

Special Topics in Film (English/Cinema Studies 489): American Film Renaissance: Movies and American Culture, 1967-1975



1959



1967



1975

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| Chuck Maland , 413 McClung Office Hours: M 2-3:15, T 10-11, R 9-10, and by appt. email: cmaland@utk.edu Phone: 974-6963 | Meeting Times: TR 2:10-3:25 (Hodges Library 253) W 1:25-3:20 (Hodges Library 129) |
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“Creative periods in film history often take place in periods of social and political conflict.” ---Peter Lev, 2000

“The social world is at all times filled with countless spiritual forces or entities that one simply calls ideas. They all want to penetrate the extant world; they all want to become reality.” --Siegfried Kracauer, 1932

Because of a variety of circumstances within the American film industry and, more broadly, in American society, the period between 1967 and 1975 was a particularly exciting yet somewhat unusual one for American films. Ideas in the turbulent culture sometimes did, as Kracauer’s comment above would have it, penetrate the extant world through the social mythologies of American movies. Film historians have called this period the American Film Renaissance. In this special topics course we’ll be exploring both some of the key films of the AFR, trying to identify common features and formal divergences among the films. We will also examine the industrial and socio-historical context of these films, trying to come to a better understanding of the ways in which the movies were shaped by the times (and, in turn, shaped them). Finally, we will seek to understand how and why American movies and the industry began to shift in the middle 1970s as the American Film Renaissance waned and the era of the Blockbuster began to emerge.

By the end of the course, you should have demonstrated:

1. Familiarity with important historical issues and conflicts in American culture and the film industry in the 1960s and 1970s
2. An ability to analyze films and to recognize through writing and discussion the ways that they employ or deviate from the conventions of Classical Hollywood Cinema
3. An ability to relate movies to American culture through writing and discussion
4. A basic understanding of several approaches to the study of film, especially the formalist, ideological, auteur, and genre approaches
5. An ability to research and to integrate in your writing further information about films, filmmakers who made them, their social contexts, and conflicting interpretations about both the films and the history of American culture during the period.

Screenings, readings, lectures, discussions, exams, and papers are designed to help you achieve each of these objectives.

REQUIRED BOOKS AND OTHER COURSE MATERIALS:

Mark Harris, [Pictures at a Revolution: Five Movies and the Birth of the New Hollywood](#)

Jonathan Kirshner, [Hollywood’s Last Golden Age: Politics, Society, and the Seventies Film in America](#)

Selected Readings—these required readings will be available on Blackboard under “Selected Readings” the week they are assigned

Recommended book: Peter Biskind, [Easy Riders, Raging Bulls](#) (available used and inexpensive on Amazon)

CLASS FORMAT:

We will meet in Hodges 253 on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:10-3:25 for lecture and guided discussion and in Hodges 129 on Wednesdays from 1:25-3:20 for screenings. We will also have an assigned film to screen most weeks between our Thursday and our Tuesday screenings. These will be available to be streamed from our Blackboard site. I’ll poll the class after we first meet to see if the class would be interested in scheduling a group screening on Monday afternoon or evening for those films scheduled over the weekend.

BLACKBOARD:

I will have a Blackboard site for the course. Check it at the start of each week for an announcement; it will give you an idea of our main focus and activities for the week. I’ll also include other useful information on the site, including external links, the syllabus, the required selected

readings, paper assignments (when we get closer to the time to write them) and occasional study guides or questions. Let me stress, too, that I consider Blackboard not a **substitute** for attending class but a **supplement** to the course to enhance and enrich your learning. (See the next section on attendance.)

READING AND ATTENDANCE POLICY:

I'll make every effort to be in class, and I expect you to attend regularly. Our attendance policy: you are allowed **FOUR** absences during the term. After the **FOURTH** absence, your **OVERALL COURSE GRADE** will be docked **ONE** grade for **each subsequent absence**. I'll try to make class interesting, informative, and engaging. If you do miss a class session, *YOU are responsible for any work we will have accomplished that day*. Finally, coming into class more than ten minutes late or leaving more than ten minutes early will be considered an absence.

Please read the assigned readings by class time on the day they're assigned. I won't "lecture from the book," although I will at times refer to readings, and they will be linked to the topics we'll be considering when they are assigned. Your learning will be enhanced if you read and comprehend the assigned readings before class on the day they are assigned.

CELLULAR PHONES AND LAPTOPS:

As a courtesy to everyone in class, do not bring active cellular phones (or other beeping devices) into the classroom. In addition, unless we have a special activity planned, I would also like you **not** to use laptops in class. They can distract other students, as well as distract those with laptops via the temptation of multi-tasking! I'd rather you just take notes the old-fashioned way—using handwriting.

