

FROM HOLLYWOODLAND TO PLANET HOLLYWOOD
AMERICAN CINEMA: HISTORY AND CRITICISM
ENGL 241.01

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Office Hours: MW 1:00-2:00, TR 12:30-1:30, & by appt.
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Semester: Fall 2008
Class: MWF 12:00-12:50
Screening: T 7:00-9:30

Room: 34 Barret
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Course Description

The history of Hollywood could be written as the successive moves to install and define the commodity "film," while at the same time extending and refining the service "cinema."

—Thomas Elsaesser



Here is a story about how Hollywood was "discovered." In 1913, when filmmaking was less than two decades old, Cecil B. DeMille and co-director Oscar C. Apfel went to Flagstaff to shoot the western *The Squaw Man* on location. But they found the snow-capped Arizona mountains unsuitable for their tale. Frustrated, they packed up, got back on the train, and rode to the end of the line. On their last stop, they discovered a little-known district of Los Angeles called Hollywood, whose open countryside and sunny climate proved to be ideal for making motion pictures. Soon after DeMille stumbled upon this new setting, others followed. By 1915, the majority of American films were being produced in or around Hollywood. By the late 1920s, Hollywood had become the movie capital of the world, and its studio system of filmmaking had standardized stylistic and thematic conventions for making movies capable of enthralling audiences worldwide.

Since then, American cinema has played a significant role in reflecting and shaping our social and political history. Indeed, American film history is closely intertwined with our cultural history; it is not merely an aggregate of facts and dates but a series of stories about how

Hollywood has developed as an art and an industry, an imaginary pleasure and a symbolic language, a hallucination and a fact. This course tells those stories by tracing the evolution of American narrative cinema from its beginnings in the nickelodeons to its worldwide dominance during the studio era to its rebirth as a countercultural medium to its most recent transformation as a "transnational" cinema in today's global cultural marketplace.

We will begin the semester by sketching the rise and fall of the studio system within the context of tumultuous historical events, major economic changes, and noteworthy technological breakthroughs. Then, we will turn to the emergence of a New Hollywood, born out of the turmoil of counterculture movements and then altered radically by growing media conglomerations, new exhibition formats, and the transnationalization of the American film industry. In the final unit, we will move from film history to film criticism and examine how millennial fears and anxieties about the future inform contemporary American cinema. Along the way, we will explore the notion of classical cinema; investigate Hollywood's ideological influence on American culture; and assess the cultural, technological, and industrial changes that have occurred in American film practice during the "century of cinema."

Course Policies

Attendance: You are required to attend all classes and screenings. You should not email me about your absences. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get information and/or handouts from a classmate. You are allowed three absences over the course of the semester, no questions asked, for extracurricular activities or medical/personal emergencies. After the third absence, each subsequent absence will result in a deduction of 20 points from your final course grade. After six absences, you will fail the course.

Tardiness: You are required to be on time. Habitual tardiness, even if it's only a couple of minutes, will hurt your participation grade.

Late Work: I do not accept late work. If you do not plan on being here when an assignment is due, it must be in my mailbox before the deadline. You will receive a zero on an assignment if it is not turned in when it is due. Please note that you are required to complete all assignments in order to receive a passing grade.

Class Participation: You are required to come to class prepared with the assigned reading for that day. I expect constructive verbal contribution to each class meeting. A student who disrupts class, interrupts another student's presentation, or in any way creates a hostile environment will be subject to disciplinary action. A student who reads the newspaper, chats with a neighbor, leaves to go to the restroom, or simply dozes off should expect a low participation grade even if they have contributed to class discussions on other occasions. I will likely say nothing at the time of the incident, but disruptive behavior will adversely affect your participation grade.

Screenings: We will view a wide variety of films in class. You may find these films intellectually challenging or troubling. Learning how to watch and analyze them critically will be an important part of our discussions and assignments.

Electronic Devices: You should turn off all electronic devices before class begins. Do not allow cell phones, pagers, or any type of beepers to go off in class. You are expected to refrain from sending or receiving calls as well as text messaging. A laptop may be used for taking notes. However, instant messaging, gaming, or surfing the web is prohibited.

Food or Drink: I don't mind if you bring something to drink, but please avoid bringing any food into the classroom.

