ENGLISH 288K  
America Dreams American Movies  
Spring 2015, Session 2,  
TUESDAY and THURSDAY 1-3:30 p.m.

Instructor's Information

Marianna Torgovnick  
Professor of English; Affiliated Professor AMI, Literature, and Women's Studies  
Director Fall Duke in New York Arts and Media; Summer Duke in New York Internships in the City  
tor@duke.edu  
www.mariannatorgovnick.com

Prerequisite(s), if applicable

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Course Description

America Dreams American Movies explores the development and cultural history behind American movies—the Depression, World War II, fear of the atomic bomb, evolving understandings of psychology, race, and women’s roles—while narrating the evolution of American film as a mass-entertainment industry interacting with changing technologies. Organized by genre and decade, each week focuses on one-two specific films, with a wide range of examples from the beginnings through time present that shows what remains constant within genres but also what changes over time. Throughout, the course emphasizes a critical consciousness of how movies both reflect and generate American narratives of national identity that interact with the world. Genres covered include: comedy, adventure / action, romantic drama, epic, the Western, and gangster films—all with attention to conditions of production from The Studio System to the independent auteur and to national and international markets.
Course Goals / Objectives

To give students an understanding of

- The history of American movies as a mass-entertainment industry
- The influence of technology (sound, Technicolor, the advent of TV, digital versus film, 3D and computer animation, contemporary preservation and restoration)
- Terminology for and techniques of shot analysis and scene analysis
- A critical understanding of American iconologies and narrations of “the nation”
- International contexts, including the French New Wave and China’s roles in the film industry today

Required Text(s)/Resources

Belton, John. *American Cinema / American Contexts* (most readings from this textbook)


Optional Recommended Text(s)/Resources (on reserve)

Selections: Chow, Rey. *Primitive Passions: Visuality...and Contemporary Chinese Cinema*

Thompson, David. *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film*

Tompkins, Jane. “Introduction,” *West of Everything*

Truffaut, Francois. *Alfred Hitchcock*

Wood, Michael. *America in the Movies*

Additional Materials (optional)

Students should have laptops or iPads to facilitate watching movies outside of group screenings, which will be in addition to class lecture time. MACS and iPhones will facilitate the making of group films.

Course Requirements

- Attendance at weekly screenings (or demonstrated self-viewing)
• Attendance at lectures and occasional pop-quizzes; Brief oral reports ad assigned.

• A midterm exam

• A final exam.

• Collaborative short genre films, followed by an ADAM Awards Ceremony.

Assessment Information / Grading Procedures

1. Pop Quizzes: 10% of Grade.

   Rubrics for grading:

   • responsiveness to the prompt (did the student address the shot, scene, or issues to which they were directed?);

   • quality of thinking and accuracy (did the response show understanding of the film?)

2. Midterm + Final; 60% of Grade (30% each = 70%)

   Rubrics for grading:

   • responsiveness to the prompt (did the student address the shot, scene, film, or issues to which they were directed?);

   • quality of thinking and accuracy (did the response show understanding of the film? Did it seem complete? Did it incorporate class lectures and readings and/or did it go a step beyond?;

   • was it well written and executed (for example: Did it have a title and a beginning, middle, and end? Did it progress logically and clearly? Did it have a main point and a title that reflected that main point?

   • was it carefully proofread and relatively free of writing errors?

   • For short answers (multiple choice). Do the answers reflect attention to lectures and readings? These will be factual, multiple choice questions with defined answers.

   • Identifications: quality of thinking (is the student able to apply factual knowledge to specific terminology, issues, and frame shots? Is the students able to synthesize information effectively and/or able to build upon information conveyed in class? These will be more flexible than the multiple choice questions
3. Collaborative Short Genre film: (20% of grade). Guidelines and rubrics for grading may be found in a separate handout.

