



SCRN 120: History of US Film, 1960-present SPRING 2021

CLASS: TUESDAYS & THURSDAYS, 4:15-5:30PM, ZOOM

SCREENINGS: ONLINE (ASYNCHRONOUS WEEKLY BEFORE THURSDAY CLASS WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS—SEE COURSE SCHEDULE)

PROF. ROX SAMER (THEY/THEM)

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OFFICE HOURS: THURSDAY AFTERNOONS, 2-4PM, VIA ZOOM & BY APPOINTMENT. EMAIL TO SCHEDULE BY WEDNESDAY AT 5PM.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course offers a history of US film from 1960 to present. Narrative fiction film will be our focus. However, we will also study documentary and experimental film, both of which fostered great alternative film cultures in the 1960s and 70s. Together we will take a number of approaches to US film history. We will study how film evolved as a commercial art form after the collapse of the studio system and the Motion Picture Production Code, and we will study how cultural and social developments—including the Vietnam War, the emergence of a mass counterculture, Civil Rights, the Women's Movement, and Gay Liberation—as well as economic and technological developments affected 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, class, gender, sexuality, and national identity. 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 audiences and the intellectual labor of film reception.

Students should leave the class with:

- A thorough introduction to the second half of US film history
- Deeper knowledge of US history more broadly speaking, especially the history of US social movements and changes in American society's thinking around race, gender, and sexuality
- Familiarity with a wide range of methods of film analysis, including historical research methods

REQUIRED TEXTS

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

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING POLICIES

Participation: 10% of final grade
Moodle Assignments: 10%
Film Reception Group Assignment: 10%
Take Home Essay Exam 1: 20%
Black Independent Cinema Paper: 25%
Take Home Essay Exam 2: 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

Barring illness, emergency or development of covid-like symptoms, you are expected to attend every class meeting. Students who miss class will be ill prepared for assignments. If you miss a class meeting, 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.

Students are expected to attend class having completed that day's reading and screening homework and taken careful notes on these materials. Students should come prepared to discuss the homework with their professor and peers.

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.

Across the semester, we will talk about a wide range of complicated and emotionally charged topics, including matters of race, class, gender, and sexuality. I want you to develop the ability to take a strong position on the issues that matter to you most, to defend what you believe in, and to question one another about those beliefs with both kindness and conviction. Acknowledging that we all bring different backgrounds and experiences to the various topics at hand, I also want you to learn how to listen carefully to what others are saying and be willing to change your mind when the ideas, questions, or arguments you hear are convincing. Listening to and learning from the opinions and perspectives of others gives us a broader view of the world we share and is the first step to building a better world to live in together.

Relatedly, I want to encourage you to take risks and get involved, even when it might feel easier keep to the sidelines. Here are some guidelines, which should help:

1. Contribute at least once a week to class discussion. Whenever possible, speak in "I" statements and do not generalize or try to speak for the class as a whole or some demographic or group as a whole.
2. Treat one another with respect. This includes using each other's correct pronouns (and correcting yourself if you make a mistake).
3. Know that anything you bring up is up for discussion and others are free to agree, disagree, or otherwise respond respectfully to what you have said.
4. Begin comments by responding to what other students or the professor have said before you. If you intend to move the dialogue in a new direction, inform the class of as much and make sure they are ready to move on.
5. Practice making arguments, not simply stating opinions. This requires you to always have your reading materials before you and be able to point to specific moments or features of a text to support your ideas.

This course, like all other 1 unit 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 (virtual and/or physical) you should plan to devote another 140 hours to your readings, screenings, and assignments. Much of this time should go to reading each week. If you consistently put in this time, you ought to be prepared to serve as a productive class participant.

