



SPRING 2020

CLASS: TUESDAYS & FRIDAYS, 12-1:15PM, TC 112

SCREENINGS: WEDNESDAYS, 7-9:30PM, RAZZO HALL

PROF. ROX SAMER

EMAIL: RSAMER@CLARKU.EDU

OFFICE: 202 TRAINA CENTER

OFFICE HOURS: FRIDAYS, 1:30-2:30PM, & BY APPOINTMENT

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course offers a history of US film until 1960. Narrative fiction film and the Hollywood studio system will be our primary focus. However, we will also study documentary and experimental film, both of which blossomed in the 1920s and developed alongside and often in conversation with Hollywood across the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. Together we will take a number of approaches to US film history. We will study how film evolved as a commercial art form, producing genres and stars meant to entertain the masses. We will also study how social and political developments of the 20th century—including Jim Crow, suffrage, immigration, censorship, the Great Depression, WWII, the Cold War—contributed to the evolution of the medium. We will witness how film not only held up a

mirror to such changes, reflecting American society back to itself, but also served as an important site for the thinking and imagining of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and nationality. While we will at times be concerned with auteurs (and will count among them filmmakers of color, women filmmakers, and queer filmmakers), we will be equally preoccupied with the intellectual labor of film audiences.

Students should leave the class with:

- A thorough introduction to the first half of US film history
- Deeper knowledge of early 20th US history more broadly speaking
- Greater confidence in their skills of film analysis and Screen Studies research

REQUIRED TEXTS

All texts required for this course will be available as PDFs on Moodle.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING POLICIES

Participation: 10% of final grade

Small Group Production Assignments: 10%

Discussion Leading: 10%

Silent Film Paper: 15%

Exam #1: 15%

Exam #2: 15%

Classical Hollywood Research Paper: 25%

Your final grade will be calculated as a score out of 100 possible points for the semester. A standard 90-80-70-60 scale will be applied.

“A” work extends and expands our in-class discussions and offers original and creative thought. It meets all elements of the assignment or exam prompt and responds with a high degree of organizational foresight. “A” is reserved for outstanding work.

“B” work responds to the assignment or exam prompt insightfully, revealing strong command of the material we have covered. “B” is reserved for good work. “B” work, however, is less bold, less original, and/or less organized and well written than “A” work.

“C” work completes assignments and meets assignment requirements, while demonstrating a partial understanding of course content and minimal original thinking.

“D” work meets the technical requirements enumerated in the assignment or exam prompt, while failing to demonstrate any significant course-specific learning.

“F” work fails to meet the requirements of the assignment or exam, including but not limited to: lack of concrete textual analysis, inability to answer prompts, insufficient length, excessive grammatical and/or spelling errors, or late submission.

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION

You are expected to attend every class meeting. While we will have weekly readings, much of the course content will appear in the form of lectures and class discussions. Students who miss class will be ill prepared for the exams and paper assignments. If you must miss class because of illness or an emergency, it is your responsibility to secure notes from a classmate and/or meet with the professor during office hours to learn about what you missed. Good class participation involves contributing to the discussion in an informed manner, being attentive to that conversation, and being respectful of the participants in it.

This course, like all other 1 credit courses at Clark, comes with the expectation that over the course of the semester students will devote 180 hours to its study. This means that in addition to the forty or so hours we will spend together in the classroom you should plan to devote another 140 hours to your readings, screenings, and assignments. Much of this time should go to reading (and arguably re-reading) each week. If you consistently put in this time, you ought to be prepared to serve as a productive class participant.

Phones must be put away for the duration of the class. Laptops and tablets should be used exclusively for taking notes and accessing readings. I encourage you to print the readings and take notes in a notebook if internet access will be a distraction for you.

Although you are welcome to re-watch our weekly films at the Traina Resource Library, attending our weekly Wednesday night screenings is mandatory. Screening a film in a theater with an audience is vastly different than watching a film at home on your laptop. During screenings, all devices should be away. Use a paper and pen for any notes. Students should avoid sitting in the back two rows behind the dividing aisle. Weeks when I am unable to attend, an attendance sheet will be passed around.

