
John Fairfield
Fairfield@xavier.edu

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Fairfield Office: Schott 609  
Phone (and voice mail): 745-3660  
e-mail: fairfiel@xavier.edu

Administrative Assistant for History Department: Darleen Frickman, Schott Hall 505, 745-2009, frickman@xavier.edu

*****Please note: As an on-line course taught in the summer (when the timeline is necessarily shortened), this course requires you to be self-motivated. If you not stay on the schedule and get things done in a timely manner, it will be difficult if not impossible to successfully complete the course.

I highly recommend you orient yourselves to what on-line learning requires by visiting this site and taking the quiz:  http://www.xavier.edu/online/Student-Orientation.cfm .

CANVAS: This course requires access to Canvas. Please address all Canvas access questions to the help desk: 745-HELP
Note: you can access Canvas from this website (without using MyXU, don’t put www at beginning):  http://Canvas.xu.edu

Xavier University Services and Policies: Please see the document “Xavier University Services and Policies” under the “Course Content” tab on the Canvas site for this course.

HOLLYWOOD: A Social and Cultural History of American Movies, 1890-1960

Arising out of the chaotic metropolitan growth at the turn of the century, movie culture and the movie industry played crucial roles in the shaping of American society in the first half of the twentieth century. Initially subverting a dominant, middle-class Victorian culture and potentially democratizing American culture, the movies soon became a part of corporate capitalism’s consumerist transformation of American society. In the face of the social traumas of massive depression and international conflict in the 1930s, a consolidated movie industry and culture (popularly known as “Hollywood”) crafted powerful and pervasive symbols and myths to support traditional American values and institutions and prepare the nation for war. Caught up in the international anxieties and domestic frustrations of the early Cold War, Hollywood conformed to dominant cultural values (particularly anti-communism) in the late 1940s and 1950s.

Thus four (or five) words, subvert (democratize), transform, support, and conform, can briefly summarize and frame the history of movies from 1890 to 1960. Much of the fascination
of this history, however, emerges at the margins where this powerful means of communication never completely ceased to be disruptive, challenging, and creative. Indeed, the civic and democratic potential of what became an essentially commercial and consumer phenomenon is an important theme in this course. Robert Sklar's *Movie-Made America* (1994), the best one-volume survey of the history of American movie culture, is the central text in this course. Other texts will be available on e-reserves and will represent a sampling of the extensive and remarkable scholarship on the history of movies written over the past forty years as well as a few primary documents that illustrate key episodes in movie history.

I. Course Objectives

Like all history courses, this course is designed to promote habits of critical reading, thinking, writing, and viewing. The method used to promote these habits is the reading of a series of historical texts, followed by thinking and writing about the issues they raise. The assigned texts, narrated presentations, and movies are central to the course. It will be difficult to do well in this course without careful and timely reading and viewing.

The course is also designed to develop students’ understanding of history as a field of inquiry. History is centrally concerned with change over time. Historians describe and, as fully as possible, explain how things change over time. A major concern of historians, therefore, is cause and effect. Historians prefer multi-causational, rather than mono-causational explanations because we believe things are generally more complex than they might superficially appear. Consequently, a major benefit of historical study is a greater appreciation of complexity and ambiguity. This particular historian (Fairfield) prefers historical descriptions and explanations that emphasize active agents rather than impersonal historical forces because I believe women and men play a significant role in making their own history, within the limits imposed by other historical and natural factors.

Historical inquiry is dependent upon good questions about change over time and logical arguments about cause and effect. History is something very different than "the past" (a chaotic jumble of everything that has ever happened). History is *an interpretation of selected aspects of the past.* To guide our way through the maze of details and events in the past, we need good questions that clarify what it is we want to know and that help us select what is important to our inquiry (that is, evidence that addresses our question, especially when that evidence does not support our presuppositions). To answer our questions (questions that generally do not have single, simple, or obvious answers), historians construct arguments that marshal as much evidence and logic as possible to develop convincing explanations of change over time. Everything in this course, what I do and what you do, will concern questions and arguments concerning change over time.

