

The Southerner Caught on Camera (or PopSouth or Southerners On Screen)

Blurb

Popular depictions of the South (from *Dukes of Hazzard* to *Real Housewives of Atlanta* to *The People of Walmart*) are often riddled with inaccuracies, assumptions and misrepresentations. In 103, we'll produce researched arguments which take on Hollywood's worst backwoods, redneck stereotypes in order to prove what *is* a true image of Southern identity.

Expanded Overview & Objectives

Whether they're born Southerners or Southern transplants, all students have something to gain from examining the immediate culture they're living in. Films, fictional and reality television series, and popular websites will serve as a lens through which to do this examining, and will provide immediate audiences for argumentation, whether students attempt to persuade Hollywood producers or directors of truth or whether they just attempt to uncover the truth for their peers and of their campus. Using various styles of argumentation (Aristotelian, Toulmin, Rogerian), we'll come to analyze texts and become critical thinkers about our media, our culture, and our own writing.

Units of Study

Unit One: Southern Roles & Relationships—The Response Essay

Reading essays such as Bruce Lunceford's "She Just Called You Honey," and Roy J. Blount's "Can't I Be the Most Sophisticated Something Else?" students will write response essays in order to practice the skills of summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting from a text, as well as to explore thematically what their position is to the identity of Southerner and how texts may have the power to complicate or interact with that position.

Unit Two: Defining vs. Stereotyping the South—The Rhetorical Analysis

Pulling from texts such as John Shelton Reed's "The Three Souths" and Carl Menzel's "Shattering the Southern Stereotype," students will come to examine what definitions of the South hold true, and which collapse under the weight of stereotypes and fallacies. The corresponding essay will be a rhetorical analysis of a commercial either aimed at Southern audiences or depicting Southern characters (for example, the character of "Jack Legg" from Northport Auto Supply).

Unit Three: Reel vs. Real Sights of the South—The Rogerian Argument

After a screening of two ten-minute *Documenting Justice* films about the South ("Canaries in the Mine" and "Trained In") and/or Ray McKinnon's short film about Southern identity, *The Accountant*, and using essays such as Blount's "No to Nashville, Yes to O Brother" and/or Reed's "Hollywood Chain Gangs" as models, students will produce Rogerian arguments about the relative value of Southerners taking control of their own depictions of the South. (This essay may or may not be written as a timed, in-class midterm exam)

Unit Four: Their South vs. Our South—The Researched Toulmin Argument*

*(*This unit may be switched with Unit 3.)*

Students will first practice analyzing Toulmin argument through in-class discussions of texts like Doug Nye's "*Dukes Revs Up Southern Stereotypes*" and Steve Persall's "Films Produce Southern Discomfort." They will then conduct ethnographic and textual research of the social, psychological and/or political impact of particular media depictions. They will write researched Toulmin-style arguments aimed towards the directors/producers of a particular film or reality television series of their choice, in order to persuade their audience of the potential harm inherent in particular Southern portrayals

Unit Five: Defining Southern Cool—The Visual Argument & Final Presentation

Taking the argument beyond media depictions (i.e. "off the screen") and into their real lives (and using essays such as Malcolm Gladwell's "The Cool Hunt" and Rick Moody's "Against Cool" as jumping off points) students will work in small groups to create visual arguments about what Southerners value and project (i.e. what is *cool*) on a Southern college campus. They'll produce independent short essays which craft a corresponding argument as well as evaluate how they've developed over the semester as writers and thinkers. The project is in two parts: the group visual and independent self-evaluation and a final "exam" where they present their findings to the class.

Major Assignments

- Response Essay
- Rhetorical Analysis
- Rogerian Argument (may include research)
- Toulmin Argument (will definitely include research)
- Visual Argument & Self-Analysis
- Final Exam/Presentation

Possible Texts:

- Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference*, Custom Seventh Edition
- Barnet & Bedau's *From Critical Thinking to Argument*, Third Edition or Wilhoit's *A Brief Guide to Writing Academic Arguments*
- A range of essays uploaded to BBL, including but not limited to John Shelton Reed's "The Three Souths," Bruce Lunceford's "She Just Called You Honey," Tom Perotta's "The Cosmic Significance of Britney Spears," Roy Blount's "No to Nashville, Yes to O Brother," etc. See above for their places within units.