Film and Society: Humanities 222

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Office Hours: MWF 10:00-10:45 a.m., M 6:00-6:45
TU and TR 11:00 a.m.-2:30 p.m.

Course Objectives: The primary objective of this course is to examine the evolution of film—as both an art form and an industry—and its complex and important place within American culture. We will focus on the history of cinema in the United States and the social, political and economic forces that have shaped its development. We will have the opportunity to analyze a wide variety of movies, all of which will provide key insights into our culture and history.

Another, equally important, objective of this course is to help you sharpen your abilities as writers and thinkers. During the course of the semester, you will research, analyze and write about films, film audiences, genres and stars. You will need to follow MLA style of documentation.

In order to begin, we have to agree on a few basic points:

• Films mean something. All films are cultural artifacts, and as such, they do more than reflect our culture; they participate actively in its creation. All films have some sort of deeper meaning that may not be readily apparent but can be discovered through careful analysis. While many films were (and are) made to make money and to entertain an audience, what a culture finds entertaining can be an important key to understanding the needs, desires and fears of particular people at a particular time and place.
• Films mean more than one thing. All movies have multiple, viable interpretations, although these interpretations must be backed up with evidence.
• Some of the films may have “adult content.” If you have any reservations about watching or discussing sexually explicit or violent material, please talk to me as soon as possible.

**Texts:** You will have three basic texts in this class:
- John Belton’s *American Cinema/American Culture*
- Handouts distributed during the semester
- The films we will be watching in and out of class.

**Course Assignments and Point Breakdown:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response Paper #1</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay #1: Genre Study</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td></td>
<td>200</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Response Paper #2</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay #2: Star Study</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>200</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td></td>
<td>200</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading quizzes</td>
<td>9/drop low score</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>100%</td>
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**Response Paper #1:** This short essay is a response to a visit to a local theater. Drawing on your reading concerning the history of film distribution and exhibition, you will analyze your visit in terms of how the economics of exhibition shapes the film experience for the audience. How is the theater you visited different from the nickelodeon or the motion picture palaces? Where do you still see traces of these earlier venues? How does the architectural design of the theater foster a certain kind of experience or reward a certain kind of behavior? How did this mode of exhibition (in contrast to past modes) influence or even determine your reaction to the film?

When writing this response, make sure to digest and apply what you have learned from the readings and class discussion to your own experience. Be sure to cite aspects of your visit and link them back to past modes of exhibition; show me that you know and understand the material from Belton and the discussion. While you do not need to tell me everything you see or do in the theater, it may be helpful to structure this essay as a loose narrative of your visit.
**Essay #1:** In this essay, you will choose a genre and analyze how it reflects and/or comments on societal attitudes and ideologies. You will want to focus your topic by choosing a sub-genre, a mixed genre or a cycle of popularity. For example:

- football melodramas
- spaghetti westerns
- 1950s giant monster movies
- 1960s road films
- 21st century film noir.

Over the course of the essay, you analyze this genre in terms of a specific ideological/cultural issue such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, political ideology, etc. You will need to develop a thesis concerning how a key film or films within this genre comment on this ideological issue or problem. For example, here are two potential thesis statements:

- In the typical musical of the 1940s, female sexuality challenges patriarchal power and must be carefully controlled.
- *Remember the Titans,* and other sports melodramas, seem to preach racial tolerance but end up reinforcing racist stereotypes concerning black men.

You will need to analyze at least one film in depth, using close readings of key scenes to support your thesis, but you can use multiple films to make or complicate your point (as long as they all fall into the same genre). You need to use at least one outside source other than or addition to Belton. Cite all the films you discuss and any outside sources you use following MLA style. Feel free to use the books on reserve as sources.

**Response Paper #2:** In this short essay, you will choose a star and describe his or her unique persona in as much detail as possible. You will need to use at least one film as an example and to use one outside source. Your outside source could be anything that helps to build or influences this star’s persona, such as interviews, critical articles written about the star, fan websites, etc. You must avoid cliché or vague descriptions, and you must approach this star from an objective viewpoint. Of course, your personal feelings toward the star are important, but do not let them blind you to the complexities of his or her persona. Try focusing on different ideological aspects of the star’s persona. What is the star’s gender or class identity? Does race play a part in this star’s public image? What is the star’s relationship to authority? Finding and focusing on the key ideological issues in the star’s persona can help you organize your response, and doing so may help you find a focus for Essay 2. This paper differs from Essay 2 in that you are describing a star’s various ideological aspects; in Essay 2, you will focus on one ideological issue and analyze it in detail.

**Essay #2:** In this essay, you will take the star that you used in Response Paper #2 and analyze his or her star persona. As in Essay 1, you will examine this persona in terms of a specific ideological issue (which you may have already identified in Response Paper #2). For example:

- Denzel Washington represents the anxiety concerning changes in male gender identity and the need to both rethink and preserve traditional ideas concerning
masculinity.

- In the 1950s, Cold War paranoia concerning America’s place in the world finds expression in the star persona of Cary Grant.

In order to prove your thesis, you have to examine at least one film in detail but feel free to include multiple films that feature this star. You must use at least one outside source other than or in addition to Belton. Cite all the films discussed and any outside sources following MLA style.

Remember that you are analyzing the star’s persona and not the actual person; you may want to choose a star who you find interesting but do not admire or idolize. Any information you find should be considered as part of the star's persona and not as evidence of their "real" character." In addition, be careful to choose a subject who is a star in lieu of or in addition to being an actor.

On Blackboard, I will be posting sample papers for Essay 1, Essay 2 and Response Paper 2, in addition to more detailed assignment sheets.

