

## **Syllabus: History of American Cinema American Studies/Cultural and Ethnic Studies 286**

Instructor: Dan Thornton

Time: Monday and Wednesday 3:00pm-5:10pm

Place: L122

Email Contact: dthornto@bellevuecollege.edu

### Course Goals:

- Present the role of the still photograph and its influence on motion pictures
- Describe the process and history of the motion picture evolving from arcade entertainment to a dominant storytelling medium
- Discuss the history and techniques of the great early film pioneers inside and outside the U.S., and analyze the continuing aesthetic theories of editing motion pictures
- Take a close look at the cinema culture of central and southern Europe after the second world war, paying particular attention to the Italian and French “New Wave” movements respectively.
- Analyze the journey from the golden age of American silent films to the creation of the Hollywood studio system, and its’ subsequent celebrity culture
- Present how the acceleration of film technologies mirror technological trends throughout the culture and economy
- Write and research aspects of the film industry
- Explain the basic principles of cameras, lenses, film stocks and sound recording processes
- Describe the use of movies as ideological tools, and as propaganda
- Present the ways in which American cinema has, or has not, presented diverse voices

### **The course will have weekly modules that will roll out consecutively:**

Week 1: (Cook: 1,2) *note that reading assignments are to be done by the second class of the week they are assigned* The photograph and the influence of the aperture on human perception. From Brady’s battlefield documents to Stieglitz’s and Muybridge’s new photographic fine art form, the still photograph’s influence on motion pictures.

Film as a representation of culture and place. We will look at how Italian culture, geography and history has been used in film. From Fellini through the “Spaghetti Western.” Uniquely Italian cityscapes and landscapes have informed film culture world wide.

Week 2: (Cook: 4,5)

From early arcade “flicks” to Edwin S. Porter’s “The Great Train Robbery” the motion picture moves from entertainment to storyteller. Montage and the great Russian film pioneers: Eisenstein, Vertov, Kuleshov and the early aesthetic theories of editing motion pictures.

Week 3: (Cook: 3,6)

United Artists: the journey from the golden age of American silent films to the creation of the first Hollywood studio, and its subsequent celebrity culture. The great German cinematic experiments of the Weimar republic including: Expressionism, Symbolism and even the Dada.

Week 4: (Cook: 7,8) Talkies: how an acceleration of technologies in film making sets the stage for Hollywood's "Gilded Age". Students will get a "nuts and bolts" look at cameras, lenses, film stocks and early sound recording.

Week 5: (Cook: 9)

The screwball comedy and the Hayes Code. Literary America moves west to write for the movies.

Week 6: (Cook: 10,11)

Stalin & Hitler and Mussolini use movies as ideological tools--from "Ivan the Great" to "Il Duce" and "Triumph of the Will." Why We Fight: the motion picture goes to war. Allied and Axis attempts to convert an entire industry to fight the propaganda war.

Week 7: (Cook: 12,13, Biskind 1-3))

From "Citizen Kane" to a "Touch of Evil": Orson Welles and his influence on the genres of the second half of Twentieth Century films. Post War Films – Film Noir in the U.S., The influence of Italian Neo-Realists. The effects of the McCarthy hearings on the film industry. "Acinema of moral anxiety".

Week 8: (Biskind 4-6)

Movies in the TV Era – emerging technologies and experiments, influences of television on movies and vice versa, 1950's and science fiction in the wake of the Cold War. Cinema and Counterculture – decline of studio system during the 1960's, outside productions by likes of Roger Corman.

Week 9: The French New Wave. No other film movement of the twentieth century was as important and influential as the French New Wave. Italian Neo-realism, smaller, cheaper cameras, ideology and the Cahiers Du Cinema.

From "The Bicycle Thief" to "Satyricon"—an examination of post war attitudes in Italy through film.

Week 10: (Biskind 5-7) The New Hollywood Realism – from "Mean Streets" to "French Connection", discussion of film techniques. How new more mobile motion picture equipment and better film stock moved the camera out of the studio. New Film School Generation – Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese among others-their influence and achievements during the 1970's and beyond.

Depictions of Italians in American cinema: The "Godfather", Saturday Night Fever" and "Do the Right Thing" are more than just movies. They and other Hollywood films have

shaped perceptions of Italian Americans, reinforcing both positive and negative stereotypes.

Week 11: (*if time allows*): (Cook: 18,19) The Other Hollywoods – Bollywood, Hong Kong and worldwide cinema, rise of independent film, Breaking through stereotypes with new and diverse voices-Spike Lee, Jane Campion etc.... Film and Rise of Technology – From 1980's to the present, special effects blockbusters, new generation of talent in film, From Spike Jonz to Ang Lee and others.

Students' grades will be based on two essays, a midterm exam and a final exam that will have a hands-on visual component.

The Text Books will be:

A History of Narrative Cinema 3rd edition by David A. Cook  
W. W. Norton & Co. (1996) ISBN 0393968197

Italian Locations: Reinhabiting the Past in Postwar Cinema by Noa Steimatsky  
Univ Of Minnesota Press (2008) ISBN 9780816650880

Easy Riders Raging Bulls: How the Sex-Drugs-And Rock 'N Roll Generation Saved Hollywood by Peter Biskind Simon & Schuster (1999) ISBN 0684857081