Consultation: I'll be happy to talk with you about any questions or concerns you have about the class. Feel free to stop by during my office hours. If those times don't work, I can make an appointment to meet with you at a time that is mutually convenient. If you have questions about an assignment, do not wait until the last minute. Remember, I want you to do well in the class and am always willing to work with you.

Email: It is always preferable to meet in person to discuss any questions or concerns, since the impersonal medium of electronic communication is a poor substitute for a genuine face-to-face conversation. However, I'm available by email for simple queries (expect a response during business hours: 9am-5pm Monday-Friday). Please regard email correspondence as formal communication. It is always best to ask specific rather than general questions in an email and abide by rules of professional etiquette. It is not advisable to email me the evening before an assignment is due asking for help because there is very little I can do at that point; besides, last-minute emails are very unprofessional.

Format of Assignments: All written assignments need to be typed and double spaced, in 12 pt. font, using Times New Roman, with one-inch margins on all sides. The format and citations must conform to MLA specifications, or the assignment may not be accepted. You do not need a title page; instead, include your name, my name, course name/number, and date in the top left corner of the first page. Be sure to number and staple your pages; also, proofread your work before printing up the final draft. I do not accept any assignments via email. A paper copy is expected at the beginning of class on the day the assignment is due.

Plagiarism: Borrowing of ideas or language from other sources (including published material, other student papers, the internet or other electronic resources, etc.) must be carefully documented. Plagiarism is considered a serious breach of academic integrity and is a major violation of the Rhodes Honor Code; suspected cases will be referred to the Honor Council. If you are ever uncertain about whether something in your assignment constitutes a violation, please contact me.

Disability Issues: Students with documented disabilities may be entitled to specific accommodations. Please contact the office of Student Disability Services for more information. In every case, it is your responsibility to provide me with an official letter from SDS.

Course Evaluation

Grade Distribution

Participation	20%	200 points
Short Papers (3 x 100)	30%	300 points
Exams (2 x 100)	20%	200 points
Research Paper	30%	300 points
Total	100%	1000 points

Assignments (Additional guidelines will be provided when each assignment is introduced.)

Participation: You are required to contribute comments and questions that further class discussion. Simply agreeing or disagreeing with your classmates and/or the readings is not enough. You are expected to add thoughtful ideas to the debate by engaging with the texts in a sophisticated manner. Participation will be evaluated in terms of quantity and quality. From time to time, you will also be quizzed on the week's film or reading. Quizzes are always unannounced, and they cannot be made up.

Short Papers (2-3 pages): You will write three short papers. Each paper will ask you to respond to historical documents and demonstrate your grasp of film history and analysis.

Exams: You will take two in-class exams, which will include short questions (identifications, definitions, quote analyses) on the readings, films, and discussions. Exams cannot be made up.

Research Paper (9-10 pages): For the final project, you will write a research paper exploring a single decade in American film history. You will be given several general questions to help you arrive at your thesis about what a film or set of films says about a particular decade. Your research paper should use a historical-critical approach. It will be evaluated on the originality of your argument as well as the thoroughness of your analysis.

Grading Guidelines

A = 100-94; **A-** = 93-90; **B+** = 89-87; **B** = 86-84; **B-** = 83-80
C+ = 79-77; **C** = 76-74; **C-** = 73-70; **D+** = 69-67; **D** = 66-64; **D-** = 63-60; **F** < 60

A range (100-90): Excellent work; exemplary in argument and organization; professionally presented; free of mechanical errors.

B range (89-80): Good, solid work; substantive in argument and organization; meets all requirements, but needs some revisions; no more than five mechanical errors.

C range (79-70): Satisfactory work; addresses the assignment adequately, but requires some significant revisions of content and/or mechanics.

D range (69-60): Below average work; misses one or more central aspects of the assignment; inadequate focus and/or development; awkwardly written; requires extensive rewriting.

F range (< 60): Unacceptable work; fails to meet the requirements of the assignment; incomplete or irrelevant material; lack of focus or development.

Course Materials

- Lewis, Jon. *American Film: A History*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2008.
- Thompson, Kirsten Moana. *Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the Turn of the Millennium*. Albany: SUNY P, 2007.

