

English 4578H
Spring 2013
TU/TH 3:55-5:15
Derby Hall 0048

Prof. Friedman
Office Hours: TU/TH 2:15-3:15 & by
appointment (Denney 565)
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IMAGINING THE NATION IN AMERICAN POPULAR CINEMA

This course explores the historical links between the American cinema—as represented by films that were widely viewed at the time of their release—and U. S. nationalism. Moving chronologically from cinema’s first decades through the 1990s, we will examine the shifting ways in which films represent the nation, the American “people,” and the idea of American culture. We will consider how various strains of nationalism have conditioned what we call “American cinema” and how cinema as a representational technology has, in turn, shaped understandings of the nation/its people. In addition to studying the historical development of film style and technology, we will take a critical look at nationalism and the various ideologies of race, gender, history, and territory that support it.

Reading Materials:

All required readings are available through the library’s e-reserves system; use the “Content” page of our class’s Carmen site (carmen.osu.edu).

Visual Materials:

Videos of all of the films that you are responsible for screening outside of class are available through the university’s Secured Media Library (drm.osu.edu). As an evolving system, the SML is very prone to glitches: you will likely run into problems with videos freezing, losing sound-image synchronization, and/or temporarily becoming unavailable. (And the server will very likely go down at least once over the course of the semester.) If your computer set-up is not compatible with the SML, or if you don’t want to deal with these potential obstacles, then you are encouraged to bypass the system and to rent videos from Netflix (all available as DVDs), or to use Amazon’s on-demand service when possible. In any event, Amazon’s service is the best fall-back plan. The following films are currently available to rent for \$2.99 each on Amazon: *Gold Diggers of 1933*, *Blackboard Jungle*, *Back to the Future*, *Malcolm X*, and *Forrest Gump*. These as well as the following are available to buy for \$9.99: *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Easy Rider*, and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Video rentals/purchases would represent the only cost associated with this course.

Requirements:

- Weekly Carmen discussion board postings, 10 in total (=20% of final grade)
 - A midterm exam (=15% of final grade)
 - One 5-page analytical essay (=15% of final grade)
 - One 8-10 page research paper (=25% of final grade)
 - One in-class presentation/turn at leading discussion (=5% of final grade)
 - Participation during class meetings (=20% of final grade)
 - Regular attendance (see policy below)
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Schedule of Assignments (subject to minor changes):

Early Cinema: Patriotic Film Programs and Expansionist Nationalism

- TU 1/8 In-class Screening: Early films (Edison Manufacturing Company, ca. 1896-1989)
- TH 1/10 Reading Due: E.J. Hobsbawm, from Introduction to *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*; Charles Musser, from “Producer and Exhibitor as Co-Creators: 1897-1900”

- TU 1/15 Screening Due: View/Re-view Edison Spanish-American War Films (Library of Congress online archive)

Reading Due: Kristen Whissel, “The Gender of Empire: American Modernity, Masculinity, and Edison’s War Actualities”

In-class Screening: Selected story films by the Edison and Biograph companies (ca. 1903-1906)

Story Films: “Nickel Madness” and the Question of the Immigrant Film Audience

- TH 1/17 Reading Due: Richard Abel, from *The Red Rooster Scare* (pp. 118-140 plus notes); Judith Mayne, “Immigrants and Spectators”

In-class Screening: Early westerns by D. W. Griffith/the Biograph company (ca. 1910-1912)

Narrative Films: The Early Western and the Birth of National Cinema

- TU 1/22 Reading Due: Richard Abel, from *The Red Rooster Scare* (pp. 151-171 plus notes)
- In-class Screening: Selected films from the Pathé-Frères company (ca. 1902-1906)

- TH 1/24 Screening Due: Watch first half of *The Iron Horse*, dir. John Ford (1924)

The Silent “Epic”: Nation Building and the National Self-Image

- TU 1/29 Screening Due: Finish *The Iron Horse*

- TH 1/31 Reading Due: Lynne Kirby, from “Train Films and National Identity”

