ABSTRACT
IN PLAIN SIGHT: CHANGING REPRESENTATIONS OF “BIRACIAL” PEOPLE IN FILM
1903-2015

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Rooted in slavery, the United States in both law and custom has a long history of adhering to the one drop rule—the stipulation that any amount of African ancestry constitutes an individual as black. Given this history, decidedly mixed race people have been subjected to a number of degrading stereotypes. In examining the three broad themes of the tragic mulatto, racial passing, and racelessness in cinema, this dissertation asks to what extent film representations of mixed race characters have had the capacity to educate audiences beyond stereotypes. In addition, this project seeks to understand the relationship between aspects of racial stereotype which are destabilized and that which are reified in film. Although a number of film scholars and critics have analyzed mixed race characters in American cinema, there is no treatment spanning the last century that comprehensively analyzes each film’s capacity to diminish racism.