

Hollywood: Western Heroes

Description of Seminar:

This Adult Liberal Studies Seminar will focus on Hollywood's Creation of the Western Hero: Myth, History and Values in Gunfighter and Cowboy Cinema, 1940-1990s. Designed as an ALS Humanities/Film seminar, the structure and approach will be on viewing a select few films along with reading essays and a text about those films dealing with cowboys, gunfighters and Western heroes beginning around the Post-War period of the 1940s up to the end of the 20th Century. Through an examination of this unique American genre this seminar will help students gain an understanding of certain socio-economic and political ideologies contained in these films and their relationship to particular aspects of American myth, history, culture and values as well as important developments in the history of film making.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

The theory behind this course is that much of who we are in North America has been reflected in and even shaped and defined by the Hollywood film industry. More specifically, one particular genre of cinema, the Western frontier gunfighter and cowboy hero has held a unique place in the history of film and consequently has played an important role in guiding the film industry as well as relating to and shaping American culture and values. As students view a select few films, read scholarly research on these films and write critical responses in the form of essays and research papers, they will gain a greater understanding of how one particular aspect of Hollywood film making has played a key role in defining the American hero, influencing the history of film and shaping American culture. At the completion of this course students will be able to:

1. Identify key films, directors, and actors who laid the foundation and guided the Hollywood film industry in the post-war period of the 1940s and 50s in the making of what has become known as the "Western."
2. Identify the archetypal characteristics common to and generally associated with the American Western frontier action hero.
3. Identify the Western heroes relationship to the heroines who often supported his journey or objectives and his relationship to the land or frontier to which he was inherently connected.
4. Write critically about what artistic techniques, themes, and styles became part of Post-War film making and how these were used in respect to creating what became known as the Western.
5. Write critically about the evolