Hollywood Cinema in the Studio-Era (TERM YR)

**General Information Sheet for Forum Posts**

The screenings selected for this course are, for the most part, non-canonical, for reasons discussed during Week 1. You will, for these forum posts, be assigned a somewhat more canonical film from the studio era and write about it from a variety of perspectives that correspond to the approaches and methods covered over the semester. You will do this in groups of 4-5 students, each of which is assigned one film.

Your written work for this assignment will comprise six short (500-750 word) essays that will ask you to explore the film assigned to your group from a variety of historical angles, including aesthetic, industrial, social, and broadly cultural.

Most of these essays will ask you to center your discussion around a single primary-source artifact that you will find and situate in its relevant context (we will practice this in class), using this object to consider what facets of the film your artifact (and ones like it) might help us explore. Your notes in this direction will, I hope, make you interested to read and comment on the work of your peers, who will be finding other, related primary sources.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **DESCRIPTION/ OPTIONS** | **DUE** |
| **POST 1** | Review of your film | Wk.03 |
| **POST 2** | A - Locate & discuss trade press reviews, comparing it to yours above | Wk.05 |
| B - Analyze a scene drawing on Bordwell's Classical Style readings |
| **POST 3** | A - Locate promotional materials & discuss in relation to genre, etc. | Wk.08 |
| B - Locate fan magazine article & discuss in relation to star readings |
| C – Review annual report / season’s releases/budgets & locate your film |
| **POST 4** | A - Locate & discuss material on production and/or creative personnel | Wk.11 |
| B - Locate & discuss material on technology in the film |
| C - Discuss Production Code File materials relating to your film |
| **POST 5** | A - Research box office performance and local circulation | Wk.14 |
| B – Research Hollywood abroad in international trade press |
| C - Research local African American film culture [using local DBs/subs] |
| D - Research a local (NJ/PA) theater where your film screened |
| **EXTRA CREDIT** | Complete an option above that you have not done already. If completed satisfactorily, you'll get 3-5 points on your final grade. | Final |
|

Hollywood Cinema in the Studio-Era (TERM YR)

**Information Sheet for Forum Posts #1 and #2**

You have 2 weeks to complete these first posts, and you should try to watch your assigned film as soon as possible. Don’t leave this until too late! When you have watched the films, please compose the posts outlined below and post them to the discussion forum.

**Post #1: Film Response** (about 250 words)

**Due:** [Wk.03 DATE] by midnight; comments by [DATE] and replies by [DATE]

**Value:** 10 points

Instructions: For Post #1, offer your review of the group's film. What were you expecting before seeing the film? Did you like it? What about it? What didn't you like? What were your favorite/ least favorite scenes, characters, other aspects of the film? Be specific! Did anything strike you as 'odd,’ confusing, upsetting, or just unfamiliar?

**Post #2** (about 500-750 words)

**Due:** [Wk.05 DATE] by midnight; comments by [DATE] and replies by [DATE]

**Value:** 10 points

Option A: Trade-Press Review: Provide a link to or image of, and detailed citation of, a trade press review from the film’s initial release. Discuss how the author's way of seeing the film differed from yours. You can start with whether you agree/disagree with the content of his/her opinion, but you should then move on to be more empathetic (how is he/she seeing things differently and why?) and analytical (what aspects of the film are important to the review?). What narrative and/or stylistic standards or ideals does the film hold up or fall short of? Does this review reinforce the standards of the classical style as discussed in BST?

Option B: Scene Analysis: Select a scene or sequence from your film and examine its classical tendencies in terms of style and narration. What are the salient techniques the film relies on to control and shape time and space in order to support the narrative? What features of mise-en-scene, cinematographic properties, editing, and sound are enlisted to ensure ease of viewer comprehension and increased spectatorial involvement? How are the general characteristics of classicism realized in the specifics of your scene’s stylistic features (reference to pertinent passages from Bordwell is probably advisable). You may want to support your discussion with screenshots (consult Google for how to obtain these).

