

## ENGLIT 1291 History of American Film 2

Spring 20067  
Tuesday 6:00-9:50 P.M.  
CL G-24  
CN 23079

Professor: Mark Best  
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Office Hours: T 1:00-3:00  
or by appointment, CL 1502  
(15<sup>th</sup> floor, inside CL 1501)

### Course Description:

This course explores the development of American film from 1940 to the present. The course examines the evolution of American film style and genre, the history of the American film industry, and the relationship between Hollywood cinema and the broader cultural context of American society.

### Grade Breakdown —

Film/Reading Journals	25%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%
Class Presentation & Handout	15%
Essay	20%
Attendance	-3.3% from your final grade for every absence, excused or unexcused, after the first two.

**Reading Journals** — This assignment will test your understanding and application of the readings assigned throughout the semester. For each reading, you will write at least one complete single-spaced (or two complete double-spaced) pages in which you:  
1) summarize the main points of the reading, and  
2) relate the ideas in the reading to the film and class lecture/discussion in the week for which it is assigned.

Be sure that your summary clearly demonstrates that you have read (and understood) the *entire* article.

Each reading journal will be due the week after the reading is assigned. (See weekly schedule.) Reading journals will be graded as follow:

- + (plus) = excellent
- ✓+ (check plus) = good
- ✓ (check) = okay (average)
- ✓- (check minus) = inadequate (below acceptable standards)
- (minus) = really poor

These grades roughly correspond to A through F. Late response papers will have one grade level deducted per day late.

Although 16 readings and journals are assigned on the weekly schedule, only your top 10 reading journals count toward your final grade. (However, all the readings will be accounted for on the midterm and final exams.) You may replace reading journals that have poor grades by writing extra reading journals.

**Take-Home Midterm and Final Exams** — These exams will test your understanding of and ability to synthesize the material we have covered in class to that date. The exams may cover material in the readings that we have not discussed in class. While the final exam will focus on material in the second half of the semester, you will still be expected to understand and use basic concepts from the first half of the semester.

**Class Presentation & Handout** — During the second half of the semester (see weekly schedule), you will give a short (10 minute) class presentation on a particularly relevant film, director, movement, or other important aspect of American film history from the 1960s to the present. Along with your presentation, you will give a handout to everyone in the class that offers background information on your topic (e.g., film credits, director filmography, relevant films and dates, etc.), questions for consideration, etc. (The weekly handouts given for each film we view can serve as a model.)

Note: the handout may not be the basis for your actual presentation — i.e., you can't just read your handout as your presentation and expect a good grade. You may use brief film clips as part of your presentation. Guidelines and a sign-up sheet for your presentation will be handed out during the first half of the semester.

**Essay** — You will write a 6-8 page essay on some aspect of the topic of your class presentation. At least part of your essay will focus on a specific film, and you will be expected to use the critical readings assigned for class in your essay. Your essay will be due **one week** after your class presentation. Choose your topics carefully and budget your time wisely. Guidelines for this assignment will be handed out later in the semester.

**Attendance** — Attendance will be taken in every class. Tardiness is disruptive, and counts as an absence. Because we meet only once a week, after the first two absences you will have 3.3% deducted from your final grade for every subsequent absence. Beware: this adds up!

**Disabilities** — If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, you need to notify both me and Disability Resources and Services no later than the second week of the term. You may be asked to provide documentation of your disability to determine the appropriateness of accommodations. To notify Disability Resources and Services, call 648-7890 (Voice or TTD) to schedule an appointment. The office is located in 216 William Pitt Union.

**Plagiarism and Academic Integrity** — You are expected to comply with the university's policy on academic integrity. Anyone suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity (<http://www.fcas.pitt.edu/academicintegrity.html>).

As you already know, plagiarism is the use of someone else's work without giving proper credit. Plagiarism is not tolerated by the university, so don't do it. The *minimum* consequence of plagiarism in this course will be failure of the assignment with no opportunity to make it up.

**NOTE:** The two easiest ways to avoid plagiarizing are to work only with your own ideas or to simply to cite other sources if and when you use them. You are always welcome to use outside materials when writing for this class, as long as you cite them.

**Warning #1** — If you need to do well in this class (e.g., get a certain grade), think about this early in the semester, instead of waiting until you have done poorly and final grades have been turned in. Plan and work accordingly, and talk to me if you are falling behind.

**Warning #2** — Some of the materials in this class may contain violent or otherwise potentially disturbing content and/or language that some people may find offensive, although, then again, they may not. If you feel that any materials might offend your personal or religious beliefs, you may wish to take a different course.

### Weekly Schedule

All assigned readings will be available via CourseWeb.

Week 1: No class

Week 2 (1/9): Introduction to course  
Film: *Some Like It Hot* (Billy Wilder, 1959)

Week 3 (1/16): Hollywood at War  
Film: *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Vincente Minnelli, 1944)  
Read: Thomas Schatz, "World War II and the Hollywood 'War Film'" (FJ #1)

Week 4 (1/23): Post-war Anxieties and Film Noir  
Film: *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur, 1947)  
Read: Michael Conant, "The Impact of the *Paramount Decrees*" (FJ #2)  
John Belton, "Film Noir: Somewhere in the Night" (FJ #3)  
**Due:** FJ #1 (Schatz on WW2)

Week 5 (1/30): The Red Scare in Hollywood; Cold War Anxieties

Film: *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955)

Read: "Seeing Red: Cold War Hollywood" [from Steven J. Ross, ed., Movies and American Society] (FJ #4)

Mick Broderick, "Armageddon Without a Cause: Playing 'Chicken' in the Atomic Age" (FJ #5)

**Due:** FJ #2 (Conant) & #3 (Belton)

Week 6 (2/6): Cold War and National Identity

Film: *North by Northwest* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959)

Read: Steven Cohan, "The Spy in the Gray Flannel Suit" (FJ #6)

**Due:** FJ #4 ("Seeing Red") & #5 (Broderick)

Week 7 (2/13): Hollywood vs. Television; Exploitation & Youth Culture

Film: *The Girl Can't Help It* (Frank Tashlin, 1956)

Read: Thomas Doherty, "Teenagers and Teenpics, 1955-1957: A Study of Exploitation Filmmaking" (FJ #7)

Steve Neale, "Widescreen Composition in the Age of Television" (FJ #8)

**Due:** FJ #6 (Cohan)

Week 8 (2/20): Collapse of the Studio System; Art & Exploitation Cinemas

Film: *X: The Man with the X-Ray Eyes* (Roger Corman, 1963)

**Due:** FJ #7 (Doherty) & #8 (Neale on widescreen)

Week 9 (2/27): New Hollywood

Film: *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967)

Read: Robert Ray, "The Left and Right Cycles" (from Ray, A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980) (FJ #9)

**Due: Take-Home Midterm Exam**

Week 10: **Spring Break**

Week 11 (3/13): The Film School Generation; Vietnam

Film: *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979)

**Due:** FJ #9 (Ray)

[Wednesday, 3/14: Last day to withdraw from class]

Week 12 (3/20): The Age of the Blockbuster

Film: *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975)

Read: Thomas Schatz, "The New Hollywood" (FJ #10)

Steve Neale, "Hollywood Blockbusters: Historical dimensions" (FJ #11)

**Class Presentations**

Week 13 (3/27): Marginal Cinemas & Marginal Audiences

Film: *Super Fly* (Gordon Parks Jr., 1972)

*Illusions* (Julie Dash, 1982)

Read: Ed Guerrero, "The Rise and Fall of Blaxploitation" (FJ #12)

Tommy L. Lott, "Hollywood and independent black cinema" (FJ #13)

**Due:** FJ #10 (Schatz on New Hollywood) & #11 (Neale on blockbusters)

**Class Presentations**

Week 14 (4/3): Hollywood in the Age of Reagan

Film: *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (George P. Cosmatos, 1985)

Read: Susan Jeffords, "Do We Get to Win This Time?: Reviving the Masculine"

(FJ #14)

**Due:** FJ #12 (Guerrero) & #13 (Lott)

**Class Presentations**

Week 15 (4/10): Independent Cinema

Film: *Donnie Darko* (Richard Kelly, 2001)

Read: Chris Holmlund and Justin Wyatt, "From the margins to the mainstream"

(introduction to Contemporary American Independent Film) (FJ #15)

**Due:** FJ #14 (Jeffords)

**Class Presentations**

Week 16 (4/17): American Cinema, Technology, & Globalization

Film: *Godzilla* (Roland Emmerich, 1998)

Read: TBA

**Due:** FJ #15 (Holmlund & Wyatt)

**Due:** Monday, April 23 — **Take-Home Final Exam** (+ last Film Journal)