

FILM & TV GENRES: The Western
FILM 3300-0012

[J-Term, Taos, 2017]

Dr. RICK WORLAND

SMU Fort Burgwin Campus, Taos, NM.
Daily, Jan 9-18. 9:00am-Noon; and 1:00-4:00pm.

Hours: No regular office hours for J-term; email or see me after class.
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Required Text: Mary Lea Bandy & Kevin Stoehr, *Ride, Boldly Ride: The Evolution of the American Western*. (UC Press, 2012).

Course Description: The genre film is inextricably linked with the Hollywood style of production. Yet our assumption will be that popular movie genres are not simply entertainment; they also present, challenge, and negotiate particular cultural values, assumptions, and conflicts. The Western is probably the most studied genre since it is closely tied in complex ways to American history itself. Until the mid 1970s, the Western was also the most perennially popular American movie genre; at this point it virtually disappeared. Why? **The objectives** of the class are:

- i) to describe some of the major conventions and concerns of the Western genre and its history;
- ii) introduce some concepts about the function of popular genres generally;
- iii) provide tools of film criticism and analysis applicable to a variety of films and genres.
- iv) understand how and why the Western evolved in relation to particular industry and historical forces over the years. Overall, we will study the movies with reference to American culture.

Instructor Bio: Dr. Rick Worland received his Ph.D. in Motion Picture/Television Critical Studies from UCLA. He is a Professor in the Division of Film & Media Arts at SMU where his teaching includes Film History, Documentary, popular genres including the Western and the horror film, television history, and the films of Alfred Hitchcock. His work has been published in *Cinema Journal*, *The Journal of Film & Video*, and *The Journal of Popular Film & Television* among others. His first book, *The Horror Film: An Introduction* appeared in 2007 from Wiley-Blackwell Publishing. He is completing a new book for Wiley-Blackwell, *Searching For New Frontiers: Hollywood Films in the 1960s*, which includes extensive discussion of the Western genre.

Course Objectives

In relation to the **University Curriculum Pillars (Creativity & Aesthetics) Level I:**

- 1. Students will identify and/or employ methods, techniques, or languages of a particular art form and describe how these inform the creation, performance or analysis of that form.
- 2. Students will demonstrate an understanding of concepts fundamental to creativity through explanation and analysis.

GRADING. There will be **MID-TERM** (80 pts.) and a **FINAL EXAM** (100 pts.) Each exam will consist of objective and essay questions drawn from the lectures, readings, and films screened in class. You will also write a 4-5-page paper (50 pts.) discussing and analyzing a **Western** of your choice. **Papers will be marked down one letter grade for each day late.** **Class attendance and participation:** 30 pts. The assignment for the paper appears on the last page of the syllabus. Before each major exam I will give you a study guide outlining pertinent terms, themes, concepts, etc. that will be covered. Your final grade will be computed as a percentage of the total of 280 pts. You are strongly advised to stay current with the reading and attend class regularly. ***You miss lectures and skip film screenings at your own risk.**

****MAKE-UP EXAMS:** Make-ups for the mid-term and final will be arranged for *medical emergencies only*. A verifiable letter from a doctor will be required for non-penalty make-ups. Under certain circumstances a make-up will be given for non-medical reasons. The results of such an exam will be marked down one letter grade. “Early” exams cannot be given for any reason.

Disability Accommodations: Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS). Students can call 214-768-1470 or visit <http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALEC/DASS> to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible, present a DASS Accommodation Letter, and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement.

Religious Observance: Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9).

Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities: Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity should be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work. (*University Undergraduate Catalogue*)

****ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:** This course is operated in accordance with the SMU HONOR CODE, violations of which may be *punished with a failing grade or expulsion from the university*. Academic dishonesty may be defined as a student’s misrepresentation of his or her academic work or of the circumstances under which the work is done. This includes plagiarism in all papers, projects, take-home exams, or any other assignment in which the student represents work as being his or her own. Academic dishonesty also includes cheating on examinations, unauthorized access to test materials, and aiding another student to cheat or participate in an act of academic dishonesty. Failure to prevent cheating by another may be considered as participation in the dishonest act. See the 2016-2017 *University Undergraduate Catalogue* for further details.

****COMPUTERS and cell phones MAY NOT BE USED for taking notes during class. Phones and computers must be put away during lectures and screenings. No exceptions.**

READING ASSIGNMENTS and SCREENING SCHEDULE. Please note that the screening list is tentative and subject to change based on any number of unforeseeable factors. Lectures are designed to both reinforce and supplement the reading.

Mon. Jan. 9 (AM)-- Introduction to the Course. The Frontier Myth in the 19th Century.
Read: “Intro”, p. 1-8; chapt. 1, p. 9-20.

Buffalo Bill (PBS, 2008) Bob Rapley. documentary
The Great Train Robbery (Edison, 1903) Edwin S. Porter

PM: The Man Who Knows Indians.

The Last of the Mohicans (1992) Michael Mann [excerpts]

Tues. Jan. 10-- The Frontier Myth, cont.
Read: (pdf) Richard Slotkin, “The Significance of the Frontier Myth in American History”, p. 1-21.
Chapt. 4.

Blue Steel (Monogram, 1934) star, John Wayne [excerpts]
Stagecoach (1939) John Ford

PM: The “Adult Western”, 1939-41.

Stagecoach, cont.

My Darling Clementine (1946) John Ford.

Wed. Jan. 11-- The Classical Western model.

Read: chapt. 5, p. 101-04; 116-27.

My Darling Clementine, cont.

Red River (1948) Howard Hawks

PM: Classical Western, cont.

Read: chapt. 7, p. 156-65.

Red River, cont.

Thurs. Jan. 12-- The Post-World War II Western.

Read: chapt. 6, p. 128-46.

High Noon (1952) Fred Zinnemann

PM-- The ‘Psychological’ Western

The Naked Spur (1953) Anthony Mann

Fri. Jan. 13 (AM). *The Naked Spur*, cont.

****PM-- Test #1.**

Mon. Jan. 16 (AM)-- The Late Western, 1960-1976.

Read: chapt. 8, p. 185-198.

Ride The High Country (1962) Sam Peckinpah

PM: The Late Western, cont. **PAPER DUE TODAY.**

Read: chapt. 7, p. 166-175; chapt. 10, p. 238-43.

Django (Italy, 1966) Sergio Corbucci

****Tues. Jan. 17-- Spaghetti Western, cont.**

Read: (pdf) P. Bondanella, “A Fistful of Pasta: Sergio Leone & the Spaghetti Western”

A Fistful of Dollars (1964/67) Sergio Leone [excerpts]

PM: Breaking the Classical Pattern.

Read: (pdf) R. Worland & E. Countryman, “The New Western Historiography & The New Western”

Bad Company (1972) Robert Benton [excerpts]

Geronimo: An American Legend (1993) Walter Hill [excerpts]

Wed. Jan. 18-- Final Exam.

****AM: FINAL EXAM.**

PAPER ASSIGNMENT.

The purpose of the paper is to analyze a Western of your choice (from any period) thematically (in relation to its major ideas or attitudes, probably as typical of the genre) and formally (i.e., in relation to elements of visual/cinematic style: editing, shot composition, lighting, music, performance, etc.) Remember, form is content: HOW something is being said or presented is WHAT is being said.

Choose at least **three scenes** of the film that you regard as the most important, memorable, powerful, etc. that reflect the style and major themes of the film; and in relation to concerns or meanings in the Western genre that we have discussed. However, do not neglect the film as a whole. There should be discussion of how these scenes figure into the entire work.

General Info: DO NOT critique a film we screened in class; but feel free to refer to films we saw if it helps you make a comparative point. The paper is due at the beginning of class. It should be 5-6 pages in length, *double-spaced*, one-inch margins.

Your writing will be evaluated on how well you argue for your **THESIS** or central point, supporting it with specific examples and evidence from the film. The clarity and organization of your argument is important, too, as well as attention to the mechanics of good writing: spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc. **Don't** spend much time summarizing the plot (a paragraph at most should cover it) but be sure to *cite specific examples* from the film to support your argument.

****This is NOT a research paper.** I neither want nor expect you to conduct additional research and report what others have said. I want your opinions and analysis.

SUGGESTED FORMAT: Introduction of film and statement of thesis; analysis of selected scenes and relevant aspects of film style; relation of style to theme in the film as a whole. How does this film relate to others in the genre as defined by our previous readings and screenings? Conclusion/Summary.

You may quote from some of the articles we've read if it helps you make a stylistic or interpretive point. But I'm really more interested in your remarks on the film. If you quote somebody keep it brief and cite the source with appropriate footnote form. e.g. (Slotkin, p. 12). Remember, I don't take kindly to plagiarism.