

# English 5950 / Studios and Stars: American Cinema of the 1930s and 1940s

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SPRING 2021  
[Sec. 001, #10354]  
Online/ TH 5:30-XXX  
Office hours by appointment

In this course a selection of American films from the 1930s/1940s—Hollywood’s “Golden Age,” according to many—will serve as our gateway to an exploration of the entertainment industry and the studio system, film language and technology, film stars and genres, film theory and criticism, and the intersection of cultural history and artistic production. We’ll be “taking Hollywood seriously” as a site of artistic, cultural, social, economic, and imaginary importance, both then and now.

## **Required texts:**

- Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Blackwell, 2003. (hence *HC*)
- Salman Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz*. British Film Institute, 1992
- Additional essays available through Canvas. Note: two volumes in the History of the American Cinema series can be accessed through the library catalogue page: Tino Balio’s *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (1993), and Thomas Schatz’s *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s* (1997). I will be assigning portions of the former.
- Required films will be available for streaming via the “Media Gallery” tab on Canvas and should be watched carefully before the class date for which they are assigned. A high-speed connection is recommended.
- A [reserve list of relevant texts](#) will be maintained in the TJ library.

## **Course Requirements (for additional information see the “Assignment Overview” document on Canvas):**

- Weekly discussion board posting, 15%
- Film memory interview assignment, 15%
- *Mise en scène* essay (± 1000 words), 15%
- Two critical essays (±1800-2000 words), 20% each
- Film genre group work, 15%

For detailed information see the “Assignment Overview” document on Canvas.

## Tentative Syllabus:

MODULE	DATE	READING & VIEWING	ASSIGNMENTS
1	TH JAN 21	<p><u>Introduction; coming attractions; some film technique and <a href="#">vocabulary</a></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Taking Hollywood Seriously," <i>HC</i> 5-22</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
2 <a href="#">Studio production</a> ; Hollywood style			
	TH JAN 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Entertainment I," <i>HC</i> 33-53</li> <li>"Industry 1: to 1948," <i>HC</i> 113-58</li> <li>"Sound" and "Color," <i>HC</i> 238-50</li> <li>"Introduction" from <i>Grand Design</i> (canvas or UMSL online access)</li> </ul> </li> <li>Viewing: "American Cinema: The Studio System" (Canvas) <a href="#">Sullivan's Travels</a> (1941; 90m) (<a href="#">links</a>)</li> </ul>	
3 <a href="#">America (and Hollywood) during the Depression</a>			
	TH FEB 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Levine, "American Culture and the Great Depression" (Canvas)</li> <li>Rauchway, "Americans in the Great Depression" (Canvas)</li> <li>Leitch, "Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory" (Canvas)</li> </ul> </li> <li>Viewing: <a href="#">My Man Godfrey</a> (1936; 94m); <a href="#">The Grapes of Wrath</a> (1940; 129m) (<a href="#">links</a>)</li> </ul>	
4 <a href="#">The Production Code</a>			

	TH FEB 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maltby, "The Production Code and the Hays Office," <i>Grand Design</i> 37-72</li> <li>"Narrative 2," HC 471-90</li> <li>Forman, from <i>Our Movie Made Children</i> (Canvas)</li> <li>"The Production Code of 1930" (Canvas)</li> <li>Eco, "Casablanca: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage"</li> </ul> </li> <li>Viewing: <a href="#">Casablanca</a> (1942; 102m)</li> </ul>	
5 <a href="#">Genre</a> in film; what we can know about <a href="#">the Western</a>			
	TH FEB 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Genre," HC 74-110</li> <li>Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre" (Canvas)</li> <li>Altman, "Where do genres come from?" (Canvas)</li> </ul> </li> <li>Viewing: <a href="#">Stagecoach</a> (1939; 96m); <a href="#">Dodge City</a> (1939; 105m)</li> </ul>	<div>Thu Feb 18: Westerns genre work due</div> <div>Fri Feb 19: Interview assignment due</div>
6 Writing about Film			
	TH FEB 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corrigan, from <i>A Short guide to Writing about Film</i> (Canvas)</li> <li>"Space I," HC 312-40</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
7 <a href="#">Movie stars</a>			

