

HST 2251

Hollywood and American History

Course Description:

Hollywood has often been described as America's "dream factory" - the place where many American fantasies were created. The reality, of course, is much more complex than that, and it is the relationship between the American movie industry centered in Hollywood and the nation's moviegoers that we will be exploring in this class. To what extent did Hollywood create social, political, and economic expectations for its audience, and to what extent were Hollywood movies a response to these expectations? How did the "dream factories" work? Who was in charge of making decisions regarding what Americans saw on their movie screens? How did the operations of the film studios change over time and why? Most importantly, why should we care about the answers to any of these questions? What can we really learn about American society from what we see in its movies? What do genres of movies such as westerns, screwball comedies, musicals, and horror teach us about American culture? In this course, we will employ the tools of the historian in an effort to begin to answer these fascinating and complicated questions.

Course Objectives

This course seeks to use Hollywood movies as a vehicle for teaching students to think historically. Students will learn to examine films as evidence of their historical time period, and to recognize that primary sources are not limited to written texts. They will also begin to learn how to analyze both primary sources and secondary sources and through this process to develop their own historical interpretations. Students will test these interpretations through class discussions and written assignments in order to improve both their critical thinking and writing skills.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students will begin to consider the complex combination of factors involved in shaping both the motion picture industry and the broader trends of consumer culture in the United States from the late nineteenth century into the 1970s.
2. Students will begin to learn how to place products of popular culture into a historical context.
3. Students will develop their critical thinking skills.
4. Students will improve their ability to write clearly and analytically.

Texts:

The assigned texts for this course will be both readings and films. Your readings of these texts should be active- do not simply glance your eyes across the page or the screen, but actively question why we are studying these texts and what they add to our understanding of the relationship between Hollywood and American society.

Copies of the following text are available on reserve at Smith Library and for purchase in the University bookstore.

Robert Sklar, *Movie Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (updated edition)

Additional readings will be made available on Blackboard. Films will be available on reserve and, when possible, through a streaming service offered by the university library. Most of these films are also easily available through rental and streaming services such as Netflix.

Course Requirements

1. **Professional Engagement:** All students in this class are expected to conduct themselves in a mature and professional manner. Your professional engagement in this class will be assessed based on the following criteria:
 - a. **Attendance:** In order to succeed in this class, you must be present at nearly all of the class sessions. Habitual absenteeism negatively impacts both you and your classmates. Consequently, I have a strict attendance policy in my class. You are allowed two absences over the course of the semester (screenings are classes so they count in your absence total). The university makes no distinction between excused and unexcused absences, and leaving class early or arriving more than 5 minutes late counts as an absence. After these two absences, you will receive a 1/3 of a grade penalty on your professional engagement grade for every additional absence. If this attendance policy will be a problem for you, come see me **IN ADVANCE**. I will not consider explanations or requests for leniency after the fact.
 - b. **Participation:** Students are expected to be active participants in this course. This means you must complete all reading assignments in a timely fashion, and come to class prepared to engage your fellow classmates in a lively discussion. In addition, on a rotating basis students will be “on call,” which means they will produce questions for the day’s class discussions and assist me in leading those discussions. Your performance in the classroom will serve as the primary basis for your professional engagement grade.
 - c. **Professional Conduct:** I expect all students in this class to treat their classmates, me, and anyone else who becomes involved with the class in a mature and respectful manner inside and out of the classroom. That means turning off all handheld electronic devices for the duration of our class periods; if students fail to do so, I will require everyone to drop such devices at the front of the room at the beginning of class. As a general rule, I will not allow the use of laptops in class; if you have a particular reason why you need to use your laptop, you may ask for permission. Holding private conversations during the class is also unacceptable. Students who violate these standards of behavior will receive a significant penalty in their class participation grade.

Outside the classroom, professional conduct means addressing class-related e-mails in a respectful fashion. When writing to me or to other men or women

who are not your peers, please address the person by their title (Dr. Ringel, Dean Stoneking, Mr. or Ms. Smith) and be sure to spell their name correctly. If the e-mail is requesting their assistance in writing or in person, please give them a reasonable amount of time to fulfill the request, recognizing that they have multiple other obligations beyond working with you. When dealing with me, requests that are not made in such a timely fashion will not be honored, absent exceptional circumstances.