II. Student Learning Outcomes: Students who read the texts, participate in the activities, and complete the assignments in this course will be able to:
1. explain how movie culture and the motion picture industry first emerged and why they proved so controversial.
2. describe how movie culture and the motion picture industry changed from 1890 to 1960, identifying key transitions and stages.
3. articulate the ways in which motion pictures both reflected and shaped changes in American society from the 1890s to 1960.
4. analyze and dissect historical movie images and narratives from the point of view of their creators, their consumers, and the larger historical context in which they are made, distributed, and exhibited.
5. connect motion pictures to other historical documents and sources so as to illuminate both the motion pictures themselves and their larger historical context.
6. identify and evaluate the growing importance of image-based communications in American life over the course of the twentieth century.
7. apply their historical knowledge and their visual literacy to interpret image-based communications (political, commercial, social, cultural) they encounter in everyday life.

III. Texts

1. Robert Sklar, Movie-Made America (New York: Vintage, 1994). This is the revised and updated edition, available at the Xavier bookstore (also widely available elsewhere).
2. Other short essays and documents are either on-line or provided in digital form on the canvas site.
3. Various films must be screened. Many are on you tube, others are widely available in public libraries or commercially (Netflix, blockbuster, etc.). There is one film, The Crowd, that is crucial to the course but not widely available. The Xavier library has purchased streaming rights to the film (I’ll provide that link on Canvas) so that is a one option if you can’t find it elsewhere. But this version does not have any soundtrack whereas there is a good VHS version out there with an orchestral score that really brings the film alive. I encourage you to try to rent or even purchase that VHS, or screen the XU Library’s version of it. If there is any interest, I can also screen the film on campus.

IV. Assignments and Assessment: The course is graded on a 1000 point scale. The weight of each assignment is noted below. All assignments, except for the postings (which are submitted on the “Discussions” tab on Canvas), must be submitted via turnitin.com. There are links to turnitin.com for each assignment on Canvas under the “Assignments” tab.

A. Postings: There are discussion groups on Canvas for each of these postings (the due dates are listed in the course schedule – all assignments are due by 11:59PM on the due date). Post #1. Initial introductory posting to the group (ungraded but required). Please post a short message to the group (on the discussion board provided on Canvas). Your post should tell us a little something about yourself, why you took the course, for example, and/or your major, or your favorite movie (and why). Please also review the
posts from the other members of the class. **Posts #2-4.** Post a draft of one of your answers to the homework questions in modules #1-3 (by #4, I don’t think you will need this).

**Posts #5-7.** Post a response *that improves* the draft answer from one of your fellow students for modules #1-3. (50 points total, 8 points for the initial post, 7 points for each of the next six). Other posts (see below) are optional and ungraded.

**Please note the following rules in postings.** Your postings should be specific and supported with facts and examples. In responding to the posts, no initial post can have more than 3 people respond. If you see that a post already has 3 response posts, you must respond to a different post. Your responses to posts should reflect your understanding of the post. If you think a classmate’s post is unclear or incorrect, say so and state the reason for your position. If you think a post is correct, also support your reason for saying so. Be respectful. Please re-read your posts to assess your “tone” so that you don’t offend someone unintentionally.

***the following assignments are all to be submitted to turnitin.com, accessible from the Canvas site under the “Assignments” tab.

**B. Four homework assignments** (of five questions each, approximately 100 words per question) covering the essential elements of the history of American movies from 1890 to 1960. Material to answer these questions can be found in Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, in the supplemental readings, in the “Assignments and Notes” document for each module, and in the short narrated presentation(s) for each module. In addition to the discussion board postings (see above), students can also discuss the assignments with me via email before each due date (which are listed on the course schedule). This assignment develops and provides an assessment of student learning outcomes 1-3 (50 points for each set of questions, total of 200 points)

