

FSEM 100 Cowboy Up: The American Cowboy in Fact and Fiction Syllabus

Semester Spring 2011
Section 34604
Time Mon 2:00
Classroom WPH 201

Lecturer Dr. Ron Scheer
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Office hours TTh 2:00
and by appointment

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Course description

The western has been a genre of American movies and popular literature for over a century. The stories told in this genre reflect values that are embedded in American culture. They are typically about men of strong character who represent a certain kind of moral order, and the story being told is about how they confront and overcome villains, outlaws, and other “bad guys” who are enemies of that order. It can be a black-and-white world of good vs. evil, or it can be a world where there are many shades of gray, so that it’s less easy to tell the difference.

This conflict is typically played out on the American frontier, in the late 19th century (1865-1900), during the decades after the American Civil War. It is the era of cowboys, the growth of the cattle industry, the fencing of the open range, the demise of the buffalo herds, the final displacement of the Native American tribes, the building of cross-continental railroads, and rapid settlement of the frontier territories fed by waves of immigration and the availability of free land made possible by the Homestead Acts.

The conflict in a western typically involves and is eventually resolved by violence – fistfights, gunfire, sometimes even explosives. It is common for lives to be lost. Violence and the threat of violence generate a high-risk atmosphere and the promise of action and excitement. This focus on heroes, villains, and violent conflict raises the western out of its roots in history to the level of myth – a dimension where what feels like deeper truths about life and humanity matter more than historical fact. This is the level where we find cultural values that are being asserted and reaffirmed – values that are assumed to be true and beyond question by readers and viewers.

Objectives

The purpose of the course is to help improve your ability to:

- Watch western films with a fuller understanding of the genre and awareness of the values and ideas expressed in them;
- Use analytical and critical skills in thinking, talking, and writing about these values and ideas; and
- Become more familiar with how the myth of the West relates to the West of history

Classes

Classes will be devoted to discussion of assigned films, viewing of excerpts from films and discussion of Western mythology as it appears in other forms: pulp fiction and comics, painting and book illustration, rodeos, cowboy poetry, radio and TV westerns, and western music and folk songs.

Blackboard

There is an online section for this course at Blackboard, which will post copies of course materials. The class will make use of the Discussion Board there, and postings will count toward class participation. Plans are to include access to additional online resources.

Assignments

You will need to subscribe to netflix so that you can download each week's western for viewing on a computer. (See "Class Schedule" below for complete list.)

Online warmup. To begin the discussion before each class, let's use the discussion board on Blackboard. After you have watched each week's movie, go to the board and post a paragraph there with your impressions of the film. Read the other posts before class so you know how your own ideas relate to everybody else's.

Google maps. Pay attention to where the stories in our movies take place and find them on the map.

Other films. From my own collection and the USC libraries, and as time permits, we'll also sample other films: *The Virginian* (1923, 1929), *High Noon* (1952), *Gunfight at the OK Corral* (1957), *3:10 to Yuma* (2007), *Lonely are the Brave* (1962), *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), *Hud* (1963), *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), *Heaven's Gate* (1980), *Tom Horn* (1980), *Lonesome Dove* (1989), *Unforgiven* (1992), *Tombstone* (1993), and *Smoke Signals* (1998).

Attendance

This is an interactive course. To take the course, you have to come to class and participate. More than two absences and you will be asked to do make-up work. If unavoidable circumstances require you to miss a class, notify the instructor promptly by email.

Course grade

This is a credit/no credit course, so you'll want to do the following to receive credit:

- Watch the movies, come to class and participate
- Post a comment each week on the Discussion Board

Academic accommodations

Any student requesting academic accommodation based on a disability should register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure that the letter is delivered to your instructor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30am - 5pm, Monday - Friday. Phone: 213-740-0776.

Class schedule

Week	Date	
1	1/10	Overview of the course, discussion of trail herding and clips of <i>Lonesome Dove</i>
2	1/17	<i>Lonesome Dove</i> (1989), parts 1-2, Dir. Simon Wincer, Cast: Tommy Lee Jones, Robert Duvall, Danny Glover, Diane Lane
3	1/24	<i>Lonesome Dove</i> (1989), parts 3-4, Dir. Simon Wincer, Cast: Tommy Lee Jones, Robert Duvall, Danny Glover, Diane Lane
4	1/31	<i>Fort Apache</i> (1948) Dir. John Ford, Cast: Henry Fonda, John Wayne, Shirley Temple, Ward Bond
7	2/7	<i>Broken Arrow</i> (1957) Dir. Delmer Daves, Cast: James Stewart, Jeff Chandler, Debra Paget
5	2/14	Double feature <i>The True Story of Jesse James</i> (1957) Dir. Nicholas Ray, Cast: Robert Wagner, Jeffrey Hunter, Hope Lange, John Carradine <i>The Return of Frank James</i> (1940) Dir. Fritz Lang, Cast: Henry Fonda, Gene Tierney, Jackie cooper, John Carradine
6	2/21	<i>Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid</i> (1969) Dir. George Roy Hill, Cast: Paul Newman, Robert Redford, Katharine Ross
8	2/28	<i>Four Faces West</i> (1948) Dir., Alfred E. Green, Cast: Joel McCrae, Charles Bickford
9	3/7	<i>Yellow Sky</i> (1948) Dir. William Wellman, Cast: Gregory Peck, Richard Widmark, Anne Baxter
10	3/21	Your pick (films about nontraditional western characters): <i>Hombre</i> (1967) Dir. Martin Ritt, Cast: Paul Newman, Richard Boone, Barbara Rush, Frederic March [Newman plays a white man raised by Indians] <i>Brokeback Mountain</i> (2005) Dir. Ang Lee, Cast: Heath Ledger, Jake Gyllenhaal
11	3/28	Class pick. The class will choose which one of the following films we will end the course with: <i>Joe Kidd</i> (1972) Dir. John Sturges, Cast: Clint Eastwood, Robert Duvall, John Saxon [early Eastwood film when he still had long hair and sideburns] <i>Tribute to a Bad Man</i> (1956) Dir. Robert Wise, Cast: James Cagney, Don Dubbins, Irene Papas [based on a story by Jack Schaefer, who wrote <i>Shane</i>] <i>Cowboy Up</i> (2001) Dir. Xavier Koller. Cast: Kiefer Sutherland, Marcus Thomas, Molly Ringwald, Daryl Hannah [modern-day rodeo movie] Attendance required last day for course evaluation