Midterm and Final: The midterm and final will cover material from Belton, the handouts, the films, and class discussion. Both will be take-home tests and will be comprised of 5 short essay questions. For each question, you will have two choices from which to pick. You will receive a handout with guidelines on how to complete both of these exams. If you keep up with the reading, attend class and take careful notes, these exams will be relatively straight-forward.

Quizzes: You will have a short quiz for each chapter. The quiz will consist of short answer questions, multiple-choice questions or matching exercises (or a combination). You can drop your lowest quiz score. If you miss a quiz, you can also make up those points through the extra credit options available on both of the major essays.

Topics: I must approve your topics for the two major essays and for Response Paper #2. Before the papers are due, I will ask for and record your topic. You cannot change your topic without consulting with me first. I will not accept a paper on a subject that I did not previously approve.

Format: Assignments other than quizzes will be submitted via Blackboard. You can submit your essay exams on Blackboard by clicking on the assignment and uploading your document. Double check to make sure that you have uploaded the correct document. Please name your document as follows: Your Name Name of Assignment. In
other words, if I turned in Essay Exam 1, the name of my document would be “Patrick Gonder Response Paper 1.”

All assignments other than quizzes must be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. If you indent the first line of each paragraph, do not add extra spaces between paragraphs. At the top of the first page, include your name, name of the class, and the date.

If you do not want to use Blackboard, you can e-mail an assignment, but it is your responsibility to make sure that I receive the document. If you wish to print out a hard copy to turn in, you may print on both sides of the paper.

I encourage you to include photos whenever appropriate (although they do not count toward the page requirement).

Never turn in the only copy of a paper or assignment; always have a back up. Keep all graded work until the semester is over and you are comfortable with your grade.

Late Papers and Attendance: Late papers and exams will be marked down 1/2 letter grade for each day late, including the weekends. If you do not turn in a paper or quiz on the due date, talk to me as soon as possible.

You are allowed 2 absences (although missing class does not excuse you from any work due that day); with the third absence, I will dock your grade 50 points, with another 50 points for each additional 2 absences. **If you need to leave class early, talk to me or you may be counted as absent. Excessive tardies will be counted as absences.**

If you start to miss class or assignments, talk to me as soon as possible so that we can try to minimize the damage. If you cannot finish the course and the date to withdraw has passed, make sure you contact me so that we can decide the best course of action.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism occurs anytime you use another writer’s words, data or even ideas without citing them in a clear and proper manner. This includes (but is not limited to) the following:

- using specific words, phrases or sentences without putting them in quotes (even if you include a parenthetical reference)
- using an author’s specific idea without a citation
- buying a paper (from the internet or other source) and trying to pass it off as your own
- having someone (friend, family member, etc.) write all or portions of your essay.

If you are unsure about the definition of plagiarism, please contact me right away. If you think you might be committing plagiarism but are not sure, please contact me right away. **It is your responsibility to make sure that you do not commit plagiarism.**
Plagiarism is punished according to the situation and severity. The instructor and appropriate administrators will determine the punishment. Possible consequences include but are not limited to the following:

- The student receives an “F” for the essay or for the course.
- The student is expelled from the college.

CLC has begun to document all cases of intentional plagiarism within a database. If I encounter a case of intentional plagiarism, I will report it, as will other teachers at CLC.

**Screening and Class Protocols:** It is necessary that you observe these rules while watching the films.

- Please react to the movies, but do not distract other students.
- No food during the screenings although drinks are permitted. You may eat during the discussion/lecture section of the class. After class, please pick up your trash.
- Watch all the films carefully. I will expect you to be able to discuss them in a thoughtful manner in class and on the exams.

It is necessary that you observe these rules during class discussions/lectures.

- Respect class discussion and whoever is talking at the moment.
- Wait until class is dismissed to pack up your books and materials.
- Turn off phones. If you have to keep your phone on due to your work or to other factors, please make me aware at the beginning of the class.
- No text-messaging in class.
- Laptops are allowed for note-taking; I reserve the right to prohibit laptop use.

**Weekly Syllabus**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Lecture</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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| 8/26 | Introduction to class
Ideology and cultural studies
“Primitive” cinema
Early film shorts | | |
| 9/2  | Exhibition
Studio system | 3-20
64-74 | Quiz #1 |
| 9/9  | The genre system | | Response #1 |
| 9/16 | Western
*Three Bad Men* (1926) | | Quiz #2 |
| 9/23 | Comedy
*My Man Godfrey* (1936) | | Quiz #3 |
<p>| 9/30 | Horror and Sci-Fi | 272-295 | Quiz #4 |
| 10/7 | <em>The Spiral Staircase</em> (1945) | | Essay #1 |
| 10/14 | <em>Singin’ in the Rain</em> (1952) | | Midterm |
| 10/21 | The star system | 83-116 | Quiz #5 |
| 10/28 | 1950s | 299-321 | Quiz #6 |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<th>Pages</th>
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<tr>
<td>11/4</td>
<td>1960s and 70s</td>
<td>341-363</td>
<td>Quiz #7</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/11</td>
<td><em>Assault on Precinct 13</em> (1976)</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Response #2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>11/18</td>
<td>1970s and 80s</td>
<td>364-386</td>
<td>Quiz #8</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/25</td>
<td><strong>Thanksgiving Break</strong></td>
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<td>12/2</td>
<td>1990s to the present</td>
<td>387-421</td>
<td>Quiz #9</td>
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<td>12/9</td>
<td><em>Toy Story 3</em> (2010)</td>
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<td><strong>Essay #2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>12/16</td>
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<td><strong>Final Exam</strong></td>
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If you have any questions or concerns about any of these policies, please talk to me within the first week of class. This syllabus is subject to change.