- 2. Writing Assignments:** Students will complete three take-home essay assignments, each of which will require them to write an approximately 1000- 1250 word answer to a question I will assign. The assignments will be due on **February 14th at 5pm, March 24th at 9 am, and April 26th at 9 am**. Students will have the opportunity to rewrite the first two assignments (they will be required to do so if they earn a 71 or below) provided they follow established revision procedures. The rewrite on the first assignment will replace the original grade; the rewrite on the second assignment will be averaged with the original grade. There will be no opportunity to rewrite the final assignment.

Students who prefer to write an independent research paper in place of the first two writing assignments may have the opportunity to do so. Please come see me by January 24th if you wish to take advantage of this opportunity.

I expect my students to be able to construct coherent arguments and to express themselves in clear, grammatically correct English. If you struggle with writing, I suggest you contact the HPU Writing Center, located on the fourth floor of Smith Library. The Writing Center provides writing assistance for students at any level of study – from freshman to graduate – at any stage in the writing process, from invention through revision. The Writing Center staff will be available in a variety of locations around campus during various hours throughout the day, Monday through Friday. Go to <https://highpoint.mywconline.com/> to make an appointment. Appointments can only be made through the online portal. Appointments will be available starting January 15, 2014.

Writing consultants do not proofread or edit students' papers *for* them, but they do work *with* students to help them develop strategies for improving their writing in light of their respective assignments, instructors, and writing styles. For more information, contact the Writing Center Director, Dr. Leah Schweitzer, at lschweit@highpoint.edu or (336) 841-9106.

- 3. Quizzes:** Students will take weekly online quizzes in order to ensure that they are keeping up with and assimilating the material. I will include the ten highest grades from these quizzes as part of their grade for the course.
- 4. Grading and Assessment:** The final grade will be computed from a weighted average of the individual grades you earn for your class participation (including your questions

submitted to the class website), written assignments, and exams. Your class participation will be determined both from the quality and quantity of contributions to the class.

The course requirements will be weighted as follows in determining your final grade for the course:

1 st Paper	10%
2 nd Paper	30%
3 rd Paper	30%
Quizzes	10%
Class Participation	20%

5. The Fine Print

a. This syllabus is a road map for this class but it is not set in stone. I reserve the right to make changes in the syllabus with proper advance notice given to you.

b. You must complete all assignments to receive a passing grade.

c. All papers are due at the times stated below. You must submit papers electronically.

All responsibility for technical problems such as e-mails not received by me lies with you. Late papers will automatically be marked down 1/3 of a grade for each day they are late (the first day begins at the time they are due and weekend days count) unless you have written documentation from your advisor, an academic Dean, or from University medical services. Computer problems are **never** an acceptable excuse for late work.

d. Students are responsible for checking their High Point University e-mail addresses regularly for information regarding this course. Failure to check this e-mail address is not an acceptable excuse for missing notifications about changes in assignments or deadlines for this class.

e. If you have a question about a grade you receive on a paper, test, or for the course, please come to my office hours or make an appointment. I will not discuss grades over the phone or e-mail. However, I am happy to discuss questions about the course material via e-mail.

f. Academic Honesty: The work you submit for this course should be completely and solely your own. This means that any and all quotations from the words and thoughts of others must be appropriately acknowledged in your assignments. To do anything less is stealing. If you have any questions about plagiarism, please talk to me about them in advance. I will be happy to help you sort through any confusion. Any evidence that you have failed to follow these rules will be immediately and thoroughly investigated, and any violations of the honor code will be submitted to the Honor Court. Be forewarned: I consider cheating to be a very serious and utterly avoidable offense. Expect no leniency from me in cases of suspected cheating/plagiarism.

g.. Students with Disabilities: Students who require classroom accommodations due to a diagnosed disability must submit the appropriate documentation to Disability Support in the Office of Academic Development, 4th Floor Smith Library. Student's need for accommodations must be made at the beginning of a course. Accommodations are not retroactive.

CLASS SCHEDULE

- T Jan 7 Course Introduction
Class Screening: *Some Like It Hot*
- Th Jan 9 How To Read a Film
- Jan 14, 16 **The Birth of the Film Industry**
Reading: *Movie-Made America*, 3-64; *Movies and American Society*, 31-40 (Bb)
Home Viewing: *Birth of a Nation* (Part 1)
Class Screening: *Birth of a Nation* (Part 2)
- Jan 21,23 **The Silent Era**
Reading: *Movie-Made America*, 67-121; *Movies and American Society*, 89-96 (Bb)
Home Viewing: *The General*
Class Screening: *The Gold Rush*
- Jan 28, 30 **Pre-Code Hollywood**
Reading: *Movie-Made America*, 122-174; *Movies and American Society*, 58-62, 120-126 (Bb)
Home Viewing: *Duck Soup*, *She Done Him Wrong*
Class Screening: *The Public Enemy*
- Jan 31 1st Paper Assignment Posted by 5 pm**
- Feb 4,6 **The Social Problem Film**
Reading: *Movie-Made America*, 194-214; *Pre-Code Hollywood*, 157-170; *Movie and American Society*, 129-162
Home Viewing: *I Am a Fugitive from the Chain Gang*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*
NO CLASS SCREENING THIS WEEK
- Feb 11, 13 **Screwball Comedies**
Reading: *Movie-Made America*, 175-214; *Movies and American Society*, 158-162
Home Viewing: *It Happened One Night*
Class Screening: *The Philadelphia Story*
- Feb 14 1st Paper Due by 5 pm**
- Feb 18, 20 **Hollywood During Wartime**
Reading: “You Must Remember This: The Case of Hal Wallis’ *Casablanca*” (e-reserve); “Film Noir, Disneyland, and the Cold War (Sub)Urban Imagery” (E-reserve)
Home Viewing: *Double Indemnity*
Class Screening: *Casablanca*

- Feb 25, 27 **The Western**
 Reading: “Bourgeois Myth and Anti-Myth: The Western Hero of the Fifties” (JSTOR); “Mirror for Pre-War America: Stagecoach and the Western, 1939-1941” (e-reserve)
 Home Viewing: *Stagecoach*
 Class Screening: *High Noon*
- Feb 28 Options 1st Paper Rewrites Due by 5 pm**
- Mar 4,6 NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK
- March 10 2nd Paper Assignment posted by 9 am**
- Mar 11, 13 **The Musical**
 Reading: “Busby Berkeley and the Backstage Musical” (e-reserve); “Sexual Economics: *Gold Diggers of 1933*” (e-reserve); “Dancin’ in the Rain” (e-reserve)
 Home Viewing: *Gold Diggers of 1933*, *Singin’ in the Rain*
 NO CLASS SCREENING THIS WEEK
- Mar 18, 20 **The Horror Film**
 Reading: “From Horror to Avant-Garde: Tod Browning’s *Freaks*” (e-reserve); Hitchcock in Hollywood (excerpt- e-reserve)
 Home Viewing: *Freaks*
 Class Screening: *Psycho* (1960)
- March 24 2nd Papers Due by 9 am**
- Mar 25, 27 **The Cold War**
 Reading: *Movies and American Society*, 198-218; “HUAC and the End of an Era,” “Ambivalence and *On the Water Front*,” “The Age of Conspiracy and Conformity: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*” (e-reserves)
 Home Viewing: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956)
 Class Screening: *On the Waterfront*
- Apr 1, 3 **Cracks in the Consensus**
 Reading: “*Dr. Strangelove*: Nightmare Comedy and the Ideology of Liberal Consensus,” “The Pentagon and Hollywood” (e-reserves)
 Home Viewing: *The Apartment*
 Class Screening: *Dr. Strangelove*
- April 7 Optional 2nd Paper Rewrites Due by 9 am**
- Apr 8, 10 **Youth in Revolt**

Reading: *Movie-Made America*, 286-304; “Hollywood, Nihilism, and the Youth Culture of the Sixties: *Bonnie and Clyde*” (e-reserves)
Home Viewing: *Bonnie and Clyde*
Class Screening: *The Graduate*

Apr 11 **3rd Paper Assignment Posted by 5 pm**

April 15, 17 **The Auteurs**
Reading: *Movie-Made America*, 321-338; *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* (e-reserve)
Home Viewing: *The Last Picture Show*
Class Screening: *Easy Rider*

Apr 22 **The Blockbuster**
Reading: *Movie-Made America*, 339-357
Home Viewing: None
Class Screening: *Jaws*

April 26 Final Exam Period 8am-11am
3rd Paper Assignment due at beginning of exam period