

AMERICAN MOVIES IN THEIR MOMENT THE GOLDEN AGE, 1929-1945

History 277/FMS 245A
Spring 2017
MW 12.30-1.45
Morey 502



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Hours: MW 9-10
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Who ya gonna believe, me or your own eyes?
-Chico Marx, Duck Soup (1933)

This course, one of two I offer in film studies, considers feature films as evidence for the cultural historian of modern America by considering the role of movies in the social imaginary of distinct moments in the nation's history. That moment for this iteration of the course is the Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945), often referred to as Hollywood's "Golden Age."

FILMS AND READINGS

The films can all be found on reserve in the Art and Music Library, on line, or for purchase as DVDs. Some of them will be streamed via Blackboard. There are two books required for the course: Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark* and Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War*. I have ordered copies at the UR Bookstore, and they available at Amazon and other on-line vendors (often at reduced prices). They are also are on 2-hour reserve in Rush Rhees Library. Other short readings will be available on Blackboard.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

I will lecture once in each segment of the course, providing a historical context for our movies, and the other two classes of each segment will consist of a discussion of the relevant films.

Class Participation: All students are expected to attend each class and actively participate in the discussions of the films.

Papers: There will be no examinations in the course. Each student will write four papers, three short (1500-2000 word) essays and one longer (2500-3000 word) paper, requiring some modest research. The first of the short papers will be an analysis of what you regard as a pivotal scene

from one of the assigned films. This paper is due by **22 February**. The second of the short papers will be an analysis of the relationships between men and women in another of the assigned films. This paper is due by **29 March**. The third of the short papers will be a response to a review of one of the assigned films by one of the leading film critics of the time: James Agee, Manny Farber, or Otis Ferguson. This paper is due by **3 May**. The final, longer paper will be devoted to an examination of the period's films of **one** of the following actors or directors: Fred Astaire, Frank Capra, Clark Gable, Cary Grant, Howard Hawks, Katharine Hepburn, James Stewart, Groucho Marx, or Preston Sturges (or an alternative subject to my approval). This paper is due by **10 May**. Further details on these papers will be forthcoming.

Grading: Grading in the course will be weighted as follows: short papers (15% each); longer paper (35%); class participation (20%).

Academic Honesty: All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with the University of Rochester's Academic Honesty Policy. More information is available at: www.rochester.edu/college/honesty.

SCHEDULE

I will lecture once in each segment of the course, providing a broad historical context for our movies, and the other two classes of each segment will consist of a discussion of Hollywood history and the relevant films. Reading assignments should be completed at the beginning of each segment.

18 January Introduction: Movies and the Social Imaginary

Recommended Reading: Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*, 3-12.

Warren Susman, "The Culture of the Thirties"

Lawrence Levine, "American Culture and the Great Depression"

Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War*, 1-15.

HARD TIMES

23 January Lecture

25 January *Modern Times*

30 January *Grapes of Wrath*

Reading: Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*, 50-91, 124-143.

SUCCESS UNDER STRAIN

1 February Lecture

6 February *Scarface*

8 February *Citizen Kane*

Reading: Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*, 215-233, 241-244, 311-354.

CLASS STRUGGLE

13 February Lecture
 15 February *My Man Godfrey*
 20 February *Holiday*

Reading: Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*, 289-310, 394-430.

NEW DEALS

22 February Lecture **First Short Paper Due**
 27 February *Gabriel Over the White House*
 1 March *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*

Reading: Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*, 441-463, 477-495.
 Lawrence Levine, "Hollywood's Washington"

DANCING IN THE DARK

6 March Lecture
 8 March *Gold Diggers of 1933*
13 March Spring Break
15 March Spring Break
 20 March *Shall We Dance?*

Reading: Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*, 233-241, 357-343, 431-438.
 Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament"

A USEABLE PAST

22 March Lecture
 27 March *Young Mr. Lincoln*
 3 April *Gone with the Wind*

Reading: Richard Fox, "The Hero on Screen"
 Molly Haskell, "American Bible"

WAR GAMES

29 March Lecture **Second Short Paper Due**
 3 April *Duck Soup*
 5 April *The Great Dictator*

Reading: Doherty, *Projections of War*, 16-35, 85-148

THE GREATEST GENERATION

10 April Lecture
 17 April *Hail the Conquering Hero*
 19 April *The Best Years of Our Lives*

Reading: Doherty, *Projections of War*, 36-59, 149-204.

INTO THE DARK

24 April Lecture
 26 April *Laura*
 1 May *Double Indemnity*

Reading: Doherty, *Projections of War*, 227-264.
 Phillip Hanson, "The Arc of National Confidence and the Birth of Film Noir"

3 May **Third Short Paper Due**
 Wrap-Up
 10 May **Final Paper Due**