LEADING DISCUSSION

Most Fridays will be devoted largely to one or two student groups leading discussions of that week's film(s) and the essays assigned on the films. You will be expected to lead a 30-minute discussion of your selected essay, alongside one or two of your classmates, with minimal consultation of your notes. Each group is expected to prepare 6-8 discussion questions, complete with key passages to have the class turn to should doing as much prove helpful. Please print and submit a hardcopy of your questions to me in class as well as submit these questions via email the same day.

Before drafting your questions, I would encourage you to read ["How to Lead a Discussion"](#) and ["Designing Effective Discussion Questions"](#) on the Stanford University Teaching Commons website. Here is a synthesis of a few of the two posts' main points:

- Good questions are both answerable and challenging
- Build from less to more challenging questions as well as from more focused to relational or connecting questions; also mix up the kinds of questions you ask and include analytical, comparative, causal, and clarifying questions
- Avoid simple yes-no questions as well as leading questions, slanted questions, and elliptical or vague questions (this is hard)

SMALL GROUP PRODUCTION ASSIGNMENTS

Over the course of the semester you will complete three small group production assignments. These assignments are designed to help you learn key concepts by putting them into practice using the digital media tools you have access to.

These assignments will be given on Fridays and due Mondays. You will work in the same small group each time, and each small group will include 7-8 members. Each group member is expected to contribute in a roughly equal fashion. Everyone should be involved in conceptualizing the project and/or writing. But after that, I would recommend delegating roles (for example, one person directing, one editing, one operating the camera, one producing, and the remaining three or four acting). You can either alternate roles each assignment or, alternatively, can play to your strengths and maintain roles across projects. Group work can be challenging. Try to work through any challenges as a team and let me know if you experience insurmountable obstacles. These assignments will be graded on a check, check plus, check minus or zero basis (roughly translating to an A, B, C or F). All group members will receive the same grade unless I learn that one or more did not pull their weight and/or contribute. Please have producers submit group production assignments via email. They should provide a short narrativization of who did what and CC all members of the group.

EXAMS & PAPERS

Exams study guides and the silent film paper prompt will be distributed one to two weeks before the exam is scheduled and silent film paper is due and three weeks before the Classical Hollywood research paper is due. Exam #1 will cover all content up until that point and exam #2 all material after exam #1. The silent film paper will be approximately 1,500 words in length. The Classical Hollywood paper will be approximately 2,000 words in length. The latter will include original research, and both will require outside screening. Please plan your schedule accordingly.

SUBMITTING WORK VIA EMAIL

Submit all written assignments as Word docs via email. When submitting work, be sure to include a header at the top of your assignment that includes your name. Also be sure to save all files as "LastName_Assignment," i.e. "Smith_Paper1" or "Smith_Paper2." Students who fail to do as much will be penalized a third of a letter grade.

EXTRA CREDIT

Over the course of the semester, I will announce a number of screenings and events on campus related to our course. Attending Prof. Laura Horak's talk on February 3rd as well as Prof. Sarah Keller's talk on March 25th will be mandatory. Attending others, however, will earn you a half point of extra credit. Should you attend four such events, you will earn two points of extra credit, such that an 88 (B+) would become a 90 (A-).

COURSE SCHEDULE

UNIT I: THE SILENT ERA

Jan. 14, 15 & 17

The Cinema of Attractions

Read: Greg Smith, "It's Just a Movie"

Screen: *Jack and the Beanstalk* (Porter, 1902); *The Great Train Robbery* (Porter, 1903); *Down the Hudson* (Armitage & Weed, 1903); *Panorama from Times Building, New York* (McCutcheon, 1905); *Coney Island at Night* (Porter, 1905); *Interior New York Subway, 14th Street to 42nd Street* (Bitzer, 1905); *The House with Closed Shutters* (Griffith, 1910); *Mixed Pets* (Guy Blaché, 1911); *Making an American Citizen* (Guy Blaché, 1912); and *Suspense* (Webber, 1913)

Read: Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde"

Silent Film Comedy

Jan. 20

Small Group Assignment #1 Due

Jan. 21, 22 & 24

Read: Charlie Chaplin, "Pantomime and Comedy"

Screen: *The Rink* (1916) and *The General* (1926)

