

AMERICAN FILM & CULTURE, ENG-135
Syllabus-MSMC Weekend College
Prof. Lou Fossum

REQUIRED TEXT: [LOOKING AT MOVIES](#) by Richard Barsam.

FIRST ASSIGNMENT: Read Parkinson's HISTORY OF FILM, Chapter 1...

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

To expose the students to ten different genre beginning with the Silent Era to the character driven Sleeper films. To develop an understanding of the language of the camera, and how it tells a story. To form an awareness of film within an historical context. To create an emotional connection between the students and film, and develop a critical eye for current film methodology. Finally, to demonstrate the power of film to mold American culture, and its multi-cultural influence abroad.

GRADING REQUIREMENTS:

The students will be graded on a 1400 point scale. Perfect attendance is worth 250 points. Each session missed will result in 100 points being deducted from the final grade. More than four sessions missed will result in a failing grade. Students may make up only ONE session for 100 points by writing a paper on the material missed. Class participation in the form of discussion and weekly Clip Quiz is worth 250 points. The mid-term will be a storyboard consisting of (6) photos telling a story with a beginning, middle, and an end is worth 200 points. The final paper is an (8) page paper covering one of the genre listed for the course, and is worth 500 points. This paper is due on the 5th weekend. Late papers will be deducted by 100 points for each week after the due date. A take home Final will be worth 200 points that is due on the 6th weekend.

GRADING SCALE:

1400-1275 = A, 1274-1100 = B, 1099-875 = C, 874-650 = D, 649-0 = F

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE:

Be on time for all class sessions. Turn off all headphones, pagers, and cell phones. Laptops should be in the back of class. No talking during clips, or features. All discussions will cover text and lecture materials, and should respect the opinions of others. Breaking classroom concentration will result in ONE warning, and subsequent

disruptions will result in 100 points being deducted from the final grade for each incident. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. (See MSMC catalogue p.40-41). For Attendance, Learning Disabilities, and Academic Freedom refer to MSMC catalogue p.39, and p.104.

AMERICAN FILM & CULTURE

WEEK #1 – SILENT ERA

Session 1: The language of the camera. The history of photography. The birth of motion pictures in America, France, and England. Edison and the Kinetoscope. The race to project the motion picture. The evolution of film from documentary to fictional storytelling. What is a shot? What is composition? Fps and the “Flicker Effect.” Lighting design. New Jersey, or Hollywood? View: *A Trip To The Moon*, *The Great Train Robbery*. (Chapter 1)

Session 2: Acting for the stage as opposed to the “Griffith Style.” Cecile B. DeMille, Jessie Lasky, Sam Goldwyn, Lillian Gish, Harold Lloyd, Buster Keaton, D. W. Griffith, and Chaplin. View: *Way Down East*, *The Cheat*, *The Cameraman*, *It!*, *The Birth Of A Nation*. (Chapter 2)

Session 3: The plot thickens. Two reels become twelve. Fps increases to 24 frames from 18 frames. German Expressionism. Clips of “signature moments” from the Silent Era. View: *The Jazz Singer*. Feature: *The Kid*.

WEEK #2 – MUSICAL FILMS (Chapter 4)

Session 1: Jolson speaks and Hollywood listens. Conversion of the film stage to the sound stage. Careers end, convert, and begin again. Hollywood invents the new form of the Musical film. Busby Berkeley and the movement of the camera. William A. Wellman and the invention of the boom microphone. View: *Hollywood Review-1929*, *Whoopie-1930*.

Session 2: The box office drops 1929-30. The camera stops moving. Busby Berkeley to the rescue. Fred Astaire & Ginger Rogers save RKO. Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen team up at MGM. Packaging stars without musical talent, Monroe, Brando,

Kiddman, and Zellwegger. Performing “In One.” View: *Summer Stock, Stormy Weather, The Little Colonel, Jailhouse Rock, My sister Eileen.*

Session 3: Concept choreography by Danny Daniels, Agnes DeMille, Jerome Robbins, Gene Kelly, Michael Kidd, Stanley Donen, and Busby Berkeley.

View: *Pennies From Heaven.* Feature: *Singin’ In The Rain.*

WEEK #3 – HORROR FILMS (Chapter 3)

Session 1: Do we love things the bump in the night? German Expressionism.

Chairoscuro lighting. Scoring to make the mood. From the stage to the screen, Bela Lugosi’s Count Dracula. Boris Karloff, and the application make up of Guy Pearce and Bud Westmore. View: Murnau’s *Nosferatu*, and John Barrymore’s *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde.*

Session 2: Universal Studios commands the genre. American International and Sam Arkoff corners the Drive-In movie market. Vincent Price, Jack Nicholson, and Francis Coppola learn to do it cheaper from Roger Corman. View: Horror clips.

Session 3: Superstition, Folklore, and Science verses Religion. Feature: *Frankenstein*, and *The Bride Of Frankenstein.*

WEEK #4 – WAR FILMS

Session 1: Propaganda films, Glorification, Self sacrifice, Enlistment tools, Revenge, Racism, and Jingoism on camera. View: *Wings, The Big Parade, All Quiet On The Western Front.* (Chapter 5)

Session 2: Isolationism converted to Anti-Fascist film. Gearing up for the coming war. Dehumanizing the enemy. The united front. View: *The Dawn Patrol, The Fighting 69th, Lifeboat*, and *Sgt. York.*

Session 3: War’s aftermath. Seeing war from a new focus after victory in WWII. Post traumatic stress disorder, and the G.I. during and after the war. Viewing our former enemies as human. View: *The Men, Captain Newman M.D., The Best Years Of Our Lives.* Feature: *A Guy Named Joe.*

WEEK #5 – FILM NOIR Chapter 6

Session 1: Are women really dangerous? Pulp fiction novels of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler come to the screen. The patriarchy and the modern woman. The form is born with Bogart and Huston. A hopeless world concept meets the Existentialists. View: *The Maltese Falcon*.

Session 2: A hopeless world meets the Existentialists. Francois Truffaut coins the name *Film Noir*, after the liberation of Paris meets the “B” movie. View: *Murder My Sweet, Somewhere In The Night, The Postman Always Rings Twice, The Lady From Shanghai*.

Session 3: View: *Gilda, The Lady In The Lake, Touch Of Evil*.

Feature: *Double Indemnity*

WEEK #6 – RACE & SLEEPER FILMS Chapter 7 & 8

Session 1: Character driven stories as opposed to special effects and computerization. Telling the story with a camera verses the camera becoming the story. Dealing with a checkered racial past. Women as full citizens. African Americans arrive in the middle-class and on the screen as real people. View: *No Way Out, Hollywood Shuffle, and Home Of The Brave*.

Session 2: Post-war realities. The Hollywood “Blacklist.” Anti-Semitism. The third feminist movement. The rise of Latinos with Ceasar Chavez. Gays on the silver screen before and after “Stonewall.” View: *Gentleman’s Agreement, Stand And Deliver, In The Heat Of The Night, Blazing Saddles, and Thelma & Louise*.

Session 3: Movie stars need not apply. Sleeper films in America and around the world. Feature: *Conrack*.

***Westerns and Comedy Films could be interchanged with Horror and War Films.**