Course Policies and Guidelines

- Academic integrity: All work to be governed by the DKU Honor Code
- Attendance: Excessive absence (more than 1 class) may be penalized in the final grade.
- Attention to assignment deadlines: Meeting all deadlines is expected and mandatory. Late written assignments will incur docking of the grade; repeated lateness will be reflected in the final grade.
- Make-up work: Students must plan ahead to complete written exercises on time. Unless under extraordinary circumstances, there will be no make-ups; late work will be noted as late work [see above]. Make-ups for the final exam will be scheduled only according to DKU policies.
- Appropriate, as directed, use of cell phone, laptop, or other technology during class: Inappropriate use of technology during class will receive warnings from the podium and from TAs; repeated infractions may be penalized in the final grade.

Tentative Course Outline or Schedule

By week: I = first half of week, TUESDAY; II = second half of week, THURSDAY

**Week One.** I. Introduction to the Course: What we will study this term and how.

Welcome from Spring 2015 ADAM at Duke. Examples, Duke Student Films; iconic early moments at the movies

II. Beginnings: Silent Films and Charlie Chaplin

Screening, Chaplin, *The Gold Rush* (1925) with glances at *The Kid* (1921), *City Lights* (1931), *The Great Dictator* (1941)

Readings: Belton, Chapter 1, “The Emergence of the Cinema”; Ch. 8, “American Comedy”

**Week Two.** Adventure / Action

I. *King Kong* (Cooper and Schoedsack, 1933) The movies and the Great Depression; technology, bound

II. Later versions of *King Kong* (especially dir. Jackson, 2005)**. Testing the boundaries of the human: monsters and their discontents, with a glance at Indiana Jones and/or sci-fi.

Sidebar (time permitting): Capra, *It Happened One Night*
**Available Monday night showing.

**Week Three.** Romantic Drama / Epic.

1. *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming, 1939)**: Epics. Race in American movies (sidebar—*Imitation of Life* 1934;1959); race in / and the film industry through 2013.

  **Monday night showing required.

Readings: Belton, Ch. 12 “Horror and Science Fiction; Ch. 4, “The Studio System”

II. Sidebar *Casablanca* (Muniz, 1942). Romance and war. The Bogart hero

Sidebar *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997). Fictions and facts. Class and the single woman.

Sidebar: 1939 as the “miracle year”; Capra

Readings: Belton, Ch. 5, “The Star System”; Ch. 9, “War and Cinema”

**Week Four.** I. Mid-term. In Class (90 minutes)

Showing, *Singin’ in the Rain* (Donen and Kelly, 1952)

II. The Musical: from theatrical acts (Busby Berkeley) to meta-musicals *Chicago* (2002)**.

Close reading, *Singin’ in the Rain*

**Available Monday night showing

Readings: Belton, “The Musical”

**Week Five.** The Auteur: European Currents / American Idols

I.Alfred Hitchcock: signature themes and styles; techniques for suspense

Focus; *Rear Window* and Post World War II anxieties; the Hitchcock style

II.Stanley Kubrick: diversity of themes and styles; the self-made auteur

Focus: *Dr. Strangelove* (1964).** Digital re-mastering. 1960s Cold War attitudes

**Available Monday night showing. *The Godfather* poss. alternative
Readings: Belton, Ch. 10 “Film Noir: Somewhere in the Night”; Ch. 13, “Hollywood and the Cold War”

**Week Six:** Tough Guys: The Western and The Gangster Film

I. *The Searchers* (Ford, 1956) and *Dances with Wolves* (Costner, 1983)**

Focus: Class hierarchies and Westerns. The solo hero. Cowboys versus Indians / cowboys and Indians: racial sub-plots.

**Available, Monday showing

Readings: Belton, Ch. 11, “The Making of the West”; optional: Tompkins,

“introduction,” *West of Everything*

II. *The Godfather* (Coppola, 1972)**

**possible alternative Monday night showing

Readings: Belton, Ch. 15, “The Counter Culture Strikes Back”; Ch. 16, “The Film School Generation.”

AND / OR

A brief tribute to genres omitted from the class: gangster, horror, documentary, animation

**NOTE:** Possible field trip to a film set this weekend. Details TBA.

**Week Seven:** Looking Back, Looking Forward

I. Technology and Movies today: digital; 3D; Special effects

International currents, with a focus on China**

**Monday night showing TBA


Final Exam: In-Class, 90 minutes.

II. Student films and end of term celebration.