DISABILITY SERVICES

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a documented disability or if you have emergency information to share, please contact the Office of Disability Services in 2227 Dunford Hall at 974-6087. This will ensure that you are properly registered for services.

PAPERS:

Students may either write two short papers (the second will be a short research paper) of around 1250 words each or one longer research essay of around 2500 words. The short paper option is probably better if you feel uncertain of your writing abilities. The first short paper may include research, and the second must include research. The longer research essay option should be preferable for those who have studied film before, are comfortable with their writing, and would like to get into a subject in more detail. Any graduate students will do additional work to earn graduate credit.

The two short papers, if you choose that option, will be due on **February 10** and **April 14**. The research paper option will be due on **March 31**. I will talk in more detail about the papers in class. Papers will be evaluated on the basis of four criteria: 1) quality and clarity of the thesis, or main idea; 2) quality and clarity of the presentation of that main idea in the body of the essay; 3) quality of research and citation form; and 4) general correctness and effectiveness of mechanics, grammar, and style. Strive to make the writing your most effective. Use the MLA internal citation form and a Works Cited page for your references. Be sure not to plagiarize sources.

PAPER DUE DATES:

Option A

February 10: First short paper due (typed, about 1250 words)
April 14: Second short paper due (typed, about 1250 words)

OR Option B

March 31: Longer research paper due (typed, about 2500 words)

EXAMS:

March 3: Mid-term Exam
April 30: Final exam (Thursday) 12:30-2:30



QUIZZES:

We will have occasional brief quizzes at the start of class, based on readings, films, and short lectures. They may not be made up. You can drop your three lowest quiz grades. The remaining quizzes will constitute your quiz total.

GRADING:

Each short paper and exam will count 20% of your grade. The longer paper, if you select that option, will count 40% of your grade. You must complete all tests and papers to pass the class. Class participation and your performance on quizzes will also count 20%. Graduate students taking the course should see me about the additional requirements for graduate credit.

READING AND VIEWING SCHEDULE

H=Harris, Pictures at a Revolution: Five Movies and the Birth of the New Hollywood

K=Kershner, Hollywood's Last Golden Age

SR=Selected Readings (available on Blackboard)

B=Biskind, Easy Riders, Raging Bulls (recommended reading only)

JANUARY

The Studio System and Classical Hollywood Cinema—and Early Deviations from Classical Hollywood

- 7: Movies as Artistic Form, History, and Culture: Pillow Talk (Michael Gordon, 1959)
- 8: Classical Hollywood Cinema and the Breakup of the Studio System; SR, 1 (Chuck Maland, "Film Form and Classical Hollywood Cinema"); H, Part One (chs. 1-8). Before class on Tuesday, see Dr. Strangelove (Stanley Kubrick, 1964)
- 13: Discuss Dr. Strangelove. Introduction to American Cultural History, 1960-75; K, Prologue, Ch. 1; SR, 2 (Kenneth Davis, "The Torch is Passed")

Pictures at a Revolution: The Oscar Nominees of 1967

- 14: Screen Guess Who's Coming to Dinner (Stanley Kramer, 12/12/1967)
- 15: Stanley Kramer, Tracy and Hepburn, and the Classical Hollywood Social Problem Film: discuss Guess Who's Coming to Dinner; H, Part Two (chs. 9-19), plus chs. 23 and 25, and pp. 347-51, 371-376. Before class on Tuesday, see In the Heat of the Night (Norman Jewison, 8/2/1967)
- 20: Movies and the Civil Rights Movement—discuss In the Heat of the Night. H, sections in Part III on Heat (pp. 288-290,
- 21: Screen Bonnie and Clyde (Penn, 8/20/67): recommended reading: B, ch. 1
- 24: American Film Renaissance Kicks Off—discuss Bonnie and Clyde; remainder of Harris, Part Three (chs. 20-31). Before class on Tuesday, screen The Graduate (Mike Nichols, 12/21/67)
- 27: Rebel without a Cause and the Generation Gap—discuss The Graduate. Before class on Tuesday, H, Epilogue, K, ch. 2

Vietnam and the Movies: A Range of Responses

- 28: Screen Alice's Restaurant (Penn, 8/20/69), K, pp. 102-110
- 29: The Draft, Vietnam, and Movies—discuss Alice's Restaurant (+ Easy Rider footage; over the weekend, screen Medium Cool (Haskell Wexler, 8/27/69)

FEBRUARY

- 3: The Media, the Anti-War Movement and the 1960s--discuss Medium Cool. K, ch. 3.
- 4: Screen M.A.S.H. (Altman, 1/25/70): K, 110-132; recommended reading, B, ch. 3
- 5: Before the TV Series: Altman, M.A.S.H., and Vietnam—discuss M.A.S.H. SR, 3 (David Cook, "The Auteur Cinema: Directors and Directions in the Hollywood Renaissance"). Before class on Tuesday, see Patton (Franklin Schaffner, 4/2/1970)
- 10: Duelling Wars: World War II versus Vietnam: discuss Patton; **FIRST PAPER DUE**