LEARNING ONLINE

In preparation for participating in class via Zoom, please:

1. Download the Zoom App.
2. Purchase and use either a headset w/microphone or a set of earbuds with an inline microphone (less than \$25; laptop microphones are inadequate).
3. Make sure your name in Zoom is the name you would like to go by.
4. Identify your pronouns in parentheses after your name (by changing your name to include in profile), if you are comfortable sharing as much (if not, I will only use your name, not pronouns, and ask that classmates do as well).
5. Participate as you would in person, i.e. raising your physical hand and/or chiming in verbally, rather than using the chat or "hand raise" function.
6. Reserve the class chat for the sharing of resources, small group discussion prompts, and the like (i.e. not classroom discussion proper).

7. Mute yourself if there are loud and distracting noises around you.
8. Use the camera whenever possible.
9. Refrain from texting, emailing or chatting, just as you would in person.
10. Refrain from distracting Zoom backgrounds and profile pictures.

We will likely figure out after a few meetings what works best for us as a class. If we need to switch to using the "hand raise" function, for example, I will alert the class.

SUBMITTING WORK VIA EMAIL

Submit all 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.

MOODLE ASSIGNMENTS

Each Wednesday you will need to make short Moodle forum post, responding to one of four prompts:

1. What was your number 1 take away from Tuesday's lecture and why?
2. What was your number 1 take away from Tuesday's reading and why?
3. What strike you as this week's 2-3 key concepts and how would you define them after completing Tuesday's reading and attending class Tuesday?
4. What is a question you have leaving Tuesday's class?

You can pick from each of these questions each week but please mix up which you answer and be sure to answer each at least twice over the course of the semester.

You should complete these posts by Wednesday at noon. You should also aim to respond to one or more of your classmates' posts by Wednesday at 10pm. Both your answers and your responses should be roughly 200 words in length. When referencing a reading, provide page numbers, so your classmates know what passages specifically you are referring to. Please title your posts indicating which question you are answering.

One goal of this assignment is to build an archive of lecture and reading notes that you can return to in preparation for the midterm and final exams. Please complete them with the appropriate care. Like participation more generally, you will not receive regular grades on these assignments. But, if you submit these assignments punctually and consistently put thought into them, you will receive an "A" for this portion of your grade come June. If you are not punctual in submitting these assignments, forget to do them altogether, and/or regularly submit them with signs of little thought or care (including poor grammar and typos), you will receive a lower grade.

FILM RECEPTION GROUP ASSIGNMENT

Each of the weeks we study a feature film that received wide release, we will devote part of our discussion to a set of questions generated from a group's research of the film's critical reception. In groups of three or four, you will find and read as many reviews as you can find of the film from the year of its release (if reviews are sparse, you

can extend the window by a couple years). I would recommend starting by watching the film ahead of time (if you have not seen it before) and then creating a shared folder and uploading PDFs of reviews found. Forty-eight hours ahead of the class session (typically Tuesday by 4:15, though, in one instance it will be a Sunday by 4:15), you will submit an annotated bibliography of three or four of these sources (depending on size of your group) and a list of four to five thoughtful and provocative open-ended discussion questions for the class coming out of your research. I will look these over and give you feedback on the best two questions (and/or how to revise them for better discussion). You will then succinctly (in 8-10 minutes) present your research to the class as a group before leading small group discussions for 15-20 minutes in breakout rooms.

For your presentation, please prepare a sparse (but well designed) Powerpoint or other form of presentation with two quotations. There should be a title slide (complete with an image or two from the film, the film's title and release date, and the film director's name). Each quotation should get its own slide in turn, and the two approved/revise discussion questions should appear on a fourth slide at the very end. The slides with quotations should include the name of the critic and where and when their review was published. In presenting these slides, provide a succinct summation of the film's critical reception, introductions of selected quotations as exemplary of your research findings, and brief narrativization of how you arrived at your two or three discussion questions.

Your annotated bibliography, submitted forty-eight hours ahead of class alongside the four or five drafted discussion questions, ought to be a substantial and polished document. Each of your sources should be formatted according to the Chicago Manual of Style and below each source should appear a roughly 350-word annotation. Annotations should be single-spaced and indented on the left. Leave an extra space between different entries. Use twelve-point Times New Roman font and one-inch margins all around. Each annotation should take one paragraph to detail: 1. the perspective being brought to the film review; 2. the thesis/argument/purpose of the review; 3. a summary of the logical progression of the reviewer's argument, if there is one; and 4. the best examples or evidence provided for arguments made.

