

Englit 1290  
Fall 2006  
Anderson, M.

# HISTORY OF AMERICAN FILM I

Mark Lynn Anderson  
Office: 517J Cathedral of Learning  
Hours: Wednesdays, 12:00 PM to 2:00 PM;  
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ENGLIT 1290/CN:18601  
Wednesdays 6:00 PM to 9:50 PM  
Lawrence Hall 209  
Fall 2006

## COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Witnesses to the first forty-five years of American film history saw the transformation of the cinema from a mechanical curiosity and vaudeville attraction to an enormous mass cultural industry whose products dominated the globe economically, stylistically, and ideologically. Dramatic shifts in American society were also occurring during this same period: the emergence of the United States as a global imperial power, the birth of the American metropolis with waves of migrants and immigrants moving to the largest cities, the rapid development of communications, advertising, and consumer culture, the collapse of the stock market, and the consolidation of bureaucratic state power for the regulation of social welfare. The motion pictures of the period certainly reflected these social developments in various ways, but they also participated in them directly. As the first mass medium to pose a serious threat to the cultural hegemony of the genteel middle class, the movies initiated a debate about the place of media in our society and participated in a series of struggles over the control of commercialized leisure.

While this course will investigate the types of films that were made and exhibited in America from 1896 to 1941, we will also be interested in the cinema as a cultural institution, in how these films participated in the social processes that were changing American society. The movies quickly became part of the social fabric of America in the early twentieth century, and Hollywood became one of the country's most cherished "colonies". Yet, the cinema was also a battleground where various business leaders, reformers, politicians, artists, and audiences sought to influence the development of the cinema by claiming the authority to judge the social value of the institution and its various products. This course is, ultimately, a course on American cultural history as it relates to development of the motion picture industry prior to the Second World War.

## REQUIRED TEXTS:

Grieverson, Lee and Peter Krämer, eds. *The Silent Cinema Reader*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Sklar, Robert. *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*. Rev. ed. New York: Vintage 1994.

Articles on electronic reserve through Pitt Digital Library.

### COURSE WORK AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

You are expected to attend the weekly class meetings and participate in the class discussions. You are also required to complete the all of the weekly reading prior to the class meeting for which it has been assigned. Missing three or more classes and/or screenings will substantially lower your final grade. Class attendance and participation count toward 10% of your final grade.

You will be given two take-home exams during the term. Each exam will contain six to eight questions of which you will choose two to write two short essays in response (500 to 700 words each). The first exam will be distributed in class on September 27 and will be due in class on **October 11**; the second exam will be distributed in class on November 1 and due in class on **November 15**. Each is exam is worth 20% of your final course grade.

Beginning on September 20, you will complete nine weekly exercises of selecting a material artifact to describe and to interpret in relation to the film historical topics discussed in the previous week's class. Each week, you will write a short paragraph or two describing the artifact you have selected and how you see it as means of approaching the film historical past. At the beginning of each class session, you will meet in groups to present your artifact to the other members of your group. Each group will then select one artifact to present to the class as a whole. Each student will submit her or his collected written descriptions to me every three weeks on **October 4, October 25, and November 15**. This assignment will be described further in class and will be develop as we go along. Your performance on these assignments will constitute 20% of your final grade.

Each student will be assigned a unique film to research. Each film will be a title no longer known to exist. This research will culminate in a short research paper (1,250 to 1,500 words excluding notes and sources). A description of this assignment will be given out early in the semester, along with instructions for completing the research. Final papers will be due on the last class meeting of **December 6**. The final research paper is worth 30% of your final grade.

Any student with a disability who might require accommodation in this course is asked to contact both her/his instructor(s) and Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 216 William Pitt Union, 412.648.7890/412.383.7355 (TTY), as early as possible in the term. DRS is charged with verifying student disabilities and determining reasonable accommodations. Their web address is <http://www.drs.pitt.edu>.

A note on plagiarism: Students should consult the university's policies on plagiarism. The Academic Integrity Code of the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh states that a student may be found in violation of her/his obligations if the student "presents as one's own, for academic evaluation, the ideas, representations, or words of another person or persons without customary and proper acknowledgment of sources". We ask that you become familiar with Pitt's Academic Integrity Code and that you come to us with your questions or concerns. The Academic Integrity Code can be accessed on the web at <http://www.fcas.pitt.edu/academicintegrity.html>.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

(x) = Electronic reserve article available through Pitt Digital Library.

SCR = *The Silent Cinema Reader.*

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August 30 Course Introduction

SCREENING:

*Show People* (MGM 1928, d. King Vidor) 82 minutes.

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September 6 Spectacular Beginnings

READING:

Sklar, 3-32.

SCR, Lee Greiveson and Peter Krämer, Introduction to Part 1, "Film Projection and Variety Shows," 31-9; **and** Thomas Gunning. "Now You See It, Now You Don't": The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions," 41-50; **and** Charles Musser, "Moving Towards Fictional Narratives: Story Films Become the Dominant Product," 87-102.

(x) Judith Mayne, "Uncovering the Female Body," *Before Hollywood: Turn-of-the-Century American Film*. New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1987, 63-67.

SCREENINGS:

*Annabelle Serpentine Dance* (Edison 1895, d. William Heise) 1 minute.

*The John C. Rice-May Erwin Kiss* (Edison 1896, d. William Heise) 1 minute.

*Troop Ships for the Philippines* (Edison 1898, d. James H. White) 1 minute

*What Happened on Twenty-Third Street* (Edison 1901, Edwin S. Porter) 1 minute.

*Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show* (Edison 1902, d. Edwin S. Porter) 2 minutes.

*The Gay Show Clerk* (Edison 1903, Edwin S. Porter) 1 minute.

*Romance of the Rail* (Edison 1903, d. Edwin S. Porter) 5 minutes.

*The Life of an American Fireman* (Edison 1903, d. Edwin S. Porter) 6 minutes.

*The Great Train Robbery* (Edison 1903, d. Edwin S. Porter) 12 minutes.

*Dog Factory* (Edison 1904, Edwin S. Porter) 4 minutes.

*Airy Fairy Lillian Tries on Her New Corsets* (Biograph 1905, d. G.W. Bitzer) 1 minute.

*The Kleptomaniac* (Edison 1905, d. Edwin S. Porter) 8 minutes.

*The Thieving Hand* (Vitagraph 1908) 4 minutes.

*Princess Nicotine* (Vitagraph 1909, d. J. Stuart Blackton) 5 minutes.

*Three American Beauties* (Edison 1906, d. Edwin S. Porter and Wallace McCutcheon) 1 minute.

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September 13 Courting Respectability

READINGS:

Sklar, 33-56.

SCR, Ben Singer, "Manhattan Nickelodeons: New Data on Audiences and Exhibitors," 119-34; **and** Roberta Pearson and William Uricchio, "How Many Times Shall Caesar Bleed in Sport: Shakespeare and the Cultural Debate about Moving Pictures," 155-68; **and** Shelley Stamp, "An Awful Struggle Between Love and Ambition: Serial Heroines, Serial Stars, and Their Female Fans," 210-25.

- (x) "Motion Pictures and the National Character," *The American Review of Reviews* 42:3 (September 1910): 315-20.

SCREENINGS:

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Vitagraph 1909, d. Charles Kent and J. Stuart Blackton) 12 minutes.  
*Twelfth Night* (Vitagraph 1910, d. Eugene Mullin and Charles Kent) 12 minutes.  
*The Musketeers of Pig Alley* (Biograph 1912, d. D.W. Griffith) 18 minutes.  
*An Unseen Enemy* (Biograph 1912, d. D.W. Griffith) 15 minutes.  
*Barney Oldfield's Race for a Life* (Keystone 1913, d. Mack Sennett) 13 minutes.  
*The Hazards of Helen* [Episode 26] (Kalem 1915 d. J.P. McGowan) 14 minutes.

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September 20            Reform, Uplift, and Sensationalism

READING:

SCR, Introduction to Part III, "Cinema and Reform," 135-43, **and** Lee Grieveson, "Fighting Films: Race, Morality, and the Governing of Cinema, 1912-1915," 169-86.

- (x) Harvey J. O'Higgins. "The Case of Fanny: From the Field Notes of a Settlement Worker," *Collier's* 48:2 (2 March 1912): 11; 32.
- (x) "The Sources of the Traffic," from O. Edward Janney. *The White Slave Traffic in America*. New York: National Vigilance Committee, 1911, 79-111.
- (x) Shelley Stamp. "Moral Coercion, or the National Board of Censorship Ponders the Vice Films," *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era*. Edited by Matthew Bernstein. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1999, 41-59.

SCREENINGS:

*Children Who Labor* (Edison/National Child Labor Committee 1912) 13 minutes.  
*Traffic in Souls* (IMP 1913, d. George Loane Tucker) 88 minutes.

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September 27            Progressivism and the Social Problem Film

READING:

Sklar, 56-64.

- (x) *Mutual Film v. Ohio Industrial Commission*, 236 US 230 (1915). Reprinted in *Movies in Our Midst: Documents in the Cultural History of Film in America*. Gerald Mast, ed. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982, 136-143.
- (x) Anthony Slide, "Controversy," *Lois Weber: The Director Who Lost Her Way in History*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996, 69-87.
- (x) Lee Grieveson, "Gangsters and Governance in the Silent Era," *Mob Culture: Hidden Histories of the American Gangster Film*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005, 13-40.

SCREENINGS:

*Hypocrites* (Bosworth 1915 d. Lois Weber) 49 minutes.  
*Alias Jimmy Valentine* (Peerless 1915, d. Maurice Tourneur) 65 minutes.

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October 4                    The Business of Stardom

READINGS:

Sklar, 67-85; 104-21.

SCR, Charles J. Maland, "A Star Is Born: American Culture and the Dynamics of Charlie Chaplin's Star Image," 197-209.

(x) deCordova, Richard. "The Star". *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990: 98-116.

SCREENINGS:

*Easy Street* (Mutual 1917, d. Charles Chaplin) 19 minutes.

*Stella Maris* (Pickford Film Corporation 1918, d. Marshall Neiland) 84 minutes.

**First collection of artifact descriptions due in class today.**

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October 11                    The Art of Oligopoly

READINGS:

Sklar, 86-103; 141-57.

SCR, Gaylyn Studlar, "'The Perfect Lover'?: Valentino and Ethnic Masculinity in the 1920s," 290-304.

SCREENING:

*The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse* (Famous Players-Lasky 1921, d. Rex Ingram) 134 minutes.

**First take-home exam due today.**

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October 18                    Beyond the Balcony

READINGS:

(x) Mary Carbine, "'The Finest Outside the Loop': Motion Picture Exhibition in Chicago's Black Metropolis, 1905-1928," *Camera Obscura* 23 (May 1990): 9-41.

(x) J. Ronald Green, "'Twoness' in the Style of Oscar Micheaux," *Black American Cinema*, Edited by Manthia Diawara. New York: Routledge, 1993, 26-48.

(x) Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, "'We Were Never Immigrants': Oscar Micheaux and the Reconstruction of Black American Identity," *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, 219-44.

SCREENING:

*Body and Soul* (Micheaux Film Corporation 1925, d. Oscar Micheaux) 102 minutes.

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October 25

Alternatives: Inside and Outside of the Dream Factory

READINGS:

- (x) Brain Taves, "Robert Florey and the Hollywood Avant-Garde," *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919-1945*. Edited by Jan-Christopher Horak. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995:94-117.
- (x) Lucy Fischer. "The Films of James Sibley Watson, Jr. and Melville Webber: A Reconsideration," *Millennium Film Journal* 19 (Fall/Winter 1987-88): 40-9.
- (x) Karen Randell. "Masking the Horror of Trauma: The Hysterical Body of Lon Chaney," *Screen* 44:2 (Summer 2003): 216-21.

SCREENINGS:

*The Life and Death of 9413, a Hollywood Extra* (1928 d. Robert Florey and Slavko Vorkapich) 11 minutes.  
*The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928 d. James Sibley Watson and Melville Webber) 13 minutes.  
*The Unknown* (MGM 1927, d. Tod Browning) 63 minutes.

**Second collection of artifact descriptions due in class today.**

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November 1

Something For Everyone

READING:

- (x) John F. Barry and Epes W. Sargent, "Building Theatre Patronage" (1927), *Movie Going in America*. Edited by Gregory A. Waller. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2002, 110-15.
- (x) Lori Landi, "The Flapper Film: Comedy, Dance, and Jazz Age Kinaesthetics," *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*. Edited by Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002, 221-48.
- (x) Douglas Gomery, "The Warner Bros. Innovate Sound," *The Coming of Sound*. New York: Routledge, 2005, 23-46.

SCREENINGS:

*A Plantation Act* (Vitaphone 1926) 10 minutes.  
*Woos Whoopee* (Pat Sullivan 1928, d. Otto Messmer) 7 minutes.  
*It* (Famous Players-Lasky 1927, d. Clarence Badger) 72 minutes.

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November 8

Can't Stop Talking

READING:

Sklar, 175-94.

- (x) Henry Jenkins, "'Assorted Lunacy . . . with No Beginning and No End': Gag, Performance, and Narrative in Early Sound Comedy," "What Made Pistachio Nuts?" *Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, 96-126.

SCREENINGS:

*The Sex Life of the Polyp* (Fox 1928, d. Thomas Chalmers) 11 minutes.

*The Cocoanuts* (Paramount 1929, d. Robert Florey) 96 minutes.

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November 15            The Return to Social Problems

READING:

Sklar, 122-40.

(x) Thomas Doherty. "Criminal Codes: Gangsters Unbound, Felons in Custody," *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, 137-70.

SCREENING:

*I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (Warner Bros. 1932, d. Mervyn LeRoy) 93 minutes.

**Third collection of artifact descriptions due in class today.  
Second take-home exam due in class today.**

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November 22 Thanksgiving Break

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November 29            Hollywood Populism

READING:

Sklar, 195-214.

(x) Smoodin, Eric. "Film Education and Quality Entertainment for Children and Adolescents." *Regarding Frank Capra: Audience, Celebrity, and American Film Studies, 1930-1960*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004. 76-118.

SCREENING:

*Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (Columbia 1936, Frank Capra) 115 minutes.

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December 6            Darkening Clouds

READING:

Sklar, 228-46.

(x) Cathy Klaprat, "The Star as Market Strategy: Bette Davis in Another Light," *The American Film Industry*, rev. ed. Edited by Tino Balio. Madison, Wis.; University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, 351-76.

(x) James Snead, "Angel, Venus, Jezebel: Race and the Female Star in Three Thirties Films," *White Screens/Black Images* [collected essays by James Snead] Edited by Colin MacCabe and Cornell West. New York and London: Routledge, 1994, 62-80.

SCREENING:

*Jezebel* (Warner Bros. 1939, d. William Wyler) 103 minutes.

**Final research papers due in class today.**