

Body and Soul (1925) – Discussion assignment.

*This assignment can be used as a class discussion in small groups, as a written homework assignment, or a written discussion board for an online course.

Goal: Further develop students understanding of course learning outcome 1 and initial understanding of outcomes 2 and 3 by helping them identify examples of basic cinematic elements and analyze how these elements are used to represent difference and power in *Body and Soul* (1925).

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES: Students who complete this course will be able to:

- Explain how difference is socially constructed.
- Using historical and contemporary examples, describe how perceived differences, combined with unequal distribution of power across economic, social, and political institutions, result in discrimination.
- Analyze ways in which the interactions of social categories, such as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and age, are related to difference, power, and discrimination in the United States

Prior to the discussion, it is useful to review the following terms with your students. The Yale Film Analysis Website and The Columbia Film Glossary are useful resources:

- Literary Design – script, dialogue, plot vs. story, narrative development, etc.
- Visual Design – aka Mise en scene, sets, prompts, costumes, lighting, blocking
- Cinematography – camera position, camera movement, camera angles, framing
- Editing – transitions between shots, continuity vs. discontinuity
- Sound – music, sound effects, voice, diegetic vs. nondiegetic

Organize students into three groups. Depending on class size there may be two A groups, etc or you can pull one question from each group to form a D group or add questions. Groups of 3-5, with one-two people as moderator, one-two note takers, one-two report out to the class, and, if needed, one-two close readers (bringing film vocab into to the conversation)

Group A will discuss the following. Try your best to incorporate 2-3 specific scenes from the film and analysis of literary design, visual design, cinematography, editing, and sound into your answers:



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1. How does Isabelle's relationship with her mother, Martha Jane, develop throughout the film, particularly in terms of difference and power?
2. How is the relationship between mother and daughter shaped their economic status and relationship to men?
3. After the terrible things that Reverend Jenkins has done to Isabelle, why do you think Martha Jane protects him from the mob searching for him near the very end of the film?
4. Overall, how does the film represent and comment upon gender differences and power?

Group B will discuss the following. Try your best to incorporate elements of literary design, visual design, cinematography, editing, and sound into your answers:

5. How does Reverend Jenkins interactions with other men in the film shape the development of his character, particularly in terms of power?
6. How is Reverend Jenkins able to gain the respect of his parishioners and how does this impact the development of his character?
7. What similarities and differences between Reverend Jenkins and Sylvester are important to the film's narrative and themes.
8. Overall, how does the film represent and comment upon patriarchy and capitalism?

Group C will discuss the following. Try your best to incorporate elements of literary design, visual design, cinematography, editing, and sound into your answers:

9. What role do the film's secondary characters (those other than Isabelle, Martha Jane, Reverend Jenkins, and Sylvester) play in developing film's narrative and themes?
10. What role do the film's various settings, play in developing the film's narrative and themes (identify three different settings used in the film)?
11. Overall, how does the film represent race and ethnicity and what, if any, emphasis is placed on racial and ethnic difference and discrimination?
12. Overall, how does the film represent and comment upon the intersections of gender and class and/or race and class?

As follow up, I suggest having students select one or two clips from the film to watch again to deepen the discussion and for the instructor to ensure their understanding of correct application of film studies vocabulary terms. If the instructor has access to HBO Max streaming service, I also recommend that before or after the discussion of the film, showing a 10-15 minute clip from the section of the 2022 documentary *Oscar Micheaux: The Superhero of Black*



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Filmmaking that focuses on how Micheaux distributed and exhibited his film for black audiences outside of the Hollywood studio system.



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