Alienation, Left Cycles, and Right Cycles in a Time of Political Turmoil

- 11: New Perspectives in a New Era--screen Five Easy Pieces (Bob Rafelson, 9/11/70); review SR, 3 on Rafelson
- 12: BBS and the AFR—discuss Five Easy Pieces: recommended reading, B, 116-20. Before class on Tuesday, see Little Big Man (Penn, 12/14/70)
- 17: Revisionist Western, I: Genre as Contemporary Metaphor—discuss Little Big Man, review K, pp. 110-115
- 18: McCabe and Mrs. Miller (Altman, 6/24/71)
- 19: Revisionist Western, 2—discuss McCabe and Mrs. Miller: recommended reading, B, pp. 102-109. Before class on Tuesday, see Dirty Harry (Siegel, 12/22/71)
- 24: The Right Cycle: Dirty Harry and the Right Cycle; SR,4 (Jay Hoberman, "The Legal Vigilante: Dirty Harry and Tricky Dicky")
- 25: The Right Cycle, II: see The French Connection (Friedkin, 10/9/1971), review SR 3 on Friedkin
- 26: Discuss The French Connection and review for midterm.

MARCH

- 3: **MIDTERM EXAM**

Emerging Auteurs in the Early 1970s

- 4: Introduce and screen the The Last Picture Show (Bogdanovich, 10/2/71)
- 5: Discuss Peter Bogdanovich and The Last Picture Show: recommended reading, B, ch. 4. Before class the Tuesday, see The Godfather (Francis Ford Coppola, 3/24/1972). Because the central concerns of Play It Again, Sam (our film for March 11) depend partly on a familiarity with the 1942 classic, Casablanca, you might also want to see that Bogart film if you don't already know the film. (NOTE: both films assigned over the weekend often appear on lists of the top ten American films ever.)
- 10: Coppola, Evans, Brando, and an American Classic—discuss The Godfather, Part I; recommended reading B, ch. 5
- 11: Woody, Comedy, and the AFR—screen Play It Again, Sam (Herbert Ross, 5/4/72)
- 12: Discuss contemporary romantic comedy, American gender myths, and Play It Again, Sam. Before class on Tuesday, see American Graffiti (Lucas, 8/1/1973)

16-20: No classes, SPRING BREAK

- 24: Lucas Makes His First Move to Take Over Hollywood—discuss American Graffiti: recommended reading, B, 234-44 and ch. 10.
- 25: Another Bonnie and Clyde? Screen Badlands (Malick, 10/15/73)
- 26: The Philosopher and the Doomed Couple—discuss Badlands: recommended reading, B, ch. 8. Before class on Tuesday, see Chinatown (Polanski, 6/20/74)

Conspiracy, Movies, and Paranoia

- 31: Polanski, European Art Cinema, and Meditations on Corruption in the Detective Film—discuss Chinatown; K, ch. 7; **LONGER RESEARCH PAPER DUE**

APRIL

- 1: Coppola's Personal Film: screen The Conversation (Coppola, 4/7/74)
- 2: Watergate, Paranoia, and the Conspiracy Film: discuss The Conversation. K, ch. 6. Before class on Tuesday, see All the President's Men (Pakula, 4/9/1976)
- 7: Presidential Turmoil, Investigative Journalism, and Cinematic Suspense: discuss All the President's Men

Movies and the Feminist Revival: An Early Cinematic Response

- 8: Scorsese Moves Out of Little Italy—Screen Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore (Scorsese, 12/9/ 1974)
- 9: Discuss Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore. K, ch. 4. Before class on Tuesday, see Godfather II (Coppola, 12/12/74)

Three Culminating Classics of 1974-75 and the End of the AFR

- 14: American Epic Tragedy: discuss Godfather II and Coppola after the AFR: B, 12; **SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE**
- 15: Sixties Novel and Seventies Film: Screen One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (Forman, 11/19/75)
- 16: Does Forman De-politicize Ken Kesey? Discuss One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. Before class on Tuesday, see Nashville (Altman, 6/10/75)
- 21: Altman's Bicentennial Present to America: discuss Nashville; K, ch. 8 and SR 9 (Pauline Kael's review of Nashville)
- 22: A New Era Forming—screen Jaws (Spielberg, 6/20/1975); recommended reading, B, Ch. 9
- 23: The AFI Subsidies and The Blockbuster Era Emerges: Discuss Jaws, Class Summary, and Review
- 30: Final Exam, (Thursday) 12:30-2:30 p.m. Hodges 253

