

Film Studies 318-01: THE AMERICAN WESTERN
DR. JAMES SCOTT; F, 2010: 10:00-10:50 MWF
TEXTS: Tompkins, *WEST OF EVERYTHING: THE INNER*
***LIFE OF WESTERNS* +**
SELECT E-RES RESOURCES
OFFICE: 334 ADORJAN; HRS: 11-12 M; 2-4 R; OR BY
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Overview:

Cross-listed to offer credit in both English and Film Studies, the American Western fulfills one of the English core requirements for the College of Arts and Sciences as well as one of the 4 requisite electives for the Film Studies Certificate. Over the course of the semester, we will look closely at ten films, representing the works of filmmakers from the 2nd half of the 20th century, who have used the myth of the American west as a way to comment upon our national identity and the new energies which continue to challenge the cultural stereotypes of the western genre. Sometimes a costume piece which undertakes to reconstruct the “Old West,” and sometimes a modernist text that continues to play off received conventions, the Western has long been a framework for examining our elusive essence, that hard-to-define quality which persuades us to call ourselves “Americans.” We will take what might be called an American Studies approach to this material, considering not only filmic issues like framing, lighting, décor, and performance style, but also how these films reflect American political, social, and even spiritual issues in the second half of the 20th century.

Goals:

To explore the connection between American cinema and the socio-cultural experience it reflects and to refine critical attitudes towards those historical forces.

To acquaint students with the modern image industry, especially as represented in the décor and visual ambience of the fiction film.

To make students more familiar with film technology and the vocabulary necessary to discuss film history and practice.

To sharpen research skills with reference both to print sources and to the electronic data bases that provide access to peer-reviewed on-line publications.

To write the competent academic prose required for the analysis of film and other humanities disciplines that communicate by iconic and metaphoric discourse.

Procedures and Protocols:

The course assumes that students are willing to work in the **SLU Global** format and master the minimal skills required to access the site.

The first requisite of the course is close attention to the films themselves, which means not simply discernment of a “theme” abstractly conceived, but also the language, narrative strategy, and visual design which are the primary vehicles of argument and meaning. **Films are available at the Global site in a digitized format.** They are also available on reserve at the Instructional Media Center (IMC). They should be viewed in advance of the class period reserved for “free form” discussion. It makes sense to take notes on the films as you watch them and perhaps also to take account of the time codes that indicate the whereabouts of particular scenes.

The class is discussion-oriented. All students are urged (indeed, obliged!) to enter into the classroom conversation by utilizing the course web site and posting comments via the “discussion” option. This might be done either by initiating a discussion “thread” or continuing a line of inquiry initiated by a classmate or the instructor. There will always be an **“Our Space”** provided for commentary as we approach a new film. **To assure that students stay current with the materials in the class, we will normally have a short quiz on each of the days when we start a new film. Quizzes will include the introductory material associated with the film. The first and last films of the semester are exceptions to that norm, given the usual problems getting off the launching pad and bringing things together in the last days of the course.**

Productive participation in the dialogue of the course is a crucial component of “class participation” and will be rewarded in the grading process. Regular classroom attendance is also expected. **We aim at informality and often will divide the class into workshop groups to facilitate discussion.**

One primary concern of the course is to refine the analytical skills appropriate to film criticism. To further this purpose, we will have two short papers (3-5pp.) devoted to “textual” analysis: these will be based on a careful response to individual films and the assigned readings from E-res that will normally accompany them. **These papers might be generated from less formal responses to the film texts that you make by way of the discussion link at the web site.**

Electronic resources may be accessed through the Pius Library homepage, under the password “Western.” The same access is provided by a link at the Global site. The exact arrangements for the “collateral readings” will be discussed in class.