**C. Four short essays** (no more than 750-1250 words each), one for each of the major sections of the course, analyzing specific movies from the point of view of their creators, their consumers, and the larger historical context in which they are made, distributed, and exhibited. I will assign historical essays and documents that you can use to develop your paper. Students have the option of posting a paragraph from their short essays for modules #1-2 to get suggestions for improvement. This assignment develops and provides an assessment of student learning outcomes 4-5. (100 points for each of the short essays, total of 400 points)

**D. A longer essay** (no more than 2500-3500 words) describing and evaluating the role of image-based communications (including but not limited to movies) in commercial, political, and cultural life in the twentieth-century. Students have the option of posting two paragraphs from their draft of this essay to get suggestions for improvement from me. Here is the specific prompt for this essay: *When did images begin to become important to the exercise of cultural, social, and political power in the United States? Did this power emerge all at once or in stages? Has this power been exercised through movies alone or through a variety of forms? What have been the costs and benefits of the*
growing role of image-based communications in American life? Your answer should discuss these questions with reference to the history of the United States between 1890 and 1960. You may also go beyond 1960, but be sure to focus mainly on the period covered in this course (1890-1960). This assignment develops and provides an assessment of student learning outcome 6. (200 points)

E. Visual Literacy Assignment: (see Course Context on Canvas for more information on this assignment.) Select a contemporary example of image-based communications, for example a political message or photo-op, a commercial advertisement, a music video, or the like. Develop a short presentation (using powerpoint, keynote, google docs, or other presentation software) to analyze and interpret the communication. The presentation should include at least five still images or five short video clips (15 seconds each, maximum) and at least five hundred words. If you prefer, you can create the presentation using a word processing program. Students have the option of posting text from this presentation to get suggestions for improvement from me. Interested students may want to use a voice narration on the presentation, but this is not required. This assignment develops and provides an assessment of student learning outcome 7. (150 points)

****Late assignments will be penalized at the discretion of the instructor. As a general policy, and in fairness to those who get their work in on time, the penalty for lateness is 5% off per day.


***Specific grading rubrics for the various assignments can be found on the Canvas site under course content.

Please note the following policy from page 52 of the Xavier University Catalog (the History department and your instructors take this seriously.

****if you are uncertain what constitutes plagiarism, please see the XU library tutorial: http://www.xavier.edu/library/xututor/plagiarism/index.cfm

“The pursuit of truth demands high standards of personal honesty. Academic and professional life requires a trust based upon integrity of the written and spoken word. Accordingly, violations of certain standards of ethical behavior will not be tolerated at Xavier University. These include theft, cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized assistance in assignments and tests, unauthorized copying of computer software, the falsification of results and material submitted in reports or admission and registration documents, and the falsification of any academic record including letters of recommendation.”

“All work submitted for academic evaluation must be the student’s own. Certainly, the activities of other scholars will influence all students. However, the direct and unattributed use of
another’s efforts is prohibited as is the use of any work untruthfully submitted as one’s own.”

“Penalties for violations of this policy may include one or more of the following: a zero for that assignment or test, an “F” in the course, and expulsion from the University.”

**V. Outline of Course:** There are six modules for the course. See the Canvas site for specific dates.

*Module One: MASS CULTURE AND THE CRISIS OF VICTORIANISM: The Subversive/Democratic Potential of Movie Culture*

Reading: Sklar, Part One, supplemental readings on Canvas site

*Module Two: MOVIE CULTURE TAMED: The Hollywood Moguls and the New Capitalism*

Reading: Sklar, Part Two, supplemental readings on Canvas site


Reading: Sklar, Part Three (ch. 10-12, 14 only; skip chapter 13), supplemental readings on Canvas site

*Module Four: DEVOURING ITS OWN: From Commitment to Accusation and the Decline of Movie Culture*

Reading: Sklar, Part Four (ch. 15-17 only, skip ch. 18) supplemental readings on Canvas site

*Module Five: LONGER ESSAY ON IMAGE-BASED COMMUNICATIONS IN AMERICAN HISTORY*

*Module Six: PRESENTATION ON VISUAL LITERACY*