**Locating Film Review Tips**

You can access industry trade press reviews through the very valuable, and yet *free*, Media History Digital Library (mediahistory.org), but a keyword search of the film’s title will likely return thousands of hits, many of them advertising material, box office reports, and so on. Indexes and other resources that compile source citations are very helpful here:

* AFI Catalogue of Feature Films: available online, this will tell you the date your film premiered and will give you a list of primary sources (bottom of entry on film). Those sources nearest the premiere date are likely to be the reviews.
* Patrica King Hanson and Stephen Hanson, eds. Film Review Index. 2 vols. (Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1986). == PN1995 .F464 1986 V.2,

*Distribute: Wk.2*

Hollywood Cinema in the Studio-Era (TERM YR)

**Information Sheet for Forum Posts #3**

This assignment asks you to analyze a promotional artifact that speaks to your group’s film as a product of Hollywood as an industrial system. The key markers of differentiation discussed in Unit 2—genres, stars, prestige, and artistry—should be the salient concepts on which your discussion focuses. In this writing assignment, you are being asked to explore how historical artifacts position your film industrially.

**Post #3: Promoting the Product** (about 500-750 words)

**Due:** [Wk.08 DATE] by midnight; comments by [DATE] and replies by [DATE]

**Instructions for assignment:**

Locate at least one piece of advertising material promoting your film in the trade press through the Media History Digital Library. You might select posters or newspaper advertisements for the film itself or for the studios season, a behind-the-scenes feature in a fan magazine, or a fan magazine profile of one of the film’s stars (select a profile from during or after – not before – your film’s release). You may choose to select more than one artifact if each individual object is not sufficiently rich or interesting to merit close consideration. Post the artifact(s) as an image (images) or provide a link(s), and cite the document(s). **Remember:** Keep the central questions of primary-source analysis (PAPER) in mind when discussing your artifact(s).

Option A: Advertising/Promotional Material: Make an argument about the underlying industrial assumptions that the promotional material presents. What aspects of the film are highlighted (or downplayed) in the marketing campaign? (Its directors and/or stars? Its genre? Its themes or social issues? Its use of technology?) What kinds of viewers does the marketing campaign appear to be targeting? How does the look of the ad campaign complement the film’s visual design? Which implicit messages do the visual elements or copy present? Note that you are looking for historical and textual meaning that departs from the obvious. If you did Option A for Post #2 (the film reviews), do promotional materials emphasize the same issues stressed in the reviews?

Option B: Fan-magazine star profile: Make an argument about how the star profile you’ve found activates aspects of the star’s persona (private and/or as established in previous roles) in relation to your film. How is the star’s role in your film related to his/her persona? What aspects of his/her private life resonate with his/her character in the film? How is this role related to previous roles? What kinds of viewers does the star and profile appear to appeal to?

**Whichever option you choose, be sure to address this question:**

*What do the promotional materials suggest about the film's market, appeal, and industrial status*? In order to address the latter facet of this question, you should consult and, where appropriate, cite relevant background information on your studio in either the Bernstein or *Cinema Book* supplementary readings. This is how you will be able to assess whether and how genre identity, prestige level, star meaning, etc. “fit” into the strategy of your film’s studio.

*Distribute Wk.6*

Hollywood Cinema in the Studio-Era (TERM YR)

**Information Sheet for Forum Post #4**

This assignment asks you to consider **either** how the Production Code mediated between the film industry and the broader culture (Option A) **or** how your film’s production and its creators’ work on the film relate to Hollywood production practices (Option B) **or** how the use of some particular production technology affected the film’s style and its creators’ work practices (Option C).

**Post #4: The Production System** (about 500-750 words)

**Due:** [Wk.11 DATE] by midnight; comments by [DATE] and replies by [DATE]

**Instructions for Assignment:**

Anchoring your discussion in a specifically cited primary source (or multiple sources, if appropriate—see below), write a post answering one of the three prompts below. If you aren’t sure whether your film “works” for a particular prompt, please don’t hesitate to ask me!

Option A: The Production Code: Look at the Production Code Administration file for your assigned film and find a memo or exchange of letters between censors and producers. Discuss an exchange between regulators, producers, and/or pressure groups you find interesting, making reference to Jacobs and Maltby in order to demonstrate your understanding of self-regulation as a process of negotiation. Alternately, if your film does not have a PCA file available, you may use the PCA Analysis chart to evaluate your film and write a letter to the producers. You will have to fill in, scan, and post the form to the forum, and you will have to write a letter to the producer from the perspective of a PCA official. In doing this, you must demonstrate an understanding of the stages of self-regulation.

