

## AMERICAN CINEMA

Film 2253E

Western University

Department of Film Studies 2015-2016

Screening: Tuesdays 4:30-7:30 pm (AHB-3B04)

Lecture/Discussion: Wednesdays 5:30-7:30 pm (AHB-3B04)

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### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This yearlong course surveys the central industrial, technological, aesthetic, and ideological developments in the history of American cinema. Given the global prominence and influence of Hollywood cinema, much of the course will be focused on the establishment of the Hollywood studio system and its many transformations over the course of the 20th century. We will begin with an analysis of the origins of the medium and its place in American culture at the turn-of-the-century. We will then examine the development of narrative cinematic standards and the rise and consolidation of the Hollywood studio system, paying close attention to genre, stardom, marketing, and popular reception from the 1920s to the 1960s. In addition to key technological developments such as the coming of sound and the emergence of widescreen cinema, we will also explore social anxieties about cinema's effects, the institution of the Production Code, and the complex relationship of Hollywood film to key social crises (The Depression, WWII, McCarthyism, Civil Rights) of the period.

The second term of the course will focus on the emergence of “post-classical” Hollywood and the parallel growth of American independent cinema. Here we will explore the economic, aesthetic, and ideological transformations in American film from the social upheavals of the '60s and '70s to the contemporary era of conglomeration, globalization, and digital media. Key topics will include: the politics of genre revision; the shifting parameters of the “New Hollywood”; the fall of the Production Code and the representation of sex and violence; independent cinemas and social identity; the emergence of the international blockbuster; and crises of security in post-9/11 cinema.

**Course Objectives:** This course operates as an American film history course, but it also investigates the methods and ideological issues of film historical research more broadly. In addition, the course explores how film aesthetics and theory may be understood in the context of American film history.

**Learning Outcomes:** In addition to enhancing your formal analysis and critical thinking skills through class discussion and research papers, you will acquire the basic tools necessary to conduct informed film historical research, particularly of American film history, which can then be applied to the study of other cinemas.

## **COURSE TEXTS**

*Required:*

1. Lewis, Jon. *American Film: A History*. New York: Norton, 2008.
2. Coursepack of readings—available at bookstore [CP] (one coursepack per term)
3. Additional readings from E-Journals available on OWL [OWL]

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS and GRADING GUIDELINES**

- Class Attendance and Participation [10%]
- Class Presentation [5%]
- Midterm Exams (Nov. 6 & Jan. 22) [20% total]
- Film Analysis (1500 words—one per term) [20% total]
- Marketing and Reception Analysis (2000 words—one per term) [30% total]
- Final Exam (Winter Term) [15%]

**Attendance and Participation:** You are required to attend all class meetings and screenings for the full duration. Attendance will be taken regularly. Be sure to come to class fully prepared, having read all of the weekly reading assignments, and with your coursepack and textbook in hand. Thoughtful participation is highly encouraged and will improve your final participation grade. Lateness, early departures, not having the appropriate readings, texting, or other disruptive behavior will adversely affect your participation grade. More than **THREE unexcused** absences (per term) will result in a zero for your final participation grade. Only documented medical emergencies—verified through the Dean's office (see below)—will be considered for paper extensions or exam rescheduling. *If you are absent for FOURTEEN or more classes (excused or unexcused) you will automatically fail the final exam and the overall course.*

**Laptops, Tablets, Cell Phones:** Laptops/tablets/cell phones are *not* to be used during screenings. You will need to take notes using paper and pens, so be sure to bring these materials to class. Exceptions *may* be granted in the case of students with special needs, but this will only come with official approval from the Dean's office. Laptops/tablets will be permitted during lecture, but only on a probationary basis: if the instructor is distracted two times during the semester by non-note-taking/internet laptop use, the instructor will ban ALL use of laptops/tablets for the remainder of the year. In addition, be sure to turn off cell phones and refrain from text messaging during class. This counts as disruptive behavior and will lower your final participation grade.

**Class Presentation:** Working with another classmate, you will deliver a 15-20 minute presentation (including clips) on an American film relevant to the topics being discussed for the week of your presentation. I will provide a list of suggested films for each presentation week, and the film that you present on *can* be the film that you use for your paper assignments for the term. Each student will present only once during the entire course. I will circulate a presentation schedule and a list of film options early each term.

**Quizzes and Exams:** There will be two mid-term exams and one comprehensive final exam for the course. The Fall midterm will be given on Wednesday November 18 during the lecture session. The Winter midterm will be given on Wednesday January 27 during

the lecture section. Each midterm will run approximately 90 minutes and will test material from readings, lectures, and screenings. The final exam will be a 3 hour exam administered during the formal exam period. Students are advised not to book travel out of the city until the April exam schedule has been posted. The final exam is a comprehensive exam, but it will emphasize course material since the January midterm. Finally, there will be periodic *unannounced* reading quizzes given at the beginning of Wednesday lecture sessions; the grades from these quizzes will be calculated into the final Participation and Attendance grade.

**Paper Assignments:** In each term, you will focus two writing assignments on *one* film made in the United States that is listed on the assignment sheet. The list includes films that will *not* be screened in class but that are relevant to the overall course material. In the first term, the films will be drawn from the period of 1928-1959; in the second term, from 1960-1995. You are encouraged to meet with me about these assignments at any point, especially when expanding on the first paper to write the marketing and reception analysis. The two paper assignments for each term are:

**1. Film Analysis (1500 words min.)** [10% per term]

*Fall Term: Due Tuesday October 27 in class*

*Winter Term: Due Tuesday February 23 in class*

**2. Marketing and Reception Paper (2000 words min.)** [15% per term]

*Fall Term: Due Tuesday December 8 in class*

*Winter Term: Due Tuesday Apr. 5 in class*

***\*\*You must turn in all four paper assignments in a timely manner. If you do not, you will automatically fail the final exam and the overall course\*\****

**Late Work:** Course papers must be turned in complete and on time. In order to be fair to the entire class, I will not grant individual extensions on paper assignments, so be sure to budget your time accordingly. Late papers will be penalized 5% points per day late (including weekends), except in the case of *properly documented* medical emergencies or illnesses (see below).

**Note on Screenings:** You are *required* to attend weekly screenings on Tuesday afternoons at 4:30 pm (attendance will be taken). Be sure to arrive to the screenings on time and to follow traditional screening etiquette (turn off cell phones, no talking, no laptops, etc.). If you are ill or have a legitimate excuse, you should set up an appointment to view the film in the study center [AHB-1G19] sometime before Wednesday's lecture.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### *FALL TERM 2015*

#### **Section I: DEFINING a NATION ONSCREEN**

##### **Week 1—Sept. 15-16—Analyzing Classical Hollywood Cinema**

**Screening:** *Stagecoach* (John Ford, 1939, 96 min.)

**Reading:** [OWL] Bernstein, “*Stagecoach*”  
& [OWL] Warshaw, “Movie Chronicle: The Westerner”

##### **Week 2—Sept. 22-23—Modernity and Early American Film**

**Screening:** Select Edison Co. Films  
*The Lonedale Operator* (D.W. Griffith, 1911, 17 min.)  
*Making an American Citizen* (Alice Guy-Blaché, 1912, 12 min.)  
& Clips from *The Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915, 187 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 3-20; 27-35; 53-9  
& [CP]: Hansen, “A Cinema in Search of a Spectator”

##### **Week 3—Sept. 29-30—Race, Gender, and Citizenship**

**Screening:** *The Cheat* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1915, 60 min.)  
& *Within Our Gates* (Oscar Micheaux, 1920, 79 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 20-27; 35-41; 59-63  
& [CP]: Stewart, “We Were Never Immigrants”  
& [OWL]: Higashi, “Ethnicity, Class, and Gender in Film” (excerpt)

#### **Section II: THE HOLLYWOOD STUDIO SYSTEM**

##### **Week 4—Oct. 6-7—The Star System**

**Screening:** *Son of the Sheik* (George Fitzmaurice, 1926, 68 min.)  
& *It* (Clarence Badger, 1927, 72 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 43-53; 63-89  
& [CP]: Studlar, “The Perils of Pleasure”

##### **Week 5—Oct. 13-14—Sound and Genre**

**Screening:** *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Lewis Milestone, 1930, 133 min.)  
**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 91-108; 128-137  
& [CP]: Westwell, “Early War Cinema, 1898-1930”  
& [OWL]: Chambers, “All Quiet on the Western Front”