All selected sources should be written by film critics, scholars, and/or arts editors and published within a year of the film's original release in a reputable newspaper or trade journal (such as *The New York Times*, *The Village Voice*, *The New Yorker*, *The Chicago Sun-Times*, *Cineaste*, *Film Comment*, *Sight & Sound*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Variety*, or *Rolling Stone*). No retrospective reviews or contemporary reviews will be accepted. Before beginning your research, I would recommend watching Librarian Andrew Haggarty's film review research video, which he prepared for your support.

The week you contribute to a film reception project, you are not required to participate in the week's Moodle assignment (though you might want to read classmates' contributions in preparation for leading discussion).

This is a group project. Like any other group project, you are more likely to do well if all members collaborate and contribute equally. That being said, you will be graded individually. Please note which bibliographic entries were written by whom, and please be sure to give all group members equal opportunity during the oral presentation.

EXTRA CREDIT

Over the course of the semester, I may announce screenings, talks, and/or other events on campus or online related to the subject of our course. Attending each of these 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-).

WEEKLY WORKFLOW

Most weeks will share a similar flow of coursework. Tuesdays will start with a half hour lecture on the topic at hand, followed by a discussion of the day's reading. In preparation for this lecture and discussion, you will need to review usually 20+ minutes of clips ahead of time. I will share these clips to Moodle each week by Monday at 5pm. After lecture, you will need to make a short Moodle post (see above) before watching that week's feature film and completing the reading for Thursday. Thursday will be spent in discussion of the film and reading at hand with students often leading small group discussions, inspired by their research into the film's critical reception (see above).

A few weeks, when we are watching short films, you will be asked to watch two or three before class on Tuesday and the remaining three to five before class on Thursday. The last week of class you will have your choice of watching one of three feature films (though you are welcome and encouraged to watch two or all three).

COURSE SCHEDULE

UNIT I: NEW HOLLYWOOD

The End of the Studio Era

Feb. 23 Read: Greg Smith, "It's Just a Movie"

Feb. 25 Screen: *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)

Read: Robin Wood, "Psycho"

1967

Mar. 2 Read: Mark Harris, *Pictures at a Revolution* excerpt

Mar. 4 Screen: *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Stanley Kramer, 1967)

Read: Mark Harris, *Pictures at a Revolution* second excerpt

Blaxploitation

Mar. 9 Read: Eric Pierson, "In the Beginning There Was Shaft"

Mar. 11 Screen: *Coffy* (Jack Hill, 1973)
Read: Kara Keeling, "'A Black Belt in Bar Stool': Blaxploitation, Surplus, and *The L Word*" excerpt

Gender, Genre & The Blockbuster

Mar. 16 Read: Bill Nichols, "Genre Films" excerpt

Mar. 18 Screen: *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982)
Read: Vivian Sobchack, "Postfuturism," & Donna Haraway, "The Cyborg Manifesto" excerpt

Ryn Silverstein Guest Lecture

Mar. 23 No Class (Clark break)

Mar. 25 **No Class—Take Home Essay Exam 1 due at 6pm via email**

UNIT II: ALTERNATIVE CINEMAS OF 60S & 70S

Direct Cinema

Mar. 30 Read: Bill Nichols, "How Can We Describe the Observational, Participatory, Reflexive, and Performative Modes of Documentary Film?" excerpt

Apr. 1 Screen: *Don't Look Back* (D.A. Pennebaker, 1967)
Read: Jeanne Hall, "'Don't You Ever Just Watch': American Cinema Verité and *Don't Look Back*"

The American Avant-Garde

Apr. 6 Screen: *Bridges-Go-Round* (Shirley Clarke, 1958);
Mothlight (Stan Brakhage, 1963); *Prelude: Dog
Star Man* (Stan Brakhage, 1963); & *Go! Go! Go!*
(Marie Menken, 1964)

