., only when it's necessary to make a point about the film's treatment of ethnic / national identity.

You may use sources like film reviews; if you do, you must cite them in a bibliography. If you're uncertain about how to do this, see me, and re-read the section on plagiarism in the beginning of the course syllabus.

You must watch the films you pick—don't rely on your memory of one you've already seen.

The best local video store for Indie and foreign films is Hollywood Express. The Cambridge Public Library (various branches) has a lot of videos and will obtain ones it doesn't have from a wide range of libraries in the greater Boston area *if* you request them with enough lead time. You can access these holdings on the Internet. Video stores and libraries also have videos about films—for example, the history of the Western movie. The MIT Comparative Media Studies Program has a large number of films that students may borrow overnight for course assignments. There are also a LOT of books and articles about film in the Humanities Library that you can consult if you aren't sure what films you want to pick. And of course archives of publications like the *Boston Globe*, *Phoenix*, *NY Times*, etc., contain film reviews.

7+ typewritten pages.

Handed out:	March 10
Films chosen:	March 29 (we will discuss in class)
Due:	April 14 (if you're writing an optional first draft)
Handed back:	April 21
Final draft due:	April 28