ENG 241 History and Criticism of American Cinema

Professor: Thomas Cohen  
Office: Palmer 302

Time: Tues. and Thurs. 11:20-12:50  
Office hours: 3:00-4:00 Tues. and Thurs./Wed. 1:00-2:00

Screening: Monday Night 7:00-10:00  
Messages: ext. 3399

Room: 302 Clough; FJA (screening)  
E-mail: cohen@rhodes.edu

Goals

This course offers a chronological survey of American cinema, addressing such topics as the development of cinematic technologies and the evolution of film "language." Students will compose essays that demonstrate their grasp of film history and analysis.

Texts

# Short Guide to Writing about Film–Timothy Corrigan
# Silent Film and the Triumph of the American Myth–Paula Marantz Cohen
# The Speed of Sound–Scott Eyman
# The Genius of the System–Thomas Schatz
# Spike, Mike, Slackers, and Dykes–John Pierson

Course requirements

# Three papers of approximately 8 pages each
# Unannounced reading and viewing quizzes
# Film terms test (mix and match)
# Class participation

Grading

# Papers=25% each
# Quizzes=5% total
# Test=5%
# Participation=15%

Grading Scale

95 = A; 90 = A-; 89 = B+; 85 = B; 80 = B-; 79 = C+; 75 = C; 65 = D below 65 = F
Overview

I have divided the course into three units. Each is organized around a certain critical moment in cinema’s history: First, the introduction of sound in the late 1920s; second, the decline of the studio system after World War II; third, the blockbuster’s emergence and the independent film renaissance that followed Hollywood’s fall in profits in the early 1970s.

Paper Assignments

**Essay one**: Compose a correspondence in which a director argues for making a silent movie while the producer insists on a sound picture. Draw examples from class readings and films to support each side of the argument. Avoid the assumption that all film strives towards “realism.”

**Essay two**: Imagine the process of turning a certain play or novel into a film. Write a paper that describes how different production conditions would affect both the filmmaking process and the finished product. For example, describe how making a picture for MGM in the 1930s would differ from making one for Warners in the 1940s or for a television studio in the 1950s. Again, use concrete examples from class readings and films.

**Essay Three**: Write a paper that comments on the relation between the individual filmmaker and the film industry in the period we have studied (1970s-1990s).

Rules

- All work submitted for a grade must conform to the Rhodes College Honor Code.
- Students must complete all assigned work to receive a passing grade in the course.
- Attendance is required. The final grades of students with more than three unexcused absences will be dropped.
- Chronic lateness will reflect on a student’s final grade.
- Late papers will be marked down one grade level for each day late.
- Students with disabilities will be accommodated. Such students should contact the Coordinator of Disability Services as soon as possible.

Schedule

**Unit One**

8/23: Introduction to course.
8/28: Corrigan chapters 1 and 2 (1-40).
8/30: Corrigan chapter 3 (Film Terms) (41-83).
9/4: FILM TERMS TEST
9/6: Cohen Intro. and chapter 1 (3-42).
9/11: Cohen chapter 2 (44-70) and 4 (108-130).
9/18: Eyman 96-162.
9/20: Eyman 164-237.
9/25: Eyman 347-383
9/27: Corrigan chapters 5 (“Style and Structure in Writing”) and 7 (“Manuscript Form”).
**10/2: FIRST PAPER DUE**

**Unit Two**

**10/4:** Schatz, Introduction (3-12)
**10/9:** Schatz 159-198 (On MGM’s “Charmed Interval” and “SPI: Going Independent”).
**10/11:** Schatz 198-251 (On Warners and Universal).
**10/16:** No class. Fall recess.
**10/18:** Schatz 252-294 (MGM and Selznick and Hitchcock).
**10/23:** Schatz 411-462 (Warners “Top of the world, End of the Line” and MGM “Last Gasp”).
**10/25:** Schatz 463-492, chapters 23 and 24 (Universal & television; The New Hollywood).
**10/30:** Discussion

**11/1: SECOND PAPER DUE**

**Unit Three**

**11/6:** Margulies on Cassavetes in *New American Cinema* (275-301).
**11/8:** Cook on Auteur Cinema and the New Hollywood (*New American Cinema* 11-35),
**11/13:** Wyatt on indie marketing innovations, (*New American Cinema* 64-83)
**11/15:** Kleinhaus on Independents (*New American Cinema* 307-327)
**11/20:** No class. Thanksgiving.
**11/22:** No class.
**11/27:** Pierson 1-82
**11/29:** Pierson, 126-136;

**12/4: THIRD PAPER DUE**

**Screenings**

**8/27:** *Our Hospitality* – Buster Keaton (1922)
**9/3:** No Screening. Labor Day
**9/10:** *The Crowd* – King Vidor (1928)
**9/17:** *Singin’ in the Rain* – Stanley Donen (1952)
**9/24:** *Gold Diggers of 1933* – Mervyn Le Roy (1933)
**10/1:** No screening
**10/8:** *To Have and Have Not* – Howard Hawks (1944)
**10/15:** No Screening
**10/22:** *The Letter* – William Wyler (1940)
**10/29:** *Psycho* – Alfred Hitchcock (1960)
**11/5:** *The Player* – Robert Altman (1992)
**11/12:** *Jaws* – Steven Spielberg (1975)
**11/19:** *Do the Right Thing* – Spike Lee (1989)
**11/26:** No Screening
**12/3:** *Mystery Train* – Jim Jarmusch (1989)