Option B: Production Personnel: Identify a member of your film’s production team—director, cinematographer, writer, producer, set designer, etc.—and recover his or her work on your film. What qualities (style of cinematography, type of script, etc.) did this member of the production bring to your film? In order to answer this question, you will first need to **(1)** find out what sort of work the crew member was known for before this film. Such information might be found in a primary-source profile (e.g. story in *American Cinematographer*), but you might need to seek out biographies or autobiographies of the crewmember or his/her collaborators, histories of the studios where he/she worked, interviews with the crew member and/or his/her collaborators. In order to **(2)** determine his/her contribution to your film, you might find a primary source account of its production through the Media History Digital Library, but you might also need to consult the AFI Catalogue’s account of the production, articles or chapters on your film, etc.

**Note:** *Option B is the hardest to research, so if you want to do this one, you should consult with me and tell me which member of the crew you’re interested to research.*

Option C: Production Technologies: Do some preliminary research to see what new (or relatively new) technologies are being used by your film (see the Bordwell & Thompson reading from week 4 for some possibilities). Using the MHDL, find a *technical journal* article about the technology. How does the discussion of this technology indicate how it will make the more production process more efficient (or not disrupt it too severely)? Does the article give an indication of how the technology will affect film style? Evaluate this assertion against the evidence of your film: does the technology, as deployed in a key scene, support classicism’s prioritization of narrative or do values such as spectacle/ artistic motivation become dominant? Be specific in discussing your scene.

*Distribute Wk. 9*

Hollywood Cinema in the Studio-Era (TERM YR)

**Information Sheet for Forum Post #5**

**Post #5: Local Cinema Cultures** (~500-750 words\*\*\*)

**Due:** [Wk.14 DATE] by midnight; comments by [DATE] and replies by [DATE]

**Assignment Description:**

For your fifth post you will choose one of these four topics, each of which pertains to how your film (or cinema at the time) was received in the broader culture. As a result, each option will ask you to attend to a *local* context in which cinema circulated—these local contexts include cities like Philadelphia and Camden, small towns, African American communities, and (farthest afield) Latin America. While the below prompts indicate some issues you should attend to in your post, bear in mind your work will be assessed according to the generalized rubric that has been used for Posts #3 and #4. In particular, be mindful of the requirement that your discussion incorporate

Option A: *Variety* “Picture Grosses” & local exhibition

*Research:* Using the MHDL’s holdings of *Variety*, search your film’s title during the year of its release. This will return (among other things) “Picture Grosses” entries on your film’s performance at large downtown theaters in major cities. In which sections of the country was your film a hit? Where did it flop? How was the film presented in different cities? Next, use either the *Motion Picture Herald*’s “What the Picture Did For Me” column (not available for all years/films) **or** local Philadelphia & South Jersey newspapers (see relevant page from Module XX) to research how your film performed beyond the metros (if WTPDFM) or was presented nearby (if Philadelphia/region).

*Post:* Write a post summarizing your findings and addressing the broader contextual and evidentiary issues that you’ve attended to other posts (be sure to check your work against the Rubric before posting!).

Option B: Hollywood Abroad - *Cine-Mundial* & American Cinema in Latin America

<http://mediahistoryproject.org/2013/11/07/cine-mundial-1916-1946-goes-digital/>

*Research*: The *Media History Digital* Library hosts extensive holdings of *Cine-Mundial*, the Spanish-language version of *Moving Picture World*, was published between 1916 and 1948. From Laura Isabel Serna’s description: “Functioning as both trade publication and fan magazine, its regular columns that featured reports from national correspondents and letters from readers from every corner of the Spanish-speaking world provides invaluable insight into Latin American audiences and their reception of both imported and nationally or regionally produced films.” Use this source to see how your film or one of its stars and, by extension, American film generally was discussed in this important source for tracing global film culture.

*Post:* Write a post summarizing your findings and addressing the broader contextual and evidentiary issues that you’ve attended to other posts (be sure to check your work against the Rubric before posting!).

Option C: Race & Studio-Era Cinema

[link to library & nearby resources]

*Research:* Use one of two Rowan Library holdings. First, the *Philadelphia Tribune*, a locally focused, black-oriented newspaper that began in 1884 is available through ProQuest Historical Newspapers (1912 to 2001). Use keyword searches to find an article on film that links to useful subject headings like “Movies” and “Theater and Theaters.” and find several articles from the year of, 2 before, and 2 after your film’s release (e.g. if *Gone with the Wind*, consult 1937-41). Alternatively, you can ignore geographical boundaries and make use of the broader holdings of ProQuest’s Historical Black Newspapers (there are several additional titles) and/or ProQuest History Vault, through which you can access documents from the “Civil Rights and Black Freedom Struggle” collection, some holdings of which will engage film history.

*Post:* Drawing on the three artifacts you find most notable, write a post discussing what cinema, as both individual films of note and a social experience, meant to the mid-Atlantic’s or (if using the farther afield material) the nation’s African American community during your 5 years. What were the primary concerns with Hollywood film or commercial cinema? What was admirable or worthwhile in film culture? How, according to what you can infer from the articles, should the shortcomings implied be addressed? And, in your opinion, to what extent have these been addressed in the years since? If you notice any interesting or surprising recurrent themes (unrelated to film) in the paper as you skim to your chosen articles, feel free to incorporate this into your post. Finally, be sure to attach image or links to images of 3 articles you are discussing.

Option D: Local Theater History (general)

*Research*: Using the local newspapers (see relevant page from Module XX), find the theaters in which your film was released, in any of its first-release runs. Choose one of these theaters and research it, starting with easy sources like *Cinema Treasures*. You should continue from here to look at sources like trade papers available through the MHDL, local newspapers available online (noted above in Option A), and archival collections available in the area, which include the Theater Photograph collections (drawn on in the Module XX lecture), oral histories, and perhaps more.

*Post:* Write a post detailing when a theater that played your film opened, where it was located and what segments of the city’s population it served, what its initial use was (film, theater, vaudeville, etc.), what chain (if any) it was affiliated with, how its prices compared to other theaters (if advertised), what sorts of films it showed (first-run major releases, second-run releases, serials, B-cowboy films, etc.), what its typical presentation model was (live acts?), how did these change over time (I’d suggest you look at a sample spring/fall week or two for each decade), when the theater closed or was renovated or became something else, what it is used for today (either the building, if it still exists, or the location, if the theater’s been demolished). Be sure cite your sources and post links to images or documents that support your account and (since you won’t post all) are interesting.

***\*\*\* Note*:** This post will certainly run longer than 750 words and, more importantly, involve more research than other post options. As a result, it will be worth **20 points**, rather than the usual 10, of your final grade. It can, therefore, be used to eliminate 10 points you missed on another assignment.

*Distribute wk.12*

**An option for those bored with their film:**

Alternately, if you are just *sick* of your film, you have the option of doing another film from the list below. The catch: the paper/portfolio is worth 20 points, and you need to complete three (3!) tasks:

* First, you need to watch the film and write a response, reflecting on how it is like/different from the film you’ve dealt with all semester. Choose a specific scene to serve as the basis of comparison (consider comparing similar narrative actions exposition, love scene, musical number, we see the monster, etc.) (~250-300 words)
* Second, find three primary sources. Each one must fit into a different category of primary source (e.g. a star profile, a trade press review, and a theater owner’s review from “What the Picture Did for Me”—look at the types indicated by the various Forum Post assignments). Write a brief paragraph on each object, (about 200-300 words per primary source)
* Third, write a brief comparing the range of sources available for (or that you consulted) for this (about 250-300 words)

If you choose this option, you needn’t submit your material until [**LATE DATE**].

The list of films you may choose from is on the next page…

Here are the additional films for each group that you can choose, if you’re considering this option:

**Group 1: *Adventures of Robin Hood***

* *King Kong* (1933) – no introduction needed, iconic… **or**
* *Stagecoach* (1939) – the Old West was an ‘exotic’ locale, so this fits. We’ve also had a shortage of Westerns because I taught a class on and got sick of them last semester

**Group 2: *To Be or Not to Be***

* *Trouble in Paradise* (1932) – an early Lubitsch, in case you’d like see that touch in Pre-Code era. Miriam Hopkins has been haunted our class, and here she is again… **or**
* *Duck Soup* (1933) – the Marx Brothers!

**Group 3: *Gone with the Wind***

* *Grand Hotel* (1932) – Depression-era prestige, when budgets didn’t allow you to burn cities in Technicolor and studios were left to make do with contracted stars, **or**
* *Best Years of Our* *Lives* (1946) – Postwar prestige. Here, several key trends of late 1940s filmmaking (realism, psychological complexity, deep focus, etc.) are in evidence.

**Group 4: *The Public Enemy***

* *The Roaring Twenties* (1939) – Jimmy Cagney returns to the gangster genre, which makes a comeback after being curtailed by the Code. Story also incorporates some WWI, for those so inclined… **or**
* *Dead End* (1937) – Another return to the gangster genre, here with an emphasis on juvenile delinquency. How this and the above fil make the genre acceptable during the Code era is worth thinking about…

**Group 5: *Frankenstein***

* *Freaks* (1932) – “One of us! One of us! One of us!” A different sort of horror, combining the period’s interests in circuses (and the like) and monsters… **or**
* *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943) – the horror genre develops beyond monster movies to cover religion (sort of) and colonialism (obliquely).

**Group 6*: Wizard of Oz***

* *Love Me Tonight* (1932) – an early sound musical by Mamoulian (*Dr. J & Mr. H*), which is, like his other films, stylistically innovative… **or**
* *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944) – Another Judy Garland musical. This one is my favorite. Good for all seasons.

**Group 7: *Foreign Correspondent***

* *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) – another Hitchcock film, sort of like *Rebecca* but set in small-town America. There are shades of war here…. **or**
* *Ministry of Fear* (1944) – another European import, Fritz Lang, makes a film about Nazis. Thematically similar to Foreign Correspondent, but different from Hitch’s take.

**Group 8: *Grapes of Wrath***

* *Fury* (1936) – Fritz Lang makes a film about lynching and mob justice, **or**
* *Pinky* (1949) – Elia Kazan, recently arrived from New York theater and just starting out, makes a film about race.

*Distribute wk.14*

Hollywood Cinema in the Studio-Era (TERM YR)

**Forum Post Guidelines**

The purpose of the writing assignments being done as Forum Posts – that is, posted online where you peers will read and respond to your work – is to encourage the exchange of sources and ideas. As a result, you are required to post your assignments in a timely fashion and reply to your peers in a similarly timely fashion. Because a central purpose of the assignment is for you to work with your peers to better understand a Hollywood classic in its full complexity, from multiple dimensions, penalties for not following these guidelines are severe.

When **posting** your forum post assignment:

* You must post your primary source and your forum post essay by **11:59pm on the due date** of the assignment (always a DAY OF WEEK)
* One point (of the 10 the assignment is out of) will be deducted as a **late penalty** for each day you are late, until **DAY at TIME**, at which point the assignment (if handed in) will receive a maximum score of 5 points (50% of total).
* When posting an assignment, you should **create a new thread** in the assignment’s discussion forum. The title or subject of your thread should be the name of the article you’ve found (e.g. “Letter from ‘Extra’ in Hollywood (April 1939)”) or a brief description of the artifact (e.g. “Ad for film in Motion Picture Herald, 13 June 1939” or “Image of window display advertisement in MPH 19 Aug. 1939”).
* **Citing your source:** The first line of your post should be a full Chicago-style citation of the artifact, including (if available) a URL link to the article (e.g. “E.J. Smithson, ‘Only Angels Have Wings,’ *Hollywood* 28, no. 4 (April 1939): 34-8 <http://archive.org/stream/hollywood28fawc#page/ n235/mode/2up>”).
* If you are dealing with a photograph or advertisement, you should attach an image (JPEG, TIFF, etc.) of the item. You can do this by taking a screen grab & cropping it as you’d like.
* Because everyone in the group is required to have their own primary source (i.e. **no repeats** of the same *Variety* article), I’d recommend you complete the first few steps—that is, everything before the forum post/essay itself—as soon as possible. This way, you won’t complete an essay only to find the artifact you’ve written about has already been “taken.”
* You should post the written portion of the assignment below the full citation. **Do not** attach a .doc or .pdf file – instead, post the text directly into the Message field, so your peers can read your work more easily.

When **responding** to your peers’ posts:

* You should offer something more substantive than “cool!” when commenting on your peers’ work. You should aim for one short paragraph of about 150 to 200 words.
* You should be inquisitive and are encouraged to ask questions of clarification or that push your peers’ commentary/interpretation beyond what they offer, but you should be sure to be cordial, polite, respectful and avoid belligerence
* In addition to asking your peer to consider some overlooked aspect of their primary source, you should try to connect your peers’ research to the assigned course readings (what would Author X make of this item? Did we see a similar source used by Author Y?), previous week’s primary sources (were films reviewed differently in the 20s than in your film’s era?), or consider their artifact in relation to the one you (what different aspects of the film do they point to? How does their artifact make you consider your own differently?)
* You should post responses to *at least* **two** of your group members’ responses, and this must be done **by TIME on the DAY** after the forum post is due.
* You must reply to your group members’ responses to your post. You should do this by **TIME on DAY** after the forum post is due. Again, something more substantive than “thanks!”
* The Community aspect of the assignment is worth 4 of the assignment’s 10 points. If you do not participate in the discussion portion of the forum post assignments, your grade will be capped at 60% of the total score.

*Distribute wk.3*

Hollywood Cinema in the Studio-Era (TERM YR)

**How to Read a Primary Source**

An acronym that may help guide your evaluation of primary source texts: P-A-P-E-R.

* **P** urpose of the author in preparing the document
* **A** rgument and strategy author uses to achieve those goals
* **P** resuppositions, values, assumptions (in the text, and our own)
* **E** pistemology (evaluating truth content)
* **R** elate to other texts (compare and contrast)

**P**urpose

* Who is the author and what is her or his place in relation to film/industry (explain why you are justified in thinking so)? What could or might it be, based on the text & context, and why?
* Why was the document prepared? What was the occasion for its creation?
* Does the creator have a thesis or argument? What—in a few words—is it?

**A**rgument

* What is the text trying to do? How does the text make its case? What is its strategy for accomplishing its goal? How does it carry out this strategy?
* What is the intended audience of the text? How might this influence its content or rhetorical strategy? Cite specific examples.
* What arguments or concerns does the author respond to that are *not* clearly stated? Provide at least one example of a point at which the author seems to be refuting a position never clearly stated. Explain what you think this position may be in detail, and why you think it.

**P**resuppositions

* How do the ideas and values in the source differ from the ideas and values of our age? These might include cultural values (gender, race, class), but also how advertising functions best or what a film review is for, etc. Cite specific examples.
* What preconceptions do we as researcher bring to bear on this text? For instance, what portions of the text might we find objectionable or mistaken, but which contemporaries might have found acceptable or ‘correct.’ State the values we hold on that subject, and the values expressed in the text.
* How might the difference between our values and the values of the author influence the way we understand the text? Explain how such a difference in values might lead us to misinterpret the text, or understand it in a way contemporaries would not have.

**E**pistemology

* How might this text support one of the arguments found in secondary sources we've read? Choose a paragraph from a secondary source we've read, where this text might be an appropriate footnote (cite page and paragraph of reading), and explain why.
* What kinds of information does this text reveal that it does not seemed concerned with revealing? (In other words, what does it tell us without *knowing* it's telling us?)

**R**elate: Now choose another of your (or your peers’) primary sources, and compare the two, answering these questions:

* What patterns or ideas are repeated throughout the readings?
* What major differences appear in them?
* Which do you find more reliable and/or credible?

**Source**: adapted from Patrick Rael, “*Reading, Writing, and Researching for History: A Guide for College Students”* last modified July 2004. http://www.bowdoin.edu/writing-guides.htm

*Distribute wk. 4*