Read: Tom Gunning, "Chaplin and the Body of Modernity" & Muriel Andrin, "Back to the 'Slap': Slapstick's Hyperbolic Gesture and the Rhetoric of Violence"

The Birth of the Studio System & Early African American Film Cultures

Jan. 28, 29 & 31

Read: Clyde Taylor, "The Re-Birth of the Aesthetic in Cinema"

Screen: *Within Our Gates* (Micheaux, 1920) & *A Florida Enchantment* (Drew, 1914)

Read: Jacqueline Stewart, "'We Were Never Immigrants': Oscar Micheaux and the Reconstruction of Black American Identity"

Gender Trouble From the Silent Era to Sound

Feb. 3

Laura Horak, "'Representing Ourselves into Existence': Tracing the History of Trans Filmmaking in the United States and Canada," 7:30pm, Razzo Hall

Feb. 4, 5 & 7

Read: Siobhan Somerville, "The Queer Career of Jim Crow: Racial and Sexual Transformation in *A Florida Enchantment*"

Guest Lecture by Laura Horak

Screen: *Christopher Strong* (Arzner, 1933)

Read: Jane Gaines, "Dorothy Arzner's Trousers"

UNIT II: CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD

The Motion Picture Production Code

Feb. 10

Silent Film Paper Due

Feb. 11, 12 & 14

Read: "The Production Code" & "Special Regulations on Crime in Motion Pictures"

Screen: *The Public Enemy* (Wellman, 1931) and *Baby Face* (Green, 1933)

Read: Richard Maltby, "'Baby Face', or How Joe Breen Made Barbara Stanwyck Atone for Causing the Wall Street Crash" & Richard Maltby, "A Short and Dangerous Life: The Gangster Film, 1930-32"

Classical Hollywood Style

Feb. 18, 19 & 21

Read: Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, "The Continuity System"

Screen: *Bringing Up Baby* (Hawks, 1938)

Read: Stanley Cavell, "Leopards in Connecticut: *Bringing Up Baby*"

<p>Feb. 24</p> <p>Feb. 25, 26 & 28</p>	<p>Genres & The Star System</p> <p>Small Group Assignment #2 Due</p>
	<p>Read: Jane Feuer, Selections from <i>The Hollywood Musical</i></p> <p>Screen: <i>The Wizard of Oz</i> (Fleming, 1939)</p> <p>Read: Richard Dyer, "Judy Garland and Gay Men"</p>
<p>Mar. 10, 11 & 13</p>	<p>Hollywood Goes to War</p> <p>Exam #1</p> <p>Screen: <i>Casablanca</i> (Curtiz, 1942)</p> <p>Read: Umberto Eco, "Casablanca: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage"</p>
<p>UNIT III: ALTERNATIVE MODES OF AMERICAN CINEMA</p>	
<p>Mar. 17, 18 & 20</p>	<p>Documentary, Propaganda, & WWII</p> <p>Read: Thomas Doherty, "Documenting the 1940s"</p> <p>Screen: <i>Prelude to the War</i> (Capra, 1942) & <i>The Battle of Britain</i> (Capra, 1943)</p> <p>Read: Erik Barnouw, "Bugler"</p>
<p>Mar. 24, 25 & 27</p>	<p>The American Avant-Garde, Part 1</p> <p>Read: Scott MacDonald, "Avant-Doc: Eight Intersections"; Cinema 16, "Statement of Purposes"; & Maya Deren, "Amateur Versus Professional"</p> <p>Sarah Keller, "Both Sides of the Coin: Maya Deren's <i>Experimental Film Practice</i>," 7:30pm, Razzo Hall— includes <i>Ritual in Transfigured Time</i> (Deren, 1946)</p> <p>Read: Rudolph Arnheim, "To Maya Deren" & Maya Deren, "Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality"</p>
<p>Mar. 30</p>	<p>The American Avant-Garde, Part 2</p> <p>Small Group Assignment #3 Due</p>

Mar. 31 & Apr. 1 & 3

Read: Jonas Mekas, "A Call For A New Generation of Film-makers"