The Pre-Code Musical: Gendered Bodies and the Troubled Spectacle of the Nation

- TU 2/5 Reading Due: Will Hays, Chapter 1 of *See and Hear*; Benedict Anderson, Chapters 1-2 of *Imagined Communities*

<< FIRST ESSAY DUE >>

- TH 2/7 Screening Due: *Gold Diggers of 1933*, dir. Mervyn LeRoy (1933)
Depression-Era Film: Cinema as a Tool of Civic Education; Pluralistic Nationalism
- TU 2/12 Reading Due: Patricia Mellencamp, “Sexual Economics: *Gold Diggers of 1933*”
Screening Due: *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, dir. Frank Capra (1939)
- TH 2/14 Reading Due: Eric Smoodin, “‘Compulsory’ Viewing for Every Citizen: *Mr. Smith*
and the Rhetoric of Reception”
World War II-Era Melodrama: Gender, Race, and the Home Front
- TU 2/19 Reading Due: Office of War Information/Bureau of Motion Pictures, *Government*
Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry (read Introduction through
Section VI)
Screening Due: Watch first half of *Since You Went Away*, dir. John Cromwell (1944)
- TH 2/21 Screening Due: Finish *Since You Went Away*
The Post-War Film: Exploitation vs. Social Problem Films; Citizenship and Generational Tensions
- TU 2/26 Screening Due: *Blackboard Jungle*, dir. Richard Brooks (1955)
- TH 2/28 Reading Due: Adam Golub, “They Turned a School into a Jungle!: How *The*
Blackboard Jungle Redefined the Educational Crisis in Postwar America”
- TU 3/5 << MIDTERM EXAM >>
- TH 3/7 Class does not meet
- TU 3/12 Spring Break
- TH 3/14 Spring Break
The “New Hollywood”: Revisionist Western Mythology; Anti-racism, “Counterculture,” Anti-nationalism?
- TU 3/19 Screening Due: *Easy Rider*, dir. Peter Fonda (1969)
The Early Special Effects Film: Cinematic Magic and New American “Frontiers”
- TH 3/21 Screening Due: *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, dir. Steven Spielberg (1977)
Reading Due: John Dorst, “Postcolonial Encounters: Narrative Constructions of
Devil’s Tower National Monument”
The Blockbuster Film: National History as Media History

- TU 3/26 Reading Due: Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism”
- TH 3/28 Screening Due: *Back to the Future*, dir. Robert Zemeckis (1985)
Reading Due: Vivian Sobchack, from *Screening Space*
The Postmodern Historical Film (I): Black Nationalism and the Politics of Identification
- TU 4/2 Screening Due: Watch first half of *Malcolm X*, dir. Spike Lee (1992)
Reading Due: Marcus Garvey/UNIA, “Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World”
A. Philip Randolph, “Why Should We March?”
- TH 4/4 Screening Due: Finish *Malcolm X*
Reading Due: Malcolm X, from “Basic Unity Program”
The Postmodern Historical Film (II): (Mis)remembering and National Healing
- TU 4/9 Screening Due: *Forrest Gump*, dir. Robert Zemeckis (1994)
- TH 4/11 Reading Due: Robert Burgoyne, “Memory, History, and Digital Imagery in Contemporary Film”
- TU 4/16 Workshop on final paper topics, details t.b.a.
- TH 4/18 Library research time, details t.b.a
- TH 4/25 << FINAL PAPER DUE: to English Dept. Office (421 Denney), by 4:00 >>

Course Policies/Description of Assignments:

Attendance: Your attendance at class meetings is required. You are allowed to miss two meetings (for any reason) without penalty. Each subsequent absence beyond these two will result in a five-point reduction of your overall grade for the course.

If, on a particular day, you need to leave class a bit early for some legitimate reason—to get to a job interview, to attend a special event for another class, and so on—please let me know ahead of time so that I will know why you are leaving. Leaving class before the period ends is, otherwise, rude and disruptive; I will consider anyone who leaves early without checking with me first to be absent from the day’s meeting.

