

## **ENGLIT 1470**

### **Film Directors: John Ford**

Fall 2006  
Monday 6:00-9:50 PM  
CL 249  
CRN: 18605

Professor: Mark Best  
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Office Hours: W 2:00-3:30  
or by appointment, CL 427

#### **Texts —**

Gaylyn Studlar and Matthew Bernstein, eds. John Ford Made Westerns (available at the Pitt Book Center).

Other assigned readings are on electronic reserve at the Hillman Library.

#### **Course Description —**

**"My name's John Ford. I make Westerns."**

So John Ford introduced himself at a 1950 Screen Directors Guild meeting, thus identifying himself with a genre that was simultaneously the most all-American and still largely regarded as cheap B-movie fare. Today, no other director is as closely associated with the Western as John Ford. By 1950 Ford had won three Academy Awards for Best Director. His fourth Academy Award would come in 1953, and he remains the director with the most Best Director Oscars. Ironically, none of these were for Westerns. Indeed, only about a third of the films in his five decades of filmmaking were Westerns, and of those only 14 were made after the coming of sound. Ranging from the intensely personal project to the "job of work," Ford's films cover a wide range of topics, genres, and moods, despite his identity as *the* Western auteur.

In this course we will examine John Ford's career and key films in it, considering subjects of particular interest to Ford and various themes, motifs, and stylistic traits that mark his films. Ford was fond of using the same actors, such as John Wayne and Henry Fonda, and we will look at the role such actors and their star personas played in Ford's work. We will also consider Ford as the object of film studies and criticism. As a "maker of Westerns," a craftsman working well within the Classical Hollywood style, Ford represents the intersection of genre analysis and the auteur theory, and much has been written on Ford's work in terms of both. Finally, throughout the semester we will consider Ford's films as representations of and vehicles for ideological discourses central to American values and experience.

**Grade Breakdown —**

|                  |                                                                                                                              |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Reading Journals | 30%                                                                                                                          |
| Midterm Exam     | 20%                                                                                                                          |
| Final Exam       | 25%                                                                                                                          |
| Essay            | 25%                                                                                                                          |
| Attendance       | -3.3% from your final grade for every<br>absence, excused or unexcused, after<br>the first two (This adds up fast — beware.) |

**Reading Journals —** This assignment will test your understanding and application of the readings assigned throughout the semester. For each of the readings, you will be given several questions, from which you will choose 1 or 2 to answer, combining the author's ideas with your own observations of the film in your discussion. Each journal should be (at least) one single-spaced or two double-spaced typed pages.

Questions will be handed out at least a week before the class for which a reading is assigned. Reading journals will be due the week after that class. Due dates will be included with the questions. Note that multiple assigned readings will result in multiple reading journals due the following week. Not all assigned readings require reading journals, but such readings may be the subject of exam questions.

Journals will be graded as follows: minus = inadequate (below acceptable standards); check = okay (average); check plus = good; plus = excellent. (This translates roughly into the letter grades D, C, B, and A.) Thirteen reading journals are assigned; your overall grade for the journals will be based on your top 10.

The password to access readings on e-reserve is:

**Midterm and Final Take-Home 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.

**Essay —** You will write a 6-8 page analysis of a Ford film we have not watched in class this semester, providing a context for understanding the film, in relation to the rest of John Ford's work and/or other issues relevant to Ford, such as genre, as examined in class and in the readings. This essay will include a close cinematic analysis of at least two brief sequences from the film, one of which must be the final shots of the film.

Full guidelines for this assignment and a list of other Ford films (available for viewing in the Hillman Library) 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 contain violent or otherwise potentially disturbing content and/or language that some people may find offensive, although, then again, they may not. In fact, if you feel that these materials might offend your personal or religious beliefs, you may wish to take a different course.

Kenneth Tynan: How about contemporary American directors?

Orson Welles: Stanley Kubrick and Richard Lester are the only ones that appeal to me—except for the old masters. By which I mean John Ford, John Ford, and John Ford.

