

Syllabus: History of American Cinema

American Studies 286

Instructor: Dan Thornton

Time: Online

Place: Online—Vista/Blackboard

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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
- * 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 as such:

Week 1: (Cook: 1,2, 4,5) 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. From early arcade "flicks" to Edwin S. Porter's "The Great Train Robbery" the motion picture moves from entertainment to story teller. Montage and the great Russian film pioneers: Eisenstein, Vertov, Kuleshov and the early aesthetic theories of editing motion pictures.

Week 2: (Cook: 3,6-8)

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.

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 3: (Cook: 9-11)

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

Stalin & Hitler use the movies as ideological tools. From "Ivan the Great" to "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 4: (Cook: 12,13, Biskind 1-6)

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".

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 5: 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.

Week 6: (Biskind: 5-7) New American 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.

Week 7: (Cook: 8,19) The Other Hollywood – 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 **weekly discussions, 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

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