If you so choose, one paper may be submitted as a rough draft for detailed critique in advance of final submission. You are also welcome, on any occasion, to submit for critique a draft of your opening paragraph, or to post a thesis sentence for comment from your classmates. Normally, a writing option will be offered for each film, meaning that

students may choose 3 of 10 options over the course of the semester. Options **must** be executed within one week after we have completed the classroom analysis of the film. **You must submit at least one short paper before mid-term.** You are welcome to submit up to four papers during the semester and choose your three best grades. **In lieu of an in-class midterm exam, students will be asked for a detailed written response to a question (or questions) provided in advance. The due date for this “exam” is 10/15/10.**

In addition, students will be expected to submit a “culminating project,” a paper of 8-10 pp., which displays both skill in visual analysis and at least minimal research competence in handling on-line peer-reviewed sources. You might seriously consider the possibility of taking a director featured in the course and subjecting approximately three of his/her works to close analysis. Another attractive option might be to develop a paper topic out of your experience with the St. Louis International Film Festival in November (which we will endeavor to incorporate into the class, as far as relevance permits). Still a third possibility would be an extended book review based on reading from a select list of about a dozen books which the instructor will provide. Students might read one entire book (say, Lee Clark Mitchell’s *Westerns*), or chapters and excerpts from several books, amounting to approximately 200- 250 pp.

More individualized projects are also possible, provided they are undertaken with the approval of the instructor. One might, for example, compress and refine a topic of the period such as “women,” “the family,” “masculinity,” “work,” “music,” ethnicity,” “violence.” **The culminating project must be completed no later than Thurs., Dec. 9.** The university’s honesty policy in written work will be strictly enforced.

The only in-class “test” in the course will be a comprehensive two-hour final as scheduled by the university’s academic calendar, **M. 13 December, 12 noon.** It will be, for the most part, discussion-oriented, but will also cover, selectively, information presented in class, materials posted to the web site and, generally speaking, materials whose importance has been emphasized over the course of the semester.

Schedule:

I) Introduction: (8/23)

II) Conceptualizing “The West”

[8/25-9/1] **Film:** *Unforgiven* (Clint Eastwood, 1992)
Peter Rollins, “The West, Westerns, and the American Character” (E-res)
Free Form Discussion.

[9/1] Collateral Reading: Groups 1& 2 (E-res)

Ingrassia, "Writing the West"
Kupfer, "The Seductive & Subversive Meta-Narrative"
Plantinga, "Spectacles of Death"

[9/3-15] **Film:** *Black Robe* (Bruce Beresford, 1991)
Frederick J. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History"
Free Form Discussion

[9/3] **Q#1**

[9/15] Collateral Readings: Groups 3&4 (E-res)

Countryman, "The New Western Historiography"
Simmon, "What's the Big Idea"
Slotkin, "Israel in Babylon"

[9/17-24] **Film:** *The Last of the Mohicans* (Michael Mann, 1992)
Lee Mitchell, "Still Landscapes and Moral Restraint" (E-res)
Free Form Discussion

[9/17] **Q#2**

[9/24] Collateral Reading: Groups 1&2 (E-res)

Cooper, Excerpts
Geraghty, "Revising the Western"
Marubbio, "Celebrating *The Last of the Mohicans*"

III) The "Classical" Western

[9/27- 10/4] **Film:** *Red River* (Howard Hawks, 1948)
Tompkins, "Women and the Language of Men" [P]
Free Form Discussion

[9/27] **Q#3**

[10/4] Collateral Readings: Groups 3& 4 (E-res)

Coyne, "The Lonely Crowd"
May, "Fanning the Home Fires"
Springer, "Beyond the River"

[10/6-15] **Film:** *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956)
Tompkins, "Landscape," pp. 69-87 [P]
Free Form Discussion

[10/6] **Q#4**

[10/15] Collateral Readings: Groups 1& 2 (E-res)

Brooke, "That Don't Make You Kin"
John Hutson: "Sermons in Stone"
Studlar, "What Would Martha Want"

MIDTERM RECESS

[10/20-27] **Film:** *Ride Lonesome* (Budd Boetticher, 1958)
Tompkins' "Horses," pp. 89-109. [P]
Free Form Discussion

[10/25] **Q#5**

[10/27] Collateral Readings: Groups 3& 4 (E-res)

Dickstein, "Cold War Blues"
Lenihan, "The Western Heroism of Randolph Scott"
Kitses, "Boetticher: Rules of the Game"