— Interview with Orson Welles, *Playboy*, 1967

## Weekly Schedule

RJ = a Reading Journal will be due *next week* on this reading

**Week 1 (8/28):** Introducing John Ford (and this class)

**Film:** *The Quiet Man* (1952)

**Week 2 (9/4):** Labor Day — No Class

### **Part 1: Hollywood Craftsman**

**Week 3 (9/11):** From Low-Brow to High-Brow (and back again)

**Film:** Excerpt from Lindsay Anderson's John Ford (1990)

*The Informer* (1935)

**Read:** Charles J. Maland, "From Aesthete to Pappy" in John Ford Made Westerns (RJ)

Peter Wollen, "The Auteur Theory" [e-reserve] (RJ)

Emanuel Eisenberg, "John Ford: Fighting Irish" (1936) in John Ford Made Westerns

**Week 4 (9/18):** Ideology and Classical Hollywood Cinema

**Film:** *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939)

**Read:** The Editors of Cahiers du Cinéma, "John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*" [e-reserve] (RJ)

**Week 5 (9/25):** Reinventing the Western

**Film:** *Stagecoach* (1939)

**Read:** Robert Ray, "The Thematic Paradigm" from A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980, 55-69 [e-reserve] (RJ)

**Week 6 (10/2):** John Ford's America

**Film:** *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940)

**Read:** Leslie Gossage, "The Artful Propaganda of Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath*" [e-reserve] (RJ)

**Week 7 (10/9):** John Ford Goes to War

**Film:** *The Battle of Midway* (1942)

*They Were Expendable* (1945)

**Read:** Frank S. Nugent, "Hollywood's Favorite Rebel" in John Ford Made Westerns (1949)

(Midterm Exam assigned)

**Week 8 (10/16):** "This is funny stuff, for Pete's sake!"

**Film:** *Mister Roberts* (1955)

**Due:** Take-home Midterm Exam

## **Part 2: Maker of Westerns**

**Week 9** (10/23): The Western and Cold War America

**Film:** *My Darling Clementine* (1946)

**Read:** Edward Buscombe, "Inventing Monument Valley: Nineteenth Century Landscape Photography and the Western Film" [e-reserve] (RJ)  
Stanley Corkin, "Cowboys, Free Markets, Wyatt Earp, and Thomas Dunson" from Cowboys as Cold Warriors: The Western and U.S. History [e-reserve] (RJ)

[10/27 (F) — last day to withdraw from classes]

**Week 10** (10/30): The Cavalry Trilogy 1: Ethnicity in Ford Westerns

**Film:** *Fort Apache* (1948)

**Read:** Charles Ramirez Berg, "The Margin as Center" in John Ford Made Westerns (RJ)  
Joan Dagle, "Linear Patterns and Ethnic Encounters in the Ford Western" (pp. 102-119) in John Ford Made Westerns (RJ)

**Week 11** (11/6): The Cavalry Trilogy 2: Gender in Ford Westerns

**Film:** *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949)

**Read:** Gaylyn Studlar, "Sacred Duties, Poetic Passions" in John Ford Made Westerns (RJ)  
John Ford, "John Wayne—My Pal" (1951) in John Ford Made Westerns

**Week 12** (11/13): *The Searchers*

**Film:** *The Searchers* (1956)

**Read:** Joan Dagle, "Linear Patterns and Ethnic Encounters in the Ford Western" (pp. 119-128) in John Ford Made Westerns (RJ)  
Peter Lehman, "How the West Wasn't Won" in John Ford Made Westerns (RJ)

## **Part 3: Elegy**

**Week 13** (11/20): The Elegaic Western

**Film:** *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962)

**Due:** Essay

**Week 14** (11/27): "There are two sides to every story . . ."

**Film:** *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964)

**Read:** Robin Wood, "'Shall We Gather at the River?' The Late Films of John Ford" in John Ford Made Westerns (RJ)  
Bill Libby, "The Old Wrangler Rides Again" (1964) in John Ford Made Westerns

**Week 15** (12/4): ". . . the values of the American future as it was once dreamed"?

**Film:** *Donovan's Reef* (1963)

**Read:** "About John Ford" (by various directors) (1973) in John Ford Made Westerns