

English 339, Hollywood's America

Twentieth-Century Social History in American Movies

Spring 2010

Tuesdays, 2:50-4:40 and Wednesdays, 3:10-6 p.m. (lab), CUE 409

Note: You must sign up for the Lab (249680) as well as the lecture (249503).

[Printable .pdf version of this syllabus](#) [Go to Course Blog](#)

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 12-1 p.m. and by appointment. I am on campus all day on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, so please don't hesitate to ask to see me during those times.

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About the Course

Hollywood's America: Twentieth-Century Social History in American Movies surveys some of the significant social issues and important historical moments of the last century as they were portrayed in films of the era by white, African American, and Native American directors. We'll explore the ways in which Hollywood portrayed poverty, racism, immigration, sex, addiction, and violence, and we will also discuss the Great Depression, the rise of gangster culture in the 1920s, the Hollywood Production Code, the star system, film noir, and other features important to an understanding of film during this period. A consistent theme in the pictures we'll see is the idea of the American dream: the ways in which it is defined by people in different decades, the events that cause it to seem possible (or impossible), and the ways in which films present the obstacles that prevent people from achieving it. To facilitate our discussions of the films, class members will be expected to read short pieces (essays or short stories) related to the film for that week, and most weeks there will be student presentations related to the content of the film.

Among the films currently scheduled for viewing are *Within Our Gates*, *Redskin*, *The Public Enemy*, *Golddiggers of 1933*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Mildred Pierce*, *A Place in the Sun*, *Sullivan's Travels*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Boyz n the Hood*, *Goodfellas*, and *Smoke Signals*. Note: Because we'll be looking at these films in chronological order, more or less, you should be aware that the early films will be silent (with music and intertitles), and many of the films will be in black and white.

Goals for the Course

Our purpose in this class is to study and analyze the ways in which Hollywood movies presented contemporary life and its problems in the twentieth century. We'll be analyzing the films as art forms but also as reflections of historical periods and social issues.

Our focus is on films that reflect or represent some social issue in twentieth-century American culture. This is not a "first and greats" history of film class: we won't be watching *The Jazz Singer*, *Citizen Kane*, or other standard milestone films, although we'll be viewing many classic films.

These films reflect the cultural attitudes of their respective eras, and they may use images or words, or may express opinions, offensive to current viewers even when the intent of the film is to protest racism, sexism, or other forms of social injustice. The films are presented in their original form, so if you believe you would be unable to watch such material despite understanding its historical context, you should drop the class now.

Textbooks


Belton, John *American Cinema, American Culture* McGraw Hill 2009 978-0-07-338615-7 (Required)


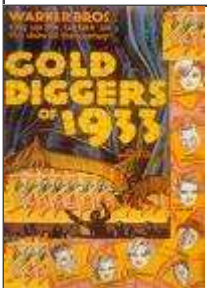



Corrigan, Timothy *A Short Guide to Writing About Film* Longman 2009 0205668941 (Required)

Bordwell, David & Thompson, Kristen *Film Art* McGraw Hill 2010 978-0-07-338616-4
(Recommended)

Schedule of Assignments. This is a tentative guide to the assignments; it may change as the course progresses. Other readings will be available online. Most of the films will be available on reserve in the library, and many are available on Netflix.

The discussion for each week will focus on the topic listed in bold. Scenes from other movies maybe substituted as examples, depending on the availability of the movies.

	Date	Reading	Assignments
	1/12	Week 1 Course Overview	
	1/13	Read Belton, ch. 1 Tom Gunning, " The Cinema of Attractions " (online) View selected early films	
	1/19	Week 2 Early Films: Representations of Race Read Corrigan, ch. 2 View scenes from <i>Broken Blossoms</i> , <i>The Birth of a Nation</i>	
	1/20	Oscar Micheaux, <i>Within Our Gates</i> (1919)	Weblog post 1 (due by 9 p.m. 1/21)
	1/26	Week 3 Silent Melodrama, Assimilation, and the American Dream Read Belton, ch. 6 View <i>Ramona</i> , <i>White Fawn's Devotion</i>	Reports
	1/27	<i>Redskin</i> (1929, dir. Victor Shertzinger, 82 minutes)	Weblog post 2 (due by 9 p.m. 1/28)
	2/2	Week 4 The Gangster Film Cycle Read Corrigan, pp. 39-61; Belton, ch. 2 View scenes from <i>Scarface</i> , <i>Little Caesar</i> , <i>The Roaring Twenties</i>	
	2/3	<i>The Public Enemy</i> (1931, dir. William A. Wellman, 83 minutes)	Weblog post 3 (due by 9 p.m. 2/4)

