

LIT 227  
American Motion Picture  
Spring 2011

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### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

LIT 227 American Motion Picture studies American Film with a major emphasis on American Culture, as reflected in the Motion Picture. The course examines the effect of the images portrayed in Motion Pictures on the perception of American society and history. Each week we will inspect different "American themes" as well as study different movie genres that inform those themes. Our goal is to examine various films as one would analyze and discuss literary works.

### ORGANIZATION OF COURSE:

1. We have no formal textbook. Each week we will watch selected films interspersed with selections from the PBS documentary *American Cinema*. Expect to watch one movie per session with the remaining time to be used for discussion and informal writing, which can be turned into Response Papers. I will lecture briefly before each film. After each screening I will provide discussion questions to begin the class and your individual response process.
2. After each formal screening you will write in a Journal of Personal Observations: Each entry will consist of 2-3 informal responses to 4-5 questions prepared by the instructor. These questions will be based upon our weekly themes and genres. Journal writing will take place in-class, but can also be amplified outside of class (if constrained by time). These writings (and the following discussions) will hopefully give you plenty of fuel for the formal Response Papers. The Journal may be typed or handwritten. A final Journal grade will be given based on the effort and quality of your journal entries. Keep all entries bound and together throughout the semester. Note: you may also take as many notes during the films as you wish (I look favorably on this).
3. *Four* times during the semester you must type a Response Paper regarding a film that we dedicate our time to. This analysis will ask for certain insights based upon the themes and genres that we discuss. I am NOT asking your opinion on the quality of the films, but rather the thematic messages that reside within the films. The paper's content should identify specific references within the film (scenes, shots, dialogue, characters, etc.) that reflect the importance of the film regarding our culture as a whole. The first sentence should act as your thesis and provide the focus of your essay. Surprise me (and stretch yourself). Each paper must be at least two typed pages. Your grade will be based on how original your thinking is, along with how well you articulate that thinking. DO NOT attempt to plagiarize. You can easily find other writings about our films, but you are here to add your own unique voice. You *may* reference other critiques if you wish, but you must cite these appropriately in MLA or APA format. No formal deadline here. Make sure I receive these papers by Friday June 23 (emailed after June 22). I recommend that you not wait to do them all the last week. Pace yourself. I will return work with a grade within a week's time (and you may revise, if you would like, for a better grade.)
4. You are expected to Participate fully in all screenings, discussions, and activities throughout the semester. As a motivator for your attendance, I will NOT tell you which films we are watching before class; you must come to class to find out. Please turn off all cell-phones (as this is just as annoying as it is in a movie theater). It is vital that you come prepared and ready to discuss. You will certainly lose points for being under-prepared or disruptive.

## EVALUATION:

- 80% Response Papers (four typed reports, 20%each)
- 10% Participation (class presence, including generative activities, discussion)
- 10% Journal of Personal Observations

Attendance: You get *one* absences. Choose it wisely. Or better yet, come to all classes. Your grade will almost certainly reflect your attendance. For each absence beyond one I will deduct a full letter off your grade. Exceptions will be made for acceptable situations (if you contact me first). Consistently arriving late or leaving early without contacting me first will also be reflected in lost points. This is a short six weeks, so each day matters.

Finally, let us Respect each other. The great thrill of a film class is discussion and sharing. It is important that we feel comfortable sharing our thoughts. Please respect your classmates' (and humanity's) diversity. Unethical biases or bigotry will not be tolerated. Note also that we are all adults watching these films, and therefore, we will encounter controversies surrounding violence, language, and sex (among other issues) within the films. This is not a promotion of those activities, but an acknowledgement that they exist in our culture.

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Genre</b>	<b>American Cinema Doc</b>
<b>1</b>	American Individual/Idealism/ Democracy and Contradiction	The Coming of Age Drama	Hollywood Style
<b>2</b>	American Myths Heroes and Anti-Heroes	The Western  The Road Film	The Western
<b>3</b>	Power and Corruption Society's Underbelly	Film Noir	Film Noir
<b>4</b> Memorial Day- No class	Race and the Melting Pot	Sociological Drama	None
<b>5</b>	Class and Labor/ Work/Community/ Politics/Paranoia	Historical Drama  Political Drama	TV's Influence on Film
<b>6</b>	Gender Roles/	Romantic Comedy	Romantic Comedy
<b>7</b>	Love and Sexuality Into the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century: New Perspectives Technology/ Multiculturalism	Relationship Drama Independent Film  Art-House Film	The Edge of Hollywood