IV) Revisionist Turns

[10/29-11-5] **Film:** *Lone Star* (John Sayles, 1996)
Tompkins, "Death" pp.23-46. [P]
Free Form Discussion

[10/29] **Q#6**

[11/5] Collateral Readings: Groups 1&2 (E-res)

Ryan, "Lone Star"
Sayles, "Sayles on Sayles"
Sultze, "Challenging Legends, Complicating Border Lines"

[11/8-15] **Film:** *The Missing* (Ron Howard, 2003)
Tompkins, "Women and the Language of Men," 47-67
Free Form Discussion

[11/8] Q#7

[11/15] Collateral Readings: Groups 3&4 (E-res)

Dulap, "Pioneer Women"

Kara, "So Close Yet So Far"

[11/17-22] **Film:** *Smoke Signals* (Chris Eyre, 1998)

Alexander Keller, "Historical Discourse and American Identity in Westerns Since the Reagan Era" [E-Res]

Free Form Discussion

[11/17] Q#8

[11/22] Collateral Readings: Groups 1&2 (E-res)

Alexie, "Sending Cinematic Smoke Signals"

Stethaug, "Hurricanes and Fires"

[11/29-12/3] **Film:** *Buffalo Soldiers* (Charles Haid, 1997)

Quintard, "Buffalo Soldiers in the West"

Free Form Discussion

[12/3] Collateral Readings: Groups 3&4 (E-res)

Johnson, "Half a Man at Best"

Lois/Oliver Horton, "From Reconstruction to Jim Crow"

Brown *et alia*, "Facing Up to Race"

V) Retrospect and Review [12/6]

VI) Final Exam [12/13: Noon]

Grading Policy: While acknowledging the inevitable subjectivity of the grading process, we will assess the various components of the course in approximately this fashion:

Quizzes:				10%
Short Papers:	10+10+ 10%	=		30%
Midterm:				10%
Oral/ "Virtual" Responses:				20%
Culminating Project:				15%
Final Exam:				15%
				<hr/>
				100%

Assessment Tools:

The course will assess student work (and evolving knowledge of course material) at several levels:

- Web-based postings will assess students' ongoing preparation of and engagement with course material;
- Essay assignments will assess students' ability to construct and represent a comprehensive understanding of both the formal aspects of film and the cultural history relevant to putting the cinema into an appropriate socio-political context
- A comprehensive final examination will assess students' retention of important concepts and data of the course;
- Class discussion and web-based exchange will assess students' developing insights into the material being studied.

ADDENDUM: Academic Integrity and Honesty

The University is a community of learning, whose effectiveness requires an environment of mutual trust and integrity. Academic integrity is violated by any dishonesty such as soliciting, receiving, or providing any unauthorized assistance in the completion of work submitted toward academic credit. While not all forms of academic dishonesty can be listed here, examples include copying from another student, copying from a book or class notes during a closed book exam, submitting materials authored by or revised by another person as the student's own work, copying a passage or text directly from a published source without appropriately citing or recognizing that source, taking a test or doing an assignment or other academic work for another student, securing or supplying in advance a copy of an examination without the knowledge or consent of the instructor, and colluding with another student or students to engage in academic dishonesty.

Any clear violation of academic integrity will be met with appropriate sanctions. Possible sanctions for violation of academic integrity may include, but are not limited to, assignment of a failing grade in a course, disciplinary probation, suspension, and dismissal from the University. Students should review the College of Arts and Sciences policy on Academic Honesty, which can be accessed on-line at <http://www.slu.edu/colleges/AS/> under "Quicklinks for Students" or in hard copy form in the Arts and Sciences Policy Binder in each departmental or College office.

ADDENDUM 2: Students with Special Needs - Disability Services

Any student who feels that he/she may need academic accommodations in order to meet the requirements of this course -- as outlined in the syllabus -- due to presence of a disability, should contact the Office of Diversity and Affirmative Action. Please telephone the office at 314-977-8885, or visit DuBourg Hall Room 36. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries.