

Englit 1470  
Spring 2006  
Bishop, E.

**Film Directors: John Sayles**  
12637 1470  
**Monday 1-4:50 pm**  
Lawrn 209  
**Dr. Ellen Bishop**  
438/9/06 CL  
[ebishop@pitt.edu](mailto:ebishop@pitt.edu)

### Course Description

John Sayles is one of the few truly independent filmmakers surviving on his own terms in America today. In a career that spans 26 year so far, he has made a number of remarkably interesting films that stand outside the Hollywood system. Financing his own ventures by writing screenplays and being a script doctor for big budget productions, Sayles writes, directs, and edits his own work. Beginning with *The Return of the Secaucus Seven* in 1980, viewers can watch Sayles learn how to apply his script writing skills to the art of directing while incorporating an active social and political consciousness to the films he makes. In this course we will examine how a director learns his craft and gives life to his own particular vision while standing outside the Hollywood machinery.

### Required Texts

*John Sayles Interviews* Diane Carson  
*John Sayles: An Unauthorized Biography of the Pioneering Indie Filmmaker*  
Gerard Molyneaux  
*John Sayles, Filmmaker* Jack Ryan

### Schedule

1/9/06      *The Return of the Secaucus Seven*

1/19/06     *Lianna*      Ryan chap. 1-4, Molyneaux Chap. 2-3

1/23/06     *Baby, It's You*      Ryan Chap. 5, Molyneaux chap. 10, Carson pg. 42

1/30/06     *Brother From Another Planet* Ryan chap. 6, Molyneaux chap. 11,  
Carson pg. 136

2/6/06      *Matewan*      Ryan chap. 7, Molyneaux chap. 12, Carson pg. 67

2/13/06     *Eight Men Out* Ryan chap. 8, Molyneaux chap.14, Carson pg. 94 &  
99

- 2/20/06      *City of Hope* Ryan chap. 9, Molyneaux chap. 15, Carson pg. 106 & 117 & 122
- 2/27/06      *Passionfish* Ryan chap. 10, Molyneaux chap. 16, Carson pg. 129 & 133 & 145
- 3/13/06      *The Secret of Roan Inish* Ryan chap. 11, Molyneaux chap. 17, Carson pg. 156 & 160 & 164
- 3/20/06      *Lone Star* Ryan chap. 12, Molyneaux chap. 18, Carson pg. 171 & 177 & 180 & 185 & 199
- 3/27/06      *Men With Guns* Ryan chap. 13, Molyneaux chap. 19, Carson pg. 202 & 210 & 219 & 235
- 4/3/06        *Limbo*        Molyneaux chap. 20, Carson pg. 223
- 4/10/06      *Silver City*    Molyneaux chap. 21, Carson pg. 239
- 4/17/06      *Sunshine State*

### **Student Responsibilities**

Students are expected to attend class, arrive on time, stay until class is over and complete assignments on time. Active class participation is strongly encouraged. One absence will be ignored, but after that absences will negatively affect students' grades. Students are also expected to display polite behavior as it is commonly understood in American culture (Please refrain from name calling or the use of pejorative or insulting terms.). The emphasis in the class will be on learning and the development of students' intellectual skills.

### **Student Work**

1. Students will be asked to form small groups of 3 (or on rare occasions of 4) and to then choose a film from the above list (with the exception of the first two) and to prepare a class presentation on that film. These presentations should cover such aspects of the films as:

1. The cinematic techniques employed in the service of storytelling.
2. The political and social background of the issues in the film.
3. The way the film is similar to and different from the Hollywood mainstream.

This will be worth 33% of the final grade.

In addition to these key elements of all the films, students will want to examine Sayles' growth as a filmmaker across the films, his use of various highly skilled cinematographers, and what we might call the development of a style. The presentations should also be structured so as to invite the class to participate in the discussion of the film. Each student in the group will be asked to write their own paper on the film they have made the presentation on as well.

2. Students will be asked to write a final paper on a topic related to the ideas and issues presented by the course. Students will be asked to propose a paper topic by the last class before spring break (2/27/06). Such topics as Sayles' work with any of the cinematographers (and their backgrounds and other work), explorations of any of the social or political issues raised in the films, or close readings of any one of the films are all possibilities.

This will be worth 33% of the final grade.

3. Active class participation is also required.

This will be worth 33% of the final grade. The last 1% of the grade will be a freebee.

### **Academic Integrity**

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

### **Disabilities**

If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, you need to notify both the instructor and the Disability Resources and Services no later than the 2nd 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.