Hollywood in the 1930s

This course introduces students to Hollywood films and filmmaking, from the transition to sound film in late 1920s and early 1930s, through the Great Depression and to the beginning of World War II. It covers basic vocabulary of film analysis and aesthetics, as we learn to describe films’ formal properties, while attending to Hollywood’s industrial structure. Topics will include the economic history of the studio and star system, genres, technical achievements (sound, color), the Production Code, and the impact of the Depression on movies and audiences. At the end of the course students will have acquired an understanding of how 1930s Hollywood films functioned as significant aesthetic, commercial and cultural artifacts.

This course aims to: 1) introduce you to the development of the Hollywood production process in the 1930s, and 2) deepen your understanding and encourage critical awareness of the textual and contextual features of Hollywood filmmaking.

Having successfully completed this course you will be able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:
- the diversity of Hollywood genres, stars, and studios in the 1930s.
- patterns and strategies of Hollywood film production, and their relationship with wider social and political determinants in 1930s American culture.
- recurrent themes and motifs, such as marriage and romance, discourses of ethnicity, immigration, crime, and gender, and the relationship of these discourses to institutional frameworks such as economics and censorship.

You will also develop the following key skills:
- engage with different and sometimes competing methodologies (economics, genre theory, political history).
- deepen your critical skills, your knowledge of theoretical paradigms and historical backgrounds.
- incorporate your skills as a viewer into a detailed analysis of film that incorporates close textual analysis.

Classroom Environment
Questions or concerns relative to class material and classroom environment should be first discussed with the instructor, who will make every effort to address them. Some of the audiovisual material presented contains explicit nudity or depictions of sexual acts; there is material that deals with issues of violence, sexism, sexuality, and racial stereotypes. All material has been selected to engage with the course’s focus and should therefore be considered from an analytical rather than a moral perspective. It is your responsibility to see me if you
require more specific forewarnings about the content of individual films or readings.

You may use your computer to take notes, but all computers must be turned off during screenings. All phones should be turned off in class.

**Course Expectations:**
1. **To attend class.** Written notification is expected if you cannot come to class due to illness or serious impediment. As the course depends on everyone’s contribution, students who miss more than two classes will be penalized (2% per missed class deducted from final grade unless medical document is provided). Everyone is expected to arrive on time: be discrete if you are late or leave early.

2. **To read the assigned materials.** The calendar gives you a week by week description of what will be discussed in class as well as required reading. You will want to consult the calendar a few days before each class. The readings are not easy! You may need to go over them more than once in order to be fully prepared for class discussion. The readings will provide us with the common ground upon which we will base our conversations. Without that common ground, our conversations will lose some of their richness. **Readings must therefore be done before class.** Optional readings are sometimes suggested for those who wish to research a week’s topics further.

3. **To be attentive and participate in class.** Participation does not simply mean speaking aloud in class, although that is essential. Students should participate by actively following the discussion, and by contributing to our quarter-long conversation through the insights they present in their papers and projects.

4. **To complete the required assignments in a timely fashion.** The assignments provide you with both informal and formal opportunities to articulate your responses to the issues we’ll be discussing. You will get the most out of the course if you turn in your work on time.

**Assignments and Evaluations**
1. We will have periodical **writing exercises in class,** which are designed both to ensure that you are keeping up with the reading, and to stimulate class discussion. I will pose a question about the reading at the beginning of class, and ask you to write a paragraph or two in response.

2. You will write **three responses to films** screened in class. The first will be a film review, the second a formal analysis, and the last will be a critical analysis. Instructions for each will be provided in class.

3. With a partner, you will research and offer a **presentation** to introduce one of the films screened in class.
4. You will write one **final paper** (10-12 pages). This paper will incorporate your independent research on the course material, and will require you to use the research and documentation skills that you should have developed throughout the semester.

Writing Exercises: 15%
Film Responses: 30%
Oral Presentation: 10%
Final Paper: 35%
Attendance and Participation: 10%

**General Guidelines for Written Assignments**
Organization, grammar, spelling, syntax, formatting, punctuation, writing style and the use of illustrations will count towards your final grade. Computer difficulties will not be accepted as an excuse for a late submission; you may want to print you paper the night before to avoid last minute problems.

I recommend using a standard writing guide such as the *MLA Style Manual* and Timothy Corrigan’s *A Short Guide to Writing about Film*.

All written assignments must be handed to the instructor in class on the day they are due. Electronic copies may be exceptionally accepted (preferably in a .pdf format). All assignments are to be written in Times New Roman, 12 pt, and double-spaced. Images are to be added at the end of the document and do not factor in the page count.

Your final paper should be written in an essay form, and should be 10-12 pages (approximately 2500 to 3000 words, excluding title page, bibliography, endnotes and illustrations). You must briefly explain the concepts you are using (with proper referencing) and demonstrate how they apply (or not) to the film. Your term paper will be evaluated according to the grid provided below.

A good strategy would be to select your film early on and work on your paper throughout the semester, as we discuss the various texts. This will allow you to view your chosen film several times during the course of the semester and work on the final paper while your ideas are still fresh.

Late submissions will be penalized (2% per day, including week end days).

**Plagiarism:**
The most common offense under the Academic Code of Conduct is plagiarism which the Code defines as “the presentation of the work of another person as one’s own or without proper acknowledgement”. This could be material copied word for word from books, journals, internet sites, professor’s course
notes, etc. It could be material that is paraphrased but closely resembles the original source. It could be the work of a fellow student, for example, an answer on a quiz, data for a lab report, a paper or assignment completed by another student. It might be a paper purchased through one of the many available sources. Plagiarism does not refer to words alone — it can also refer to copying images, graphs, tables, and ideas. Finally, if you translate the work of another person and do not cite the source, this is also plagiarism. You cannot submit the same paper for more than one course. If you are not sure how to quote or reference some material, I will be more than happy to help.

**MARKING GRID**

<table>
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<th>Topic not understood</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>Topic well-understood</th>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Clearly answers the question(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not satisfy the parameters of the assignment</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Satisfies all parameters of the assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not define/understand key terms and concepts</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Defines/understands key terms and concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not use relevant sources efficiently</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Uses relevant sources efficiently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No critical understanding of the literature</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Solid critical understanding of the literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Points are unclear and inconsistent</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Points are clear and consistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfounded assertions and description</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Uses evidence-based reasons and argument(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay is rambling and without structure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Essay is logically structured and consistent</td>
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<td>Numerous grammatical and/or spelling errors*</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Few or no grammatical and/or spelling errors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poorly implemented/ inconsistent writing style</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Consistent and well-implemented writing style</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unacceptable referencing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Grade (before late penalty)</td>
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<td>/100</td>
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* I do take into account students whose native language is not English. It is your responsibility to let me know if that is the case.
CALENDAR

WEEK 1
Introduction
Today we will discuss the socio-historical context of the 1930s, spectatorship practices and the various technical developments in film—namely, the transition to sound and early Technicolor.

- *The Roaring Twenties* (Raoul Walsh, 1939), 106 min.

Optional:

WEEK 2
Pre-Code 1 — Realism
- *The Blot* (Lois Weber, 1921), clip.
- *The Red Kimona* (Dorothy Davenport & Walter Lang, 1925), clip.
- *Street Scene* (King Vidor, 1931), 80 min. Review due next week.

Optional:
- *Brother Orchid* (Lloyd Bacon, 1940).

WEEK 3  
Film Review of *Street Scene* due today
Hollywood's Periphery I: The Documentary
- *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (Pare Lorentz, 1935), 25 min.
- *We Work Again* (Eric Burroughs et al, 1937), 15 min.
- *The City* (Ralph Steiner, Willard Van Dyke, 1939), 43 min.

Optional:

WEEK 4
Hollywood's Periphery II: “B” and Ethnic Films: Production and Exhibition
- Gomery, Douglas. Part II “Alternative Operations”. *Shared Pleasures: A

Dark Manhattan (Harry Fraser and Ralph Cooper, 1937), 70 min.

Optional:

Hallelujah (King Vidor, 1929)

The Emperor Jones (Dudley Murphy, 1933). Starring Paul Robeson.

Wages of Sin (Oscar Micheaux, 1929)

WEEK 5

Stars, the Star System and Prestige Pictures


Grand Hotel (Edmund Goulding, 1932), 112 min. Formal Analysis due next week.

Optional:


A Star Is Born (William Wellman, 1937)

WEEK 6

Formal Analysis of Grand Hotel due today

Code Enforcement: Good Clean Fun and Fast-Talking Comedies


It Happened One Night (Frank Capra, 1934), 105 min.

Optional:


Gehring, Wes D. “Screwball Comedy: An Overview”. Journal of Popular Film and


MODULE 2 Genres

WEEK 7
The Gangster Film


Optional:
- The Public Enemy (William A. Wellman, 1931), 83 min.

- The Doorway to Hell (Archie Mayo, 1930)
- Little Caesar (Mervyn LeRoy, 1931)
- Scarface (Howard Hawks, 1932)
- G Men (William Keighley, 1935)

WEEK 8
The Musical and Sound

- Footlight Parade (Lloyd Bacon, 1933), clip.
- 42nd Street (Lloyd Bacon, 1933), clip.
- Gold Diggers of 1933 (Mervyn LeRoy, 1933), 97 min.

Optional:

WEEK 9
Melodrama, Weepies and the Woman’s Films

- Back Street (John M. Stahl, 1932), 93 min.

Optional:

**WEEK 10**

**The Western**

- *Stagecoach* (John Ford, 1939), 96 min. **Critical Analysis due next week.**

Optional:
- *The Big Trail* (Raoul Walsh, 1930)
- *Cimarron* (Wesley Ruggles, 1931)
- *Belle of the Nineties* (Leo McCarey, 1934)

**MODULE 3 Directors**

**WEEK 11**  
**Critical Analysis of *Stagecoach* due today**

**A “Woman Director” in Hollywood: Dorothy Arzner**

- *Dance, Girl, Dance* (Dorothy Arzner, 1940), clip.
- *Merrily We Go To Hell* (Dorothy Arzner, 1932), 78 min.

Optional:

**WEEK 12**  
**Final Paper due today**

**The Lubitsch Touch**

- *The Smiling Lieutenant* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1931), clip.
- *Design For Living* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1933), 91 min.

Optional:
WEEK 13
Frank Capra and the American Dream


Forbidden (Frank Capra, 1932), clip.

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (Frank Capra, 1939), 129 min.

Optional:


Additional Resources:

General:

Star System and Fandom:

Sound:


**Colour:**
The American Widescreen Museum: www.widescreenmuseum.com


**Musical:**


Mast, Gerald. *Can’t Help Singin’: The American Musical on Stage and Screen.*

**Western**


Cameron, Ian and Douglas Pue (Ed.), *The Movie Book of the Western*. Studio Vista, 1996.