	2/9	Week 5 Sex and Censorship in Pre-Code Hollywood Read Belton, ch. 3; Corrigan, pp. 61-86 View scenes from <i>Heroes for Sale</i> , <i>Female</i> , <i>Night Nurse</i>	Close analysis response essay for Paper 1 due
	2/10	<i>Baby Face</i> (1933; dir. Alfred E. Greene, 76 minutes)	Weblog post 4 (due by 9 p.m. 2/11/09)
	2/16	Week 6 The Great Depression in the Hollywood Musical Read Belton, ch. 7; Corrigan, ch. 4 (focus on Film History, Genre, and Formalism) View scenes from <i>42nd Street</i> , <i>Footlight Parade</i> , <i>Golddiggers of 1933</i>	Reports
	2/17	<i>Golddiggers of 1933</i> (1933; dir. Mervyn LeRoy, 96 minutes) Optional workshop for Paper 1	Weblog post 5 (due by 9 p.m. 2/18/09)
	2/23	Week 7 Midterm in class	
	2/24	The Great Depression and the Journey Film <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i> (1940; dir. John Ford, 128 minutes)	Paper 1 due
	3/2	Week 8 Screwball Comedy Read Belton, ch. 8 View scenes from <i>My Man Godfrey</i> , <i>Bringing Up Baby</i> , <i>It Happened One Night</i>	
	3/3	<i>Sullivan's Travels</i> (1941, dir. Preston Sturges, 90 minutes)	Weblog post 6 (due by 9 p.m. 3/4)
	3/9	Week 9 Film Noir Read Belton, ch. 10 View selections from <i>Double Indemnity</i> , <i>The Big Sleep</i> , <i>The Maltese Falcon</i> , <i>The Lady from Shanghai</i>	Reports
	3/10	<i>Mildred Pierce</i> (1945, dir. Michael Curtiz; 111 minutes)	Weblog post 7 (due by 9 p.m. 3/11)

	3/15-19	Week 10: Spring Break	
	3/23	Week 11 Suburban Discontent and the American Dream Read Belton, ch. 13 Discuss Paper 2 View scenes from <i>All that Heaven Allows</i>	
	3/24	<i>A Place in the Sun</i> (1951, dir. George Stevens 122 minutes)	Weblog post 8 (due by 9 p.m. 3/25)
	3/30	Week 12 New Hollywood: Breaking the Code Read Belton, ch. 15; Corrigan, ch. 6 Discuss sample essay on <i>Bonnie and Clyde</i>	Reports
	3/31	<i>Bonnie and Clyde</i> (1967, dir. Arthur Penn, 112 minutes)	Weblog post 9 (due by 9 p.m. 4/1)
	4/6	Week 13 Martin Scorsese Read Belton, ch. 16 (especially pp. 398-402) View scenes from <i>Taxi Driver</i> , <i>Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore</i> , <i>The Age of Innocence</i> , <i>Casino</i>	
	4/7	<i>Goodfellas</i> (1990, dir. Martin Scorsese, 146 minutes)	Weblog post 10 (due by 9 p.m. 4/8)
	4/13	Week 14 Modern African American Cinema Read <i>Belton</i> , ch. 17 View scenes from <i>Malcolm X</i> , <i>Rosewood</i> , and other films	
	4/14	<i>Boyz n the Hood</i> (1991, dir. John Singleton, 112 minutes) Optional workshop for Paper 2	
	4/20	Week 15 Native American Experience in Film Read "The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven"	

	4/21	<i>Smoke Signals</i> (1998, dir. Chris Eyre, 89 minutes)	Optional Weblog post 11 (due by 9 p.m 4/22; covers 4/14 and 4/21) Paper 2 due
	4/27	Week 16 Presentation of Final Projects	
	4/28	Presentation of Final Projects	
	5/7	Final Exam 3:10-5:10 p.m.	

Course Policies and Requirements

Attendance and Class Participation. Attendance is expected, as is class participation; both are essential parts of the course. This course meets twice a week, and attendance will be taken in both the lecture and the lab section. You have four free absences; a fifth absence will lower your course grade, and additional absences may cause you to fail the course.

- **Class participation.** Class participation is important. If you have questions about the day's reading, don't hesitate to ask; chances are good that someone else had the same question.
- **Books.** Bringing your textbook with you is an essential part of class participation.
- **Electronics.** Giving your full attention to the material and to your classmates' comments raises the level of learning for everyone. Please keep your cell phone off during class unless you have a family emergency. Although you may use your laptop to take notes if you wish, students with laptops often participate less in class discussions, which results in a lower class participation grade. Common sense and courtesy should tell you that activities such as texting, twittering, Facebooking, and so on during class are distracting to everyone, so if you'd prefer to engage in those activities, please don't come to class.