Participation: Participation in class discussions is required, not optional: read/view the assigned material and come to class ready to respond to it. Your involvement in class discussion is essential to the learning experience that this course offers: you learn the concepts and interpretive strategies that the course introduces by trying them out in conversation with your classmates. It's also your opportunity to demonstrate the quality of the work you are doing as a critical thinker and to shape how we study the assigned material, by sharing your ideas, questions, and concerns about it.

My evaluation of the quality of your contributions to discussion over the course of the semester represents a substantial portion of your final grade (20%). In order to be able to judge students' participation, I must have some record to consider—it is impossible to compare something to nothing. Hence, I reserve the right to call on people during class. Anything that prevents you from being able to participate in or engage with the activities of the class—sleeping, reading or sending text messages, surfing the web on a laptop—will negatively affect this aspect of your grade.

Discussion leadership: Each member of the class will be assigned to lead a brief portion of class discussion during one of our meetings. (Schedule to be circulated at first meeting.) Your task here is to identify for the class the range of questions, themes, and/or issues of film style that you have found significant in your reading/viewing of the material assigned for that meeting: get the class talking about these questions/themes/issues. While there are various ways of approaching this assignment, a basic and effective one would be to sketch out your topic for the class very briefly and then to pose a series of thought-provoking questions that relate to it. While you are not responsible for occupying a lot of class time, you are expected to establish a productive direction for the discussion to take. (I'll expect you to hold the floor for 15 minutes or so, but, as long as you are asking productive questions, I'll hold off on stepping in.) The goal of this project is to encourage student participation and to give you the chance to bring your concerns and interests to bear on the content of our discussions.

Carmen postings: We will use the discussion board on our class's Carmen site to get the ball rolling for our Tuesday meetings. There will be 10 Carmen discussions in total: before every Tuesday meeting, *except* 2/5 and 3/5.

I will create a discussion thread for each of these Tuesday meetings, by posing a series of questions or outlining a topic pertinent to the day's material. (We may also use one or two of these discussions as a means of proposing and getting peer feedback on essay topics.) The thread will be up by the end of the day on the prior Thursday, and you will be required to post at least one substantive comment to each thread, by 10:00 p.m. on the prior Monday night. By "substantive comment," I mean a contribution to the virtual discussion that illustrates your thoughts, concerns, interests in, and/or difficulties with the assigned material. You are encouraged to respond directly to your classmates' postings when possible. You are also encouraged to follow-up on your initial contributions: check the discussion board later and see if other people have responded to your posting, and so on.

Essays: Detailed topics for the essays will be distributed well in advance of the due dates (see above schedule). Essays submitted after the due date will not be accepted without prior approval.

University Policies:

Grading Scale:

A	93+	C+	79-77
A-	92-90	C	76-73
B+	89-87	C-	72-70
B	86-83	D	69-60
B-	82-80	E	59-

Academic Integrity: This course follows the standards laid out by the University’s Office of Academic Affairs: “Academic integrity is essential to maintaining an environment that fosters excellence in teaching, research, and other educational and scholarly activities. Thus, The Ohio State University and the Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM) expect that all students have read and understand the University’s *Code of Student Conduct*, and that all students will complete all academic...assignments with fairness and honesty. Students must recognize that failure to follow the rules and guidelines established in the University’s *Code of Student Conduct* may constitute ‘Academic Misconduct’ [and lead to subsequent referral to the COAM]. OSU’s *Code of Student Conduct* (Section 3335-23-04) defines academic misconduct as: ‘Any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the University, or subvert the educational process.’ Examples of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to) plagiarism [the unauthorized representation of another’s ideas or words as one’s own], collusion (unauthorized collaboration), copying the work of another student, and possession of unauthorized materials during an examination.” The *Code of Student Conduct* is available online (http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource_csc.asp).

*If you have any questions about academic integrity, please contact me, or consult the COAM’s helpful website (<http://oaa.osu.edu/coam/faq.html#faqlist>). We will be discussing the concept of plagiarism at length later in the quarter, but you are expected to be familiar already with university policies on plagiarism and other aspects of academic integrity.

Disability Services: The Office of Disability Services (150 Pomerene Hall; x2-3307) offers support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Their policies and procedures can be viewed online (<http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/current.asp>).