

AMERICAN FILM HISTORY FILM 3352

[July A 2018]

Dr. RICK WORLAND

Mon-Fri, 1:00-5:00pm (or TBD) in 3351 Greer Garson Theater (or TBD)

Required Text: Jon Lewis, American Film: A History (Norton, 2008)

OFFICE: 204 Umphrey Lee Center

Hours: TBD; and by appointment.

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course will provide an overview of American film history. We begin in the late nineteenth century when the basic motion picture technology was developed and conclude at a time approaching the present. Since this is an introductory course assuming little previous knowledge of the subject, we will survey various issues of cinema aesthetics, industrial and economic history, and film and social history. We will study a number of historically important periods, movements, styles, directors, stars, and individual movies. However, the choices of material for discussion are just that--choices. There is no single, self-evident way to cover such a large and diverse topic. Some important areas will be touched on lightly or not at all (e.g., animation, documentary, etc.). Virtually every film selected for screening and discussion could be substituted with any number of alternatives. Yet the course will provide a solid introduction to a complex and engaging subject.

The objectives of the course are for you to: i) understand the origins and development of the American motion picture industry from its beginnings to the present including developments in film technology, formal style, and its place in evolving socio-historical contexts; ii) gain exposure to, and greater appreciation of American films beyond the recent times; and iii) intellectually, gain an understanding of how film history is written, and its evidence gathered and organized.

Learning Objectives under the University Curriculum 2012 and 2016 revision:

2012 Creativity and Aesthetics Level 1:

1. Students will be able to identify methods, techniques, or languages of a particular art form, creative endeavor or craft(s) and explain how those inform the creation, performance or analysis of creative work.
2. Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of concepts fundamental to the creative impulse through analysis, performance, or creation.

2012 Historical Contexts Level 1:

1. Students will be able to identify the main events, actors, and evidence involved in a defined historical period.
2. Students will be able to summarize in their own prose the major changes that took place over time in a defined historical period.

2016 Creativity and Aesthetics:

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.

Students will demonstrate an understanding of concepts fundamental to creativity through explanation and analysis

2016 Historical Contexts:

1. Students will contextualize, in their own prose, main events, actors, and primary sources in a defined historical period.

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 5-page paper (50 pts.) discussing and analyzing an American film of your choice. The assignment appears on the last page of the syllabus. *Papers will be marked down one letter grade for each day late.* **Class Attendance and Participation** will be 30 pts. 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 260 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.**

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

****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 “Religious Holidays” under [University Policy No. 7.22](#))

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. (See [2018-2019 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 2018-2019 *Undergraduate Catalogue* for further details.

OFFICE HOURS: If you have any problems or questions about the course, please feel free to ask me in class, phone, email, or stop by my office.

READING ASSIGNMENTS AND SCREENING SCHEDULE. Please note that the list of films to be screened is tentative and subject to change due to unforeseeable factors. Lectures both reinforce and supplement the reading.

Mon. July 8-- Introduction. American Silent Cinema, 1894-1927
Read: p. 3-35; 38-41.

Early Edison Co. films: selection of assorted 1-shot films, 1894-1901.

The Gay Shoe Clerk (1903) [3]; **The Great Train Robbery** (1903) [12] directed by Edwin S. Porter.

The Nickelodeon Theater Era, 1906-1914

The Girl and Her Trust (Biograph, 1912) D.W. Griffith [17]

Suspense (Rex, 1913) Lois Weber [10]

Early Hollywood:

A Dog’s Life (First National, 1918) Charlie Chaplin

Tues. July 9-- The Hollywood Studio Era, 1920-1950.

Read: p. 43-59; 70-84. p. 147-56.

The Jazz Singer (WB, 1927); *Scarface* (1932); *Gone With the Wind* (1939) [excerpts]

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (Paramount, 1931) Rouben Mamoulian

Wed. July 10-- The Independent “Race” movies, 1916-1950.

Read: (pdf) D. Bogle, “The Interlude: Black Market Cinema”

(pdf) T. Cripps, “*The Blood of Jesus*”.

The Blood of Jesus (Sack Amusements, 1941) Spencer Williams

Hollywood and World War II.

Bataan (MGM, 1943) Tay Garnet [excerpts]

Thurs. July 11-- 1940s Hollywood, cont.

Read: p. 161-69

Brother Brat (WB, 1944) Frank Tashlin (cartoon)

The Wolf Man (Universal, 1941) [excerpt]

The Spiral Staircase (RKO, 1946) Robert Siodmak

Fri. July 12-- Postwar Hollywood.

Read: p. 193-200; 209-228.

The Searchers (1956) John Ford; *El Cid* (1961) Anthony Mann [excerpts]

Rebel Without a Cause (WB, 1955) Nicholas Ray

Mon. July 15-- The “New Hollywood”, 1967-1980.

Read: p. 272-79 (“Two Key Films”); p. 281-300; 322-31.

A Hard Day’s Night (1964) Richard Lester [excerpts]

The Graduate (1967) Mike Nichols

Bonnie and Clyde (1967) Arthur Penn

Tues. July 16-- Postwar Exploitation Movies

Read: p. 342-49.

Night of the Living Dead (1968) George Romero [excerpt]

Shaft (1971) Gordon Parks [excerpt]

Black Caesar (AIP, 1973) Larry Cohen

Wed. July 17-- Rise of the Blockbuster

Read: p. 301-319 (70s auteurs)

Jaws (1975) Steven Spielberg; *Star Wars* (1977) George Lucas [excerpts]

Gremlins (1984) Joe Dante

Thurs. July 18-- Independent Films, 1980s-90s

Read: p. 351-76; p. 385-99.

She’s Gotta Have It (1986) Spike Lee [excerpts]

Desperately Seeking Susan (1985) Susan Seidelman

*Fri. July 19-- Millennial Hollywood. **PAPER DUE.**

Read: p. 400-414.

Terminator 2: Judgement Day (1991) James Cameron [excerpts]

The Hurt Locker (2009) Kathryn Bigelow [excerpts]

Ex Machina (2014) Alex Garland

****Monday, July 22-- FINAL EXAM.**

PAPER ASSIGNMENT.

****You must submit your papers through Canvas (in either Word .docx or PDF formats *only*) and give me a hard copy in class.**

If you experience any problems uploading your papers to Canvas, don't call me—call the campus IT Help line at once: **214-768-HELP.**

GRADING RUBRIC: Each paper should be **Double-spaced**, with one-inch margins. Your writing will be evaluated on i) How well you state and introduce your **THESIS** or central point, stated with relevant and specific aspects of your analysis; ii) The clarity and organization of your argument with regard to specific examples and evidence cited from the movie; and iii) The technical quality of your writing, paying attention to the ***mechanics*** of good writing: sentence structure, spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc. [See “Additional Stylistic Tips” below.]

The purpose of this assignment is to research the *original* production and *reception* of **ANY American** movie of your choice. The film should **NOT** be one shown in class. However, you might choose another film from a period, movement, director, genre, etc. that we have discussed. As we have done in class, you should consider aspects of the movie's: 1) Formal and cinematic style; 2) Industry context including genre, intended audience, director, budget level, etc. and 3) Larger social and historical context in which it was made. This is a history course. Keep **historical context** in your analysis.

*****Include a bibliography** listing any review, newspaper or magazine article, book, web site, or any other published source you cite. No more than **ONE** (1) Internet site may be used. However, this would **not** apply to on-line databases as sources for research such as Lexis Nexis, which access pre-existing newspaper, magazine, or journal articles. However, do not cite Wikipedia, Imdb, Rotten Tomatoes, etc.--that is, internet sites that give recent reviews or comments on movies of the past. You must cite the articles that came off Lexis, etc., however.

You might begin by giving a description of the film: ***brief*** plot summary; director, actors, or other creative talents who worked on the film.

Other ways of thinking about the questions to address are:

1) **What are some of the movie's most interesting, outstanding, or innovative formal techniques that stood out for you and/or to contemporary reviewers?** What other films or styles we have studied, might it be compared to? Discuss specific scenes and examples from the film.

*For older films (more than 10 years) you should also research this particular period in film history, other films of the genre to which it belongs, or studies of the director or actors involved for additional background.

2) **Audience:** Who was the intended audience for this film? (You may speculate in terms of age, race, sex, income, education, or other demographic factors but this information may either come up in the research or be discussed by

critics or historians.) Or, what kinds of exhibition circumstances was it shown in--commercial theater, drive-in, art house, etc.? Why do you think it appealed to a particular group?

3) **Social/cultural/political history**: Did this film make some kind of social or political impact, or was it a part of a particular genre, cycle or trend in other movies of the time?

****Please be advised again that I take PLAGIARISM very seriously.**

Additional stylistic tips for writing your papers:

It's acceptable occasionally to say "I think", etc. in a formal critique. However, this should be used sparingly.

Film and book titles should be *italicized*. Every time. **Do not** footnote dialog quotes from the movie.

Avoid this phrasing: "In the movie *The Wizard of Oz*..." We know it's a movie.

Avoid tedious "here I go" statements that just waste space: e.g., "I have chosen to analyze for this assignment the film X"; or "I will now do this", "I have just done that", etc. Just get to it.

Avoid awkward uses of common words that have particular meanings in film production and analysis, e.g.,

--"zooms in on" when you really mean "cuts to a close up" or simply "emphasizes". The automatic variable focus lens ("zoom" lens) did not come into general use until the late 1950s, btw.

--"focuses on" when you really mean "emphasizes" or "concentrates our attention on". Every shot of every film "focuses on" something.

--a "dramatic change" when writing about...drama. You really mean "significant" or "sudden" change in the story development. These simple things will improve the style of your analysis.