

Cinemerica: Movies, Culture, and Society in 20th-century America

This is a tentative syllabus from the last time this class was taught. The books will probably remain the same, but the assignments may change.

Books Required

Paula Cohen, *Silent Film and the Triumph of the American Myth*

Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own*

Neal Gabler, *Life the Movie*

Steven J. Ross, ed., *Movies and American Society*

Robert Sklar, *Movie-made America*

Also David Chandler, "The Grammar of Television and Film", download from

<http://users.aber.ac.uk/dgc/gramtv.html>

Assignments

Early in this course we note the question "What is film for?" The basic answer that filmmakers come up with is that it's for telling stories. Once we can talk about films as stories, we can ask a lot of questions of any film and of ourselves as film viewers. These include

- What happens in the story?
- Is it a good/interesting/pleasurable story?
- How exactly does the film tell the story?
- What are the particularly cinematic means by which the story is told?
- What effect does it try to have on me/us as audience? (As a corollary, what effect does it actually have, if there is an apparent difference between intended and actual effect)
- How exactly is that effect achieved?
- Have I learned or felt something new about anything from the film? About myself?
- What other stories or films would I connect this with?

There are two separate but similar writing assignments.

1. Choose any American film you like from the 1930s or 1940s and discuss it in terms of the questions listed above.
2. Choose any American film you like from the 1950s through the 1990s and discuss it in terms of the questions listed above. Add any observations about similarities or differences between this film and the film you chose for #1.

Here are 2 resource sites: <http://www.filmsite.org/filmh.html>
<http://www.filmsite.org/genres2.html>