	TH MAR 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Performance I,” HC 377-89 (from “Acting as Impersonation”)</li> <li>Dyer, “Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society” (Canvas)</li> <li>Holmes, “The Hollywood Star System and . . . 1916-1934” (Canvas)</li> </ul> </li> <li>Viewing: <a href="#">Ninotchka</a> (1939; 110m) (<a href="#">links</a>)</li> </ul>	Thu Mar 4: Romantic Comedy genre work due
			Fri Mar 5: <i>mise en scène</i> essay due
8 <u>Melodrama and the “<a href="#">women’s film</a>”</u>			
	TH MAR 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (Canvas)</li> <li>Mulvey, “Afterthoughts...” (Canvas)</li> <li>Reading: Klaprat, “The Star as Market Strategy: Bette Davis in Another Light” (Canvas)</li> </ul> </li> <li>Viewing: <a href="#">Dark Victory</a> (1939; 106m)</li> </ul>	Thu Mar 11: Melodrama genre work due
9 <u>Film noir</u>			
	TH MAR 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schrader, “Notes on Film Noir” (Canvas);</li> <li>“Space II,” HC 343-65</li> </ul> </li> <li>Viewing: “American Cinema: Film Noir” (<a href="#">video link on Canvas</a>); <a href="#">The Maltese Falcon</a> (1941; 100m); <a href="#">Double Indemnity</a> (1944; 107m) (<a href="#">links</a>)</li> </ul>	Thu Mar 18: Film noir genre work due
10 <u>Melodrama</u>			
	TH MAR 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Williams, “Melodrama Revised” (Canvas)</li> <li>Gledhill, “Rethinking Genre” (Canvas)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Fri Mar 26 First critical essay due date

SPRING BREAK MAR 29 & 31			
11 <u>The prestige picture; Hollywood and the Civil War</u>			
	TH APR 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Narrative 1," HC 452-70</li> <li>"Time," HC 436-48 (from "History as a Production Value")</li> </ul> </li> <li>Viewing: <a href="#">Gone With the Wind</a> (1939; 232m) (<a href="#">links</a>)</li> </ul>	
	TH APR 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Entertainment 2," HC 54-73</li> <li>Burks, "Gone with the Wind: Black and White in Technicolor" (Canvas)</li> <li>Leff, "Gone with the Wind and Hollywood's Racial Politics" (Canvas)</li> </ul> </li> <li>Viewing: <i>Gone with the Wind: The Making of a Legend</i> (1988)</li> </ul>	Thu Apr 15: Series film genre work due
12 <u>Spectacle and estrangement</u>			
	TH APR 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rushdie, The Wizard of Oz</li> <li>Friedman, "Relinquishing Oz: Every Girl's Anti-Adventure Story" (Canvas)</li> <li>Doty, "My Beautiful Wickedness: The Wizard of Oz as Lesbian Fantasy" (Canvas)</li> </ul> </li> <li>Viewing: <a href="#">The Wizard of Oz</a> (1939; 155m) (<a href="#">links</a>)</li> </ul>	Fri Apr 23 First critical essay due date
13 <u>Hollywood and politics</u> ( <a href="#">links</a> )			

	TH APR 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ "Politics," <i>HC</i> 268-303</li> <li>○ Levine, "Hollywood's Washington" (Canvas)</li> <li>○ Capra, from <i>The Name Above the Title</i> (Canvas)</li> <li>○ Rogin and Moran, "Mr. Capra Goes to Washington" (Canvas)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Viewing: <a href="#">Mr. Smith Goes to Washington</a> (1939; 130m)</li> </ul>	
			Thu Apr 28: Capra genre work due
15 TBA			
	TH MAY 6		Fri Mar 26 Third critical essay due date

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the **Disability Access Services Office in 131 Millennium Student Center at 516-6554** as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are arranged in a timely fashion.