

## **MCOM 2370: Introduction to American Film History**

Spring 2016

Monday & Wednesday - 12-1:15 p.m.

Tuesday & Thursday - 10:30-11:45 a.m.

Professor Drew Morton

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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 10-Noon, UC228

### **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:**

#### ***WEEK ONE (January 17-23):***

##### **Day One: Introductions**

Reading: Film Terminology Handout.

##### **Day Two: Early Cinema and *Singin' in the Rain***

Reading: 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).

**WEEK TWO (January 24-30):**

**Day One: The Nickelodeon Era, D.W. Griffith and Continuity Editing.**

Reading: Lewis, Chapter Two.

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

**Day Two: 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).

**WEEK THREE (January 31-February 6):**

**Day One: The Golden Age of Silent Film.**

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

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

**Day Two: Pre-Code Hollywood, Censorship, and Sexuality.**

Reading: Lewis, Chapter Three.

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

**WEEK FOUR (February 7-13):**

**Day One: Classical Hollywood**

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

**REVIEW #1 DUE**

**Day Two: Classical Hollywood**

Reading: Lewis, Chapter Four.

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

**WEEK FIVE (February 14-20):**

**Day One: Dissecting *Citizen Kane*.**

**Day Two: Exam I and Classical Hollywood**

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

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

**WEEK SIX (February 21-27):**

**Day One: Classical Hollywood: Film Noir/Film Genre**

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

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

**Day Two: Classical Hollywood: Film Noir/Film Genre**

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

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

**WEEK SEVEN (February 28-March 5):**

**Day One: The Blacklist**

Reading: Lewis, Chapter Five.

Screening: *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005, George Clooney, 93 minutes).

**Day Two: The Blacklist**

Screening: *On the Waterfront* (1954, Elia Kazan, 108 minutes).

**REVIEW #2 DUE**

**WEEK EIGHT (March 6-12):**

**Day One: 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).

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

**Day Two: The 1960s: Transitioning from the Studio Era to the New Hollywood**

Reading: TBA

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

**SPRING BREAK FROM MARCH 14-18**

**WEEK NINE (March 20-26):**

**Day One: The Hollywood Renaissance**

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

**Day Two: The Hollywood Renaissance: Film Noir/Film Genre**

Reading: Lewis, Chapter 7.

Screening: *Chinatown* (1974, Roman Polanski, 131 minutes).

**WEEK TEN (March 27-April 2):**

**Day One: The Blockbuster and Exam II**

Reading: Lewis, Chapter 8.

Screening: *Jaws* (1975, Steven Spielberg, 124 minutes).

**Day Two: No Classes Due to Conference Travel**

**WEEK ELEVEN (April 3-9):**

**Day One: The Blockbuster**

Screening: *Star Wars* (1977, George Lucas, 121 minutes).

**REVIEW #3 DUE**

**Day Two: American Independent Cinema and Race**

Reading: TBA.

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

**WEEK TWELVE (April 10-16):**

**Day One: American Independent Cinema and Film Noir/Film Genre**

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

Screening: *Mulholland Drive* (2001, David Lynch, 147 minutes).

**Day Two: American Independent Cinema and LGBT Cinema**

Reading: TBA.

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

**WEEK THIRTEEN (April 17-23):**

**Day One: American Independent Cinema and the Death of the American Dream**

Reading: TBA.

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

**Day Two: The New Blockbuster**

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

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

**REVIEW #4 DUE**

**WEEK FOURTEEN (April 24-30):**

**Day One: American Independent Cinema and Women Behind the Camera**

Reading: Lewis, Chapter 9.

Screening: *The Hurt Locker* (2008, Kathryn Bigelow, 131 minutes).

**Day Two: The Contemporary State of Cinema: Feminism and the Action Film**

Reading: TBA.

Screening: *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015, George Miller, 120 minutes.)

**WEEK FIFTEEN (May 1-7):**

**Day One: The Contemporary State of Cinema: Female Pleasure and the Confrontation of the Male Gaze**

Screening: *Magic Mike XXL* (2015, Gregory Jacobs, 115 minutes).

**Day Two: Exam III and Course Evaluations**

**GRADE BREAKDOWN:**

Attendance/Participation/Homework/Quizzes: 10%

Exams: 60% (20% Each)

Four Film Reviews (See Below): #1=5%, #2=5%, #3=10%, #4=10%.

**FILM REVIEW GUIDELINES**

You are required to write FOUR one page, single spaced, normal sized font, film reviews of THE SAME FILM this semester (your choice - but it has to be an American

film NOT WATCHED IN CLASS from the American Film Institute's Top 100 Films Ever Made, 2007 Edition- <http://www.afi.com/100years/movies10.aspx>). The topics for your four reviews are as follows:

- #1: The Good Review ("This movie is good because...") 5% of grade.
- #2: The Negative Review ("This movie is bad because...") 5% of grade.
- #3: The Argumentative Review (You have to find another film review from a major publication to argue against. "Roger Ebert is wrong about this movie because...") 10% of grade.
- #4: The Contextual Review (You must review the film from the standpoint of historical context, genre, or a theoretical issue.) 10% of grade.

### **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.