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Unit I: The Rise and Fall of the Hollywood Studio System

Week 1: An International Medium Is Born

- Wed., Aug. 27** Introduction to the Course
- Fri., Aug. 29** Lewis, "Early Cinema" (3-16)
Clips: Dickson, *Fred Ott's Sneeze* (1894); Lumière, *Arrival of a Train at la Ciotat* (1895); Heise, *The Kiss* (1896)

Week 2: A Studio Industry Is Born

- Mon., Sep. 1** No Classes: Labor Day Holiday
- Tues., Sep. 2** Screening: Chaplin, *The Gold Rush* (1925)
- Wed., Sep. 3** Lewis, "Early Cinema" (27-35); "The Silent Era" (43-63)
Clips: Porter, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903); Griffith, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)
- Fri., Sep. 5** Lewis, "The Silent Era" (70-84)
Clips: Keaton, *Sherlock, Jr.* (1924)

Week 3: The Genius of the System

- Mon., Sep. 8** Lewis, "Technical Innovation and Industrial Transformation" (91-102)
Clips: Crosland, *The Jazz Singer* (1927)
- Tues., Sep. 9** Screening: Capra, *It Happened One Night* (1934)
- Wed., Sep. 10** Lewis, "Technical Innovation and Industrial Transformation" (102-18)
Clips: Goulding, *Grand Hotel* (1932)
- Fri., Sep. 12** Lewis, "Technical Innovation and Industrial Transformation" (118-45)
Clips: Hawks, *Scarface* (1932); Bacon, *42nd Street* (1933)

Week 4: World War II and Hollywood's Golden Age

- Mon., Sep. 15** Lewis, "Hollywood in Transition" (147-61)
Clips: Fleming, *Gone with the Wind* (1939); Welles, *Citizen Kane* (1941)
- Tues., Sep. 16** Screening: Curtiz, *Casablanca* (1942)
- Wed., Sep. 17** Lewis, "Hollywood in Transition" (161-68)
Clips: Capra, *Why We Fight* (1943-45)
- Fri., Sep. 19** **Short Paper #1 Due**
Discussion cont.
Clips: Minnelli, *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944); Ulmer, *Detour* (1945)

Week 5: Boom and Bust

- Mon., Sep. 22** Lewis, "Hollywood in Transition" (168-80)
Clips: Wilder, *Double Indemnity* (1944)
- Tues., Sep. 23** Screening: Hawks, *The Big Sleep* (1946)
- Wed., Sep. 24** Lewis, "Adjusting to a Postwar America" (193-209)
Clips: Tourneur, *Out of the Past* (1947)

Fri., Sep. 26 Lewis, "Adjusting to a Postwar America" (209-28)
Clips: Hawks, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953); Kazan, *On the Waterfront* (1954)

Unit II: Hollywood Renaissance and Media Conglomerations

Week 6: The Collapse of the Studio System and the Rise of Television

Mon., Sep. 29 Lewis, "Moving toward a New Hollywood" (233-47)
Clips: Preminger, *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955)

Tues., Sep. 30 Screening: Ray, *Rebel without a Cause* (1955)

Wed., Oct. 1 Lewis, "Moving toward a New Hollywood" (247-58)
Clips: Benedek, *The Wild One* (1953); Ford, *The Searchers* (1956)

Fri., Oct. 3 TBA

Week 7: The American Auteur Is Born

Mon., Oct. 6 **Exam #1**

Tues., Oct. 7 Screening: Hopper, *Easy Rider* (1969)

Wed., Oct. 8 Lewis, "Moving toward a New Hollywood" (258-64, 272-79); "A Hollywood Renaissance" (281-89)
Clips: Hitchcock, *Psycho* (1960); Penn, *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967); Nichols, *The Graduate* (1967)

Fri., Oct. 10 Lewis, "A Hollywood Renaissance" (289-305, 319-22)
Clips: Polanski, *Chinatown* (1974); Scorsese, *Taxi Driver* (1976)

Week 8: Vietnam and the Crisis of American Power

Mon., Oct. 13 Poussaint, "Blaxploitation Movies" (handout)
Clips: Parks, *Shaft* (1971)