Students with Disabilities. Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please visit the Disability Resource Center (DRC). All accommodations MUST be approved through the DRC (Washington Building, Room 217). Please stop by or call 509-335-3417 to make an appointment with a disability specialist.

Papers

- **Formal Papers.** Students in this class will write the following papers:
 - A brief (500-750 words, about 2-3 pages) close reading of an element in a film: a theme, a symbol, a motif, a structural element, a relationship, and so forth. This close reading of a film element can be incorporated into Paper 1. If the student has written a close analysis on his or her weblog, the weblog post can be used as the basis of this close reading.
 - A 5-7 page analysis paper.
 - A longer analytical research paper (10-12 pages) or project that will require some research.
- **Format.** Papers must be neatly typed and carefully proofread. Citations should follow MLA style as outlined in the *MLA Handbook*, [Bedford Handbook](#), or other such guides.
- **Electronic Version.** You will need to turn in a computer-readable version (as a Word or .rtf attachment) of your paper by e-mailing it to me in addition to, or instead of, turning in a paper version. Your paper will not be graded and you will not receive any credit for the paper until I receive the electronic version.
- **Late Papers and Extensions.** Late papers are penalized at the rate of one letter grade (10 points) per class day late; a paper that would have received a "B" on Tuesday will receive a "C" if handed in on Thursday.
 - If no paper is turned in within 4 class days (due date plus three more days), no credit will be given and a 0 will be averaged into your course grade for that paper.
 - You have one 48-hour extension in this class. This extension means that your paper will be due on the next class day, which could be more than 48 hours, without penalty. You must request the extension ahead of time, and you should save it for a true emergency, since no other extensions will be granted for illness, funerals, weddings, or any other reason.

Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else's words or ideas. This definition includes not only deliberately handing in someone else's work as your own but failing to cite your sources, *including Web pages and Internet sources*.

- For a first offense, any paper plagiarized in whole or in part will receive an "F" (0 points), and the incident must be reported to the [WSU Office of Student Conduct](#). *You will NOT be allowed to rewrite the plagiarized paper for a better grade.*
- Penalties for a second offense can range from failing the course to suspension from the university.
- [WSU Statement on Academic Integrity](#). As an institution of higher education, Washington State University is committed to principles of truth and academic honesty. All members of the University community share the responsibility for maintaining and supporting these principles. When a student enrolls in Washington State University, the student assumes an obligation to pursue academic endeavors in a manner consistent with the standards of academic integrity adopted by the University. To maintain the academic integrity of the community, the University cannot tolerate acts of academic dishonesty including any forms of cheating, plagiarism, or fabrication. Washington State University reserves the right and the power to discipline or to exclude students who engage in academic dishonesty.

Exams

The midterm and final exams in this course will consist of objective (multiple choice, short answer, matching) and identification questions and an essay. Exams cannot be made up without a doctor's note. If you want to complete a weblog AND a report, you have the option not to take the final exam. The midterm is not optional.

Other Work

- Quizzes. Frequent, unannounced quizzes over the reading will be given in this class. They cannot be made up, even if you are absent because of illness, but the lowest quiz grade will be dropped. Quizzes are usually given in the first 10 minutes of class; if you come in late and the quiz is in progress, you will not be able to take the quiz. An optional quiz will be given as a universal "make-up" quiz at the end of the semester.
- In-class writing and short assignments. Short, typed responses to the reading may be assigned from time to time, as will short pieces of in-class writing.

Reports and Weblogs

Students in this class will either present a brief oral report to the class or keep an online journal (weblog) of their reading this semester. Both options will should involve about the same amount of work, but with the weblog option, you'll be spreading the work out over the entire semester. Those who choose both to present a report and to keep a weblog will not have to take the final exam.

You'll sign up for a report or a weblog in class. See the [Reports](#) and [Weblogs](#) pages for more details.

To make the schedule updatable and available to all, it will be posted at the link above with your names on it. Weblogs will also be linked from our main page, which will contain the names of class webloggers. Because the point of the weblog is to share your thoughts with others in the class, our main class site will contain a link with your name as part of the requirement.

If you have any privacy concerns (under [FERPA](#)) about having people know that you are in this class or do not want your name posted anywhere on our class site, you should choose the Reports option instead; you'll also need to write to me (on paper) requesting that your name be omitted from the Reports page.

Grade Distribution. Note: Because of [FERPA](#) and privacy issues, no grades will be discussed or transmitted by e-mail or instant messaging.

Exams (15 percent each)	30 percent
Paper 1	20 percent
Paper or Project 2	25 percent
Close reading of a film element (response essay)	5 percent
Report or Weblog	15 percent
Quizzes, class participation, group presentations, and in-class writings	15 percent

Last Modified 02/01/2010 10:00:53