Screen: *Fireworks* (Anger, 1947); *Puce Moment* (Anger, 1949); *Bridges-Go-Round* (Clarke, 1958); *Skyscraper* (Clarke, 1959); *The Wonder Ring* (Brakhage, 1955); *Cat's Cradle* (Brakhage, 1959); & *Window Water Baby Moving* (Brakhage, 1959)

Read: Stan Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision* excerpt & Cinema 16 *Fireworks* documents

UNIT IV: HOLLYWOOD IN CRISIS

Film Noir, the Red Scare, & the Hollywood Blacklist

Apr. 7, 8 & 10

Read: Raymond Borde & Etienne Chaumeton, "Towards a Definition of Film Noir" & Janey Place & Lowell Peterson, "Some Visual Motifs of *Film Noir*"

Screen: *Touch of Evil* (Welles, 1958)

Read: Andre Bazin, "Return to Hollywood"

New Hollywood On the Horizon

Apr. 14, 15 & 17

Read: Yannis Tzioumakis, "The New Hollywood and the Independent Hollywood"

Screen: *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960)

Read: Robin Wood, "Psycho" & *Hitchcock/Truffaut* excerpt

Wrapping Up

Apr. 21, 22 & 24

Exam #2

Screen: *The Apartment* (Wilder, 1960)

No reading

Finals Period

Classical Hollywood Research Paper Due

SCREENING CONTENT WARNING

Screenings contain physical violence, sexual violence, suicide, and other forms of upsetting content. Considering the historical period this course covers and the various political, social, and cultural changes the country was undergoing at this time, we will regularly be discussing challenging topics, including racism, sexism, and homophobia. Please speak to me immediately if you have any concerns. But also know that, if discussing such matters in their historical specificity and with the emotions that cinema is designed to engender is difficult for you, this might not be the course for you.

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

College can be stressful. This stress can be exasperated by crises. If you suspect you might be experiencing excessive anxiety, depression or some other mental health concern, please visit Clark's Office of Counseling and Personal Growth. They are located at 114 Woodland Street and open Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm (closed 12-1pm for lunch). Their phone number is (508) 793-7678. Their website also has a great list of resources: <https://www.clarku.edu/offices/counseling/mental-health-toolbox/>.

ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

If you require accommodations in this course due to a disability or a personal circumstance that will affect your learning in this course, please contact me, so we can discuss the best ways to meet your needs. Any student who needs accommodations for disabilities should also register with the Office of Disability Services. For information, please contact Adam Kosakowski, Director of Disability Services, at 508-798-4368 or at <AKosakowski@clarku.edu>.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is a basic value for all higher learning. Simply expressed, it requires that work presented must be wholly one's own and unique to that course. All direct quotations must be identified by source. Academic integrity can be violated in many ways: for example, by submitting someone else's paper as one's own; cheating on an exam; submitting one paper to more than one class; copying a computer program; altering data in an experiment; or quoting published material without proper citation of references or sources. Attempts to alter an official academic record will also be treated as violations of academic integrity.

To ensure academic integrity and safeguard students' rights, all suspected violations of academic integrity are reported to the College Board. Such reports must be carefully documented, and students accused of the infraction are notified of the charge. In the case of proven academic dishonesty, the student will receive a sanction, which may range from an F in the assignment or course to suspension or expulsion from the University.

The complete academic integrity policy is available with Academic Advising at <http://www.clarku.edu/offices/aac/integrity.cfm>

NOTICE: FACULTY MEMBERS ARE “RESPONSIBLE EMPLOYEES”

This notice is to inform you that the faculty member associated with this course is considered a “Responsible Employee” by Clark University. As such, I am required to report all alleged sexual offenses to the University’s Title IX Coordinator, Lynn Levey, llevy@clarku.edu. The only exceptions to this reporting responsibility are the community members who have been designated and/or trained as “Confidential” Sources. This includes the professional staff in Clark’s Center for Counseling and Personal Growth and the medical providers at the Health Center, as well as other individuals listed at <http://bit.ly/2eUOGGx>

DISCLAIMER

As the professor, I reserve the right to make changes to any information contained in this syllabus at any time during the semester. Changes will be announced, and an updated version of the syllabus will be posted on Moodle and/or distributed to students.

All grade decisions are final.