Tues., Oct. 14 Screening: Allen, *Annie Hall* (1977)

Wed., Oct. 15 Lewis, "A Hollywood Renaissance" (327-49)
Clips: Pakula, *Klute* (1971); Siegel, *Dirty Harry* (1972)

Fri., Oct. 17 **Short Paper #2 Due**
Discussion cont.
Clips: Carpenter, *Halloween* (1978)

Week 9: Mergers, Blockbusters, and the Rise of VCR

Mon., Oct. 20 No Classes: Fall Recess

Tues., Oct. 21 No Classes: Fall Recess

Wed., Oct. 22 Lewis, "A New New Hollywood" (351-58)
Clips: Spielberg, *Raiders of the Lost Arc* (1981)

Fri., Oct. 24 Lewis, "A New New Hollywood" (359-72)
Clips: Cameron, *Aliens* (1986); McTiernan, *Die Hard* (1988)

Week 10: Auteurs and Independents

Mon., Oct. 27 Lewis, "A New New Hollywood" (372-87)
Clips: Lynch, *Blue Velvet* (1986); Stone, *Natural Born Killers* (1994)

Tues., Oct. 28 Screening: Spike Lee, *Do the Right Thing* (1989)

Wed., Oct. 29 Lewis, "A New New Hollywood" (387-99)
Clips: Tarantino, *Pulp Fiction* (1994); Coen, *Fargo* (1996)

Fri., Oct. 31 Discussion cont.
Clips: Bigelow, *Point Break* (1991)

Week 11: Fin de Siècle Anxieties

- Mon., Nov. 3** Lewis, "The End of Cinema As We Know It" (401-10)
Clips: Wachowski, *The Matrix* (1999)
- Tues., Nov. 4** Screening: Lynch, *Mulholland Drive* (2001)
- Wed., Nov. 5** Lewis, "The End of Cinema As We Know It" (410-20)
Clips: Fincher, *Fight Club* (1999)
- Fri., Nov. 7** Lewis, "The End of Cinema As We Know It" (420-25)
Clips: Lee, *Brokeback Mountain* (2005)

Unit III: Approaching the New Millennium and the End of the World**Week 12: Familial Dread**

- Mon., Nov. 10** Thompson, "Apocalyptic Dread, Kierkegaard, and the Cultural Landscape of the Millennium" (1-27)
Clips: Lang, *Metropolis* (1927); Cameron, *Terminator 2* (1991)
- Tues., Nov. 11** Screening: Scorsese, *Cape Fear* (1991)
- Wed., Nov. 12** Thompson, "*Cape Fear* and Trembling" (29-58)
- Fri., Nov. 14** **Short Paper #3 Due**
Discussion cont.
Clips: Demme, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991)

Week 13: Supernatural Dread

- Mon., Nov. 17** Thompson, "Strange Fruit" (59-81)
Clips: Rose, *Candyman* (1992)
- Tues., Nov. 18** Screening: Haynes, *Safe* (1995)
- Wed., Nov. 19** Discussion cont.
- Fri., Nov. 21** **Exam #2**

Week 14: Dystopian Dread

- Mon., Nov. 24** Thompson, "*Se7en* in the Morgue" (105-26)
Clips: Fincher, *Se7en* (1995)
- Tues., Nov. 25** No Screening
- Wed., Nov. 26** No Classes: Thanksgiving Recess
- Fri., Nov. 28** No Classes: Thanksgiving Recess

Week 15: Apocalyptic Dread

- Mon., Dec. 1** Arthur, "The Last Four Things" (handout)
- Tues., Dec. 2** Screening: Shyamalan, *Signs* (2002)
- Wed., Dec. 3** Thompson, "*Signs* of the End of the World" (127-44)
Clips: Emmerich, *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004)
- Fri., Dec. 5** Discussion cont.
Clips: Darabont, *The Mist* (2007)

Week 16: The End

- Mon., Dec. 8** Thompson, "*War of the Worlds*" (145-53)
Clips: Spielberg, *War of the Worlds* (2005)
- Tues., Dec. 9** Screening/Movie Night: TBD by the Class
- Wed., Dec. 10** Conferences for Research Paper
- Fri., Dec. 12** **Research Paper Due**