**Week 6—Oct. 20-21—Gangsters, Goldiggers, and the Production Code**

**Screening:** *Little Caesar* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1930, 80 min.)  
& *Baby Face* (Alfred E. Green, 1933, 75 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 108-128  
& [CP]: Warshow, “The Gangster as Tragic Hero”  
& [OWL]: Maltby, ““Baby Face””

**Week 7—Oct. 27-28—The Coded Humor of Screwball Comedy**

**Screening:** *It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra, 1934, 105 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 137-145; 172-178  
& [CP]: Maltby, “Comedy and the Restoration of Order”

**\*\*Film Analysis Due Tuesday Oct. 27 in Class\*\***

**Week 8—Nov. 3-4—The MGM Musical**

**Screening:** *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Vincente Minnelli, 1944, 108 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 147-168; 180-90  
& [CP]: Dyer, “Entertainment and Utopia”  
& [CP]: Schatz, “Hollywood: The Triumph of the Studio System”

**Section III: POSTWAR CRISES and the DECLINE of the STUDIO SYSTEM****Week 9—Nov. 10-11—Realism and the Returning Vet**

**Screening:** *The Best Years of Our Lives* (William Wyler, 1946, 172 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 168-178; 190-91  
& [CP]: Kozloff, excerpts from *The Best Years of Our Lives*

**Week 10—Nov. 17-18—Disillusionment and Disorder: Film Noir**

**Screening:** *Detour* (Edgar G. Ulmer, 1945, 67 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 178-80; 193-197; 201-207; 209-222  
& [CP]: Sobchack, “Lounge Time”

**\*\*Midterm Exam on Wednesday Nov. 18 During Class\*\***

**Week 11—Nov. 24-25—Hollywood’s Red Scare**

**Screening:** *My Son John* (Leo McCarey, 1952, 122 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 197-200; 207-209; 222-231  
& [OWL]: Rogin, “Kiss Me Deadly”

**Week 12—Dec. 1-2—Juvenile Delinquency in Widescreen**

**Screening:** *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955, 111 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 250-258  
& [CP]: Belton, “Glorious Technicolor”  
& [OWL]: Noriega, ““Something’s Missing Here!””

**Week 13—Dec. 8-9—Frontier Myths in the Civil Rights Era**

**Screening:** *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956, 119 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 247-250  
& [CP]: Wills, “Prologue: The Most Dangerous Man”  
& [OWL]: Henderson, “*The Searchers*: An American Dilemma”

**\*\*Marketing and Reception Analysis Due Tuesday Dec. 8 in Class\*\***

**WINTER TERM 2016****Section IV: POSTCLASSICAL and “NEW HOLLYWOOD” CINEMAS****Week 15—Jan. 5-6—Slashing Hollywood's Conventions**

**Screening:** *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960, 109 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 233-238; 258-264  
& [CP]: Williams, “Discipline and Fun: *Psycho* and Postmodern Cinema”

**Week 16—Jan. 12-13—Underground and New American Cinema**

**Screening:** *Scorpio Rising* (Kenneth Anger, 1963, 28 min.)  
& *Kustom Kar Kommandos* (Kenneth Anger, 1965, 3 m.)  
& *Shadows* (John Cassavetes, 1959, 87 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 238-247  
& [CP]: Margulies, “John Cassavetes: Amateur Director”  
& [CP]: Suarez, “Pop, Queer, or Fascist?”

**Week 17—Jan. 19-20—The Hollywood Renaissance**

**Screening:** *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969, 95 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 272-291; 327-331  
 & [CP]: Klinger, “The Road to Dystopia”  
 & [OWL]: Nystrom, “The New Hollywood”

**Week 18—Jan. 26-27—Reimagining Genres: Film Noir**

**Screening:** *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974, 131 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 291-305; 327-347  
 & [OWL]: Berliner, “The Genre Film as Booby Trap”

**\*\*Midterm Exam on Wednesday Jan. 27 During Class\*\***

**Week 19—Feb. 2-3—Reimagining Genres: The Musical**

**Screening:** *Nashville* (Robert Altman, 1975, 159 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 306-322; 347-349  
 & [CP]: Hoberman, “*Nashville* contra *Jaws*”  
 & [CP]: Chion, “The Return of the Sensorial”

**Week 20— Feb. 9-10—The Horror of War: Vietnam**

**Screening:** *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979, 150 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 322-327  
 & [CP]: Sturken, “Reenactment and the Making of History”  
 & [OWL]: Jarrett, “Sound Doctrine”

**Week 21— Feb. 16-17—Reading Week (No Classes)****Week 22—Feb. 23-24—Cold Warriors in the Reagan Era**

**Screening:** *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986, 137 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 351-368; 372-379  
 & [CP]: Prince, “Introduction: Movies and the 1980s”  
 & [CP]: Tasker, excerpts from *Spectacular Bodies*

**\*\*Film Analysis Due Tuesday Feb. 23 in Class\*\***

## Section V: AMERICAN "INDIE" CINEMA

### Week 23—Mar. 1-2—Sundance, Miramax, and the Growth of "Indie" Film

**Screening:** *sex, lies, and videotape* (Steven Soderbergh, 1989, 100 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 387-394  
& [CP]: Perren, "The Rise of Miramax and the Quality Indie Blockbuster"

### Week 24—Mar. 8-9— New Queer Cinema

**Screening:** *Paris is Burning* (Jennie Livingston, 1991, 71 min.)  
& *The Living End* (Gregg Araki, 1992, 86 min.)

**Reading:** [CP]: Pearl, "AIDS and New Queer Cinema"  
& [OWL]: Contreras, "New Queer Cinema: Spectacle, Race, Utopia"

### Week 25—Mar. 15-16— New Black Cinema

**Screening:** *Menace II Society* (Albert and Allen Hughes, 1993, 97 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 380-387  
& [CP]: Massood, "Out of the Ghetto, Into the Hood"

## Section VI: ENTERTAINMENT and DYSTOPIA: Millennial Cinema

### Week 26—March 22-23—Smart Cinema and American Anxiety

**Screening:** *Safe* (Todd Haynes, 1995, 120 min.)

**Reading:** [OWL]: Potter, "Dangerous Spaces"  
& [OWL]: Sconce, "Irony, Nihilism, & the New American 'Smart' Film"

### Week 27—March 29-30—Screening the War on Terror

**Screening:** *The Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2009, 131 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 394-399; 420-425  
& [CP]: Barker, excerpts from *A "Toxic Genre": The Iraq War Films*  
& [OWL]: Stewart, "Digital Fatigue"



## Week 28—April 5-6—Cinema in the Digital Age

**Screening:** *WALL-E* (Andrew Stanton, 2008, 98 min.)

**Reading:** [Lewis]: Pgs. 401-420  
 & [CP]: Schatz, “New Hollywood, New Millennium”  
 & [OWL]: Sobchack, “Animation and Automation”

**\*\*Marketing and Reception Analysis Due Tuesday Apr. 5 in class\*\***

**\*\*FINAL EXAM: SEE SCHEDULE for DATE and TIME\*\***

### **POLICIES and REGULATIONS**

This instructor respects and upholds University policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to the physically disabled, visually and/or hearing impaired student; plagiarism; sexual harassment; and racial or ethnic discrimination. All students are advised to become familiar with the respective University regulations and are encouraged to bring any questions or concerns to the attention of the instructor. For Film Studies Department regulations governing Term Work, Exams, Faculty Office Hours, Academic Relief (appeals, petitions, complaints), and other matters, please consult “Information for Students” on our website at [www.uwo.ca/film](http://www.uwo.ca/film)

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is a major academic offence. Students must write their essays in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage, from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. In this course, citation of all material other than students' own ideas must be completed according to the guidelines established in *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition*. For additional information on plagiarism see:

[www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

**Plagiarism Checking:** All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between the University of Western Ontario and [Turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com). You should register immediately as a new user by going to <http://www.turnitin.com>. I will provide you with the Class ID # and password as soon as possible. Assignments not handed in to [turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) will receive a 0.

**Prerequisites:** Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you will be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. The decision may not be appealed. You will receive

no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

**UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness:** Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and or assignments must apply to their Academic Counseling Office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Please go to the following site for information on the university Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness:

[www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf)

For information on the examination services provided by the Student Development Centre, please visit [www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd)

**Mental Health:** Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/>

**Disabilities:** Please consult with me during the first three weeks of class regarding disabilities that might require special accommodations.

**Complaints:** If students have a complaint concerning a course in which they are enrolled, they must first discuss the matter with the instructor of the course. If students are still not satisfied, they should then take the complaint to Jennifer Tramble in the Film Studies Office. These regulations are in place because a failure to follow these procedures creates the potential for injustices of various kinds affecting either the instructor or the students themselves, or both parties. Concerns should not be allowed to fester but should be raised with the instructor in a timely manner, so that they can be addressed in time to make a difference to the course.

**Office Hours:** I will be available to answer questions, clarify concepts/assignments, and assist you with your coursework during my weekly office hours (posted above). If you have an occasional conflict, feel free to email me and we can set up an alternative time to meet. I will also be available via email M-F from 9-5 and will do my best to respond to your email within two days.

## GRADING CRITERIA

### A+ (90-100):

**Argument:** Clear development of a specific, challenging and original thesis. The writer has taken significant risks successfully; in the resulting piece, distinctive ideas and content have discovered their necessary distinctive form. Detailed reference to appropriate texts, with evidence of individual response. Ability not only to expound subject but to see it around—subtleties and ambiguities, qualifications and concessions, relations to other subjects, etc.

**Presentation, structure:** Quotations well integrated into text. Proper paragraphs. Almost no typographical errors.

**Language Skills:** Sentence structure correct, with full range of sentence types (compound, complex, and compound-complex), with full range of punctuation (including semicolons, colons, dashes, parentheses). Graceful style, neither pompous nor breezy, and few errors.

**Research/scholarship:** Evidence of effective, extensive and independent research, with proper documentation of sources. Quotations used appropriately and purposively.

### A (80 to 89):

**Argument:** The writer has taken risks and most of them succeed. Clear development of a specific and challenging thesis, with proper paragraphs. Detailed reference to appropriate texts, with evidence of individual response. Ability not only to expound subject but to see it around—subtleties and ambiguities, qualifications and concessions, relations to other subjects, etc.

**Presentation, structure:** Quotations well integrated into text. Proper paragraphs. Almost no typographical errors.

**Language Skills:** Sentence structure correct, with full range of sentence types (compound, complex, and compound-complex), with full range of punctuation (including semicolons, colons, dashes, parentheses). Graceful style, neither pompous nor breezy, and few errors.

**Research/scholarship:** Evidence of effective and independent research, with proper documentation of sources. Quotations used appropriately and purposively.

### B (70 to 79):

**Argument:** Clear development of a specific thesis, with proper paragraphs. Adequately detailed reference to texts. Ability to expound reasonably sophisticated ideas with clarity.

**Presentation/structure:** Quotations well integrated into text. Proper paragraphs. A few typographical errors.

**Language Skills:** Sentence structure correct, with reasonable range of sentence types and full range of punctuation. Style not too wordy, with errors relatively few and minor.

**Research Scholarship:** Evidence of adequate research, with proper documentation of sources.

**C (60 to 69):**

**Argument:** Reasonably clear development of a thesis, with proper paragraphs. Basic ability to expound ideas, whose development might be rather thin. Effort to support points with references to the text. Tendency to replace analysis with descriptive retelling of plot.

**Presentation/structure:** Presentation showing lapses in tidiness and/or proofreading. Poor use of paragraphs.

**Language Skills:** Sentence structure correct, but perhaps overly simple, with tendency to avoid punctuation besides period and comma. Errors relatively few, but occasionally serious, with evident misunderstanding of some point of elementary grammar (comma splices, fragments, semicolon errors, subject-verb disagreements, poorly integrated quotations)

**Research/Scholarship:** reasonable effort at documentation, but rather thin.

**D (50 to 59):**

**Argument:** Difficulty with paragraphing or consecutive thought. Ideas inchoate but clouded by weak expression. Overgeneralization with inadequate support, or examples that run to lengthy paraphrase, with little or no analysis.

**Presentation/Structure:** Very poor to non-existent use of paragraphs. Inadequate and inaccurate documentation. Multiple typographical errors.

**Language Skills:** Errors of grammar or diction frequent enough to interfere with understanding.

**Research/Scholarship:** Little serious effort to research the topic.

**F (49 and below):**

**Argument:** Ideas too simple for level of course. Argument completely incoherent. Erroneous content showing little or no understanding of subject.

**Presentation/Structure:** Very sloppy proof-reading. Documentation virtually non-existent.

**Language Skills:** writing frequently ungrammatical.

**Research/Scholarship:** Non-existent. Content largely “borrowed” from sources with no individual distillation, but no apparent attempt to deceive.

**0 (Report to Department)**

Plagiarism with intent to deceive