

MCOM 2370: Introduction to American Film History

Spring 2015

Tuesday/Thursday, 2:30-3:45 p.m., UC323

Professor Drew Morton

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Office Hours: TBA

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES:

This face-to-face course focuses on the historical development of cinema in America from the 1890s to the contemporary period. Students will study the technology, the industrial structures, the personnel, and the films that have marked the evolution of film from silent shorts, through the rise and fall of the Hollywood studio system, to the period of conglomeration and convergence that currently defines the industry.

Before the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Exhibit an understanding of the technological developments that have driven the evolution of film (mastery will be assessed by the objective midterm and final exams).
2. Exhibit an understanding of the industrial structures that have defined the Hollywood Studio System (mastery will be assessed by the objective midterm and final exams).
3. Exhibit an understanding of the relationship between cinema, ideology, personal, and social responsibility (mastery will be assessed by the film analysis paper).
4. Exhibit an understanding of the terminology and theories that define the study of film as an art form (mastery will be assessed by classroom participation).

REQUIRED TEXTS/MATERIALS:

Lewis, Jon. *American Film: A History* (W.W. Norton and Company, 2007).

Other readings may be distributed via photocopy, PDF, or e-mail.

Students will need to utilize Netflix, Hulu, and/or Amazon to stream video titles on their own.

SCHEDULE:

Jan. 20th: Introductions

Reading: Film Terminology Handout.

Jan. 22nd: Early Cinema and *Singin' in the Rain*

Reading: Cohan, "*Singin' in the Rain: A Study of Interpretation*" and Lewis, Chapter One.

Screenings: Various Thomas Edison shorts (Various), *Sortie des Usines Lumière à Lyon* (*Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, 1895, The Lumière Brothers, 1 minute),

L'Arrivée d'un Train en Gare de La Ciotat (*The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station*, 1895, The Lumière Brothers, 1 minute), *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (*A Trip to the Moon*, 1902, Georges Méliès, 15 minutes), *The Great Train Robbery* (1903, Edwin S. Porter, 12 minutes), *Singin' in the Rain* (1952, Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, 103 minutes).

Jan. 27th: The Nickelodeon Era, D.W. Griffith and Continuity Editing.

Reading: Lewis, Chapter Two.

Screenings: Various D.W. Griffith Biograph Shorts (1909-1913, Varying Lengths).

Jan. 29th: The Beginnings of Hollywood and the Golden Age of Silent Comedy

Screenings: *A Dog's Life* (1918, Charlie Chaplin, 33 minutes) and *Sherlock Jr.* (1924, Buster Keaton, 44 minutes).

Feb. 3rd: The Golden Age of Silent Film

Reading: André Bazin, "The Evolution of Film Language" (PDF).

Screening: *Sunrise* (1927, F.W. Murnau, 95 minutes).

Feb. 5th: Pre-Code Hollywood, Censorship, and Sexuality

Reading: Lewis, Chapter Three.

Screening: *Trouble in Paradise* (1932, Ernst Lubitsch, 83 minutes).

Feb. 10th: Classical Hollywood

Screening: *The Philadelphia Story* (1940, George Cukor, 112 minutes).

Feb. 12th: Classical Hollywood

Reading: Lewis, Chapter Four.

Screening: *Citizen Kane* (1941, Orson Welles, 119 minutes).

Feb. 17th: Dissecting *Citizen Kane*

Feb. 19th: Classical Hollywood

Reading: Robin Wood, "Ideology, Genre, Auteur" (PDF).

Screening: *Casablanca* (1942, Michael Curtiz, 102 minutes).

Feb. 24th: Classical Hollywood: Film Noir, Film Genre, and Femme Fatales

Reading: Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton, "Towards a Definition of Film Noir" (PDF).

Screening: *Double Indemnity* (1944, Billy Wilder, 107 minutes).

Feb. 26th: Classical Hollywood: Film Noir and Film Genre

Reading: Janey Place and Lowell Peterson, "Some Visual Motifs of Film Noir" (PDF).

Screening: *The Big Sleep* (1946, Howard Hawks, 114 minutes).

March 3rd: The Blacklist

Reading: Lewis, Chapter Five.

Screening: *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005, George Clooney, 93 minutes) and *On the Waterfront* (1954, Elia Kazan, 108 minutes).

March 5th: MIDTERM EXAM

March 10th: The End of the Studio Era, the Rise of Television, and the Male Gaze

Reading: Lewis, Chapter Six and Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (PDF).

Screening: *Psycho* (1960, Alfred Hitchcock, 109 minutes) and *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943, Maya Deren, 14 minutes).

March 12th: Space Oddity, Introduction to the Film Analysis Paper

Reading: TBA

Screening: *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968, Stanley Kubrick, 142 minutes).

March 13th-30th: No Class Due to Spring Break, Conference Travel

Note: Paper topics and 3 scholarly sources are due - via e-mail - on March 22nd by 5 p.m.

March 31st: The Hollywood Renaissance

Screening: *The Godfather* (1972, Francis Ford Coppola, 175 minutes).

April 2nd: The Hollywood Renaissance

Reading: Lewis, Chapter 7.

Screening: *The Long Goodbye* (1973, Robert Altman, 112 minutes).

April 7th: The Blockbuster

Reading: Lewis, Chapter 8.

Screening: *Jaws* (1975, Steven Spielberg, 124 minutes) and *Star Wars* (1977, George Lucas, 121 minutes).

April 9th: American Independent Cinema

Reading: James C. McKelly, "The Double Truth, Ruth: *Do the Right Thing* and the Culture of Ambiguity" (PDF).

Screening: *Do the Right Thing* (1989, Spike Lee, 120 minutes).

April 14th: American Independent Cinema

Reading: TBA

Screening: *Pulp Fiction* (1994, Quentin Tarantino, 154 minutes).

April 16th: American Independent Cinema and Queering the Western

Reading: TBA

Screening: *Brokeback Mountain* (2005, Ang Lee, 134 minutes).

April 21st: American Independent Cinema

Reading: David Bordwell, "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice."

Screening: *There Will Be Blood* (2007, Paul Thomas Anderson, 158 minutes).

April 23rd: Paper Workshop (I will be out of town for a conference.)

Bring in a first draft of your paper for peer review!

April 28th: The New Blockbuster

Reading: Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* (PDF).

Screening: *The Dark Knight* (2008, Christopher Nolan, 152 minutes).

PAPER DUE

April 30th: American Independent Cinema and Women Behind the Camera

Reading: Lewis, Chapter 9.

Screening: *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012, Kathryn Bigelow, 157 minutes).

May 5th: The Contemporary State of Cinema

Screening: *Boyhood* (2014, Richard Linklater, 165 minutes).

May 7th: FINAL EXAM

GRADE BREAKDOWN:

Attendance/Participation/Homework/Quizzes: 10%

Objective Midterm: 30%

Film Analysis Paper (5 pages): 30%

Objective Final Exam: 30%

COURSE POLICIES:

Be sure to complete your reading and assignments on the date they are scheduled on the syllabus.

Late assignments are not accepted.

In accordance with the University's academic integrity policy (see below), students who violate the policy will earn an automatic F for the course.

Cell phones are to be set on vibrate and not to be used during class.

Be sure to bring *all* your course materials to class each day we meet.

Finally, please allow a 24-48 hour turn-around time for any e-mails. Due to this policy, be sure not to leave any major concerns/questions about assignments for the last minute!

I reserve the right to alter this syllabus.

TAMUT POLICIES:

Disability Accommodations: Students with disabilities may request reasonable accommodations through the A&M-Texarkana Disability Services Office by calling 903-223-3062.

Academic Integrity: Academic honesty is expected of students enrolled in this course. Cheating on examinations, unauthorized collaboration, falsification of research data, plagiarism, and undocumented use of materials from any source constitute academic dishonesty and may be grounds for a grade of 'F' in the course and/or disciplinary actions. For additional information, see the university catalog.

A&M-Texarkana Email Address: Upon application to Texas A&M University-Texarkana an individual will be assigned an A&M-Texarkana email account. This email account will be used to deliver official university correspondence. Each individual is responsible for information sent and received via the university email account and is expected to check the official A&M-Texarkana email account on a frequent and consistent basis. Faculty and students are required to utilize the university email account when communicating about coursework.

Drop Policy: Beginning with the first class day of the semester, faculty should report to the Registrar's Office via the preliminary class roster and/or email communication, by a date established by the Registrar's Office, any student who is not attending their class or who has not logged into Blackboard for an online class.

Faculty members shall automatically initiate an administrative drop for any student who has not been in attendance (face to face class) or has not reported in (web or web enhanced class) by the due date of the preliminary class roster as established by the Registrar's Office. The Registrar's Office will notify students by certified mail and/or email that the instructor has initiated the drop process and will instruct them to contact the instructor immediately. If the instructor does not rescind the request in writing within seven (7) days of documentable receipt of the notification, the Registrar's Office will drop the student from the class. Faculty who fail to submit an administrative drop by the established deadline, must record the grade earned by the student at the end of the semester. Faculty submitting a grade of F for a student will be required to enter the last date of attendance during the grading cycle.

Subsequent to the census date final roster, all drops during the semester must be student initiated.