Read: Stan Brakhage, *The Metaphors on Vision*
excerpt

Apr. 8 Screen: *Window Water Baby Moving* (Stan
Brakhage, 1959); *Blow Job* (Andy Warhol, 1964); &
Scorpio Rising (Kenneth Anger, 1964)

Read: Amos Vogel, *Film as a Subversive Art*
excerpt

Feminist Documentary & Experimental Cinema

Apr.13 Screen: *The Woman's Film* (The Women's Caucus
of the San Francisco Newsreel, 1971) & *Inside
Women Inside* (Christine Choy & Cynthia Maurizio
with Third World Newsreel, 1978)

Read: Julia Lesage, "The Political Aesthetics of the
Feminist Documentary Film"

Apr. 15 Screen: *Fuses* (Carolee Schneemann, 1967);
Women I Love (Barbara Hammer, 1976); & *Rules
of the Road* (Su Friedrich, 1993)

Read: Barbara Hammer, "For an Active Cinema"
& Su Friedrich, "Does Radical Content Deserve
Radical Form?"

LA Rebellion

Apr. 20 No Class (SCRN 120 Day of Rest)

Apr. 22 Screen: *Killer of Sheep* (Charles Burnett, 1977)

Read: James Baldwin, "Where the Grapes of
Wrath Are Stored" from *The Devil Finds Work*

**UNIT III: THE 1980S, 90S
& BEYOND**

Indiewood

Apr. 27 Read: Richard Dyer, "The Light of the World"

Apr. 29 Screen: *Do the Right Thing* (Spike Lee, 1989)

Read: Robert Chrisman, "What's the Right Thing?
Notes on the Deconstruction of Black Ideology"

New Queer Cinema

May 4 Read: B. Ruby Rich, "New Queer Cinema"

May 6 Screen: *Go Fish* (Rose Troche, 1994)

Read: Lisa Henderson, "Simple Pleasures: Lesbian
Community and *Go Fish*"

The 1990s RomCom

May 11 *No Reading*

May 13 Screen: *My Best Friend's Wedding* (P.J. Hogan,
1997)

Read: Kyle Stevens, "What a Difference a Gay
Makes: Marriage in the 1990s Romantic Comedy"

May 14 **Black Indie Cinema Paper due at 5pm via email**

Return of the Blockbuster

May 18 Screen: *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997)

Read: Anne Friedberg, "The End of Cinema: Multi-
media and Technological Change"

May 20 No Class (Clark break)

Mumblecore

- May 24 Screen: *Hannah Takes The Stairs* (Joe Swanberg, 2007); *Wendy and Lucy* (Kelly Reichardt, 2008); OR *Medicine for Melancholy* (Barry Jenkins, 2008)
- Read: Susan Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema"
- May 27 In Class Reflection & Review (no homework)
- June 1 **Take Home Essay Exam 2 due at 5pm via email**

SCREENING CONTENT WARNING

Many of this course's screenings contain physical violence, sexual violence, hate speech and other derogatory and/or outdated terms. Please speak to me at the start of the semester if you have any specific concerns. In my teaching experience as well as that of colleagues in gender and sexuality studies and cinema and media studies, it has been nearly impossible for a professor to predict what will be triggering to individual students. Many triggers (such as names, colors, sounds, etc.), in their very nature, cannot be predicted. Trigger warnings do not distinguish between oppositional or critical representations of traumatizing experience and sensationalistic or gratuitous representations. Overreliance upon trigger warnings can sometimes censor important representations of challenging histories and experiences authored by and for queer, transgender, women, and/or POC subjects. For these reasons, it is my policy that each individual student take responsibility for their own mental health needs and proactively research and clearly communicate any concerns at the start of the semester.

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.

This extends to the modality of any given class session. I reserve the right to move this class entirely online, should that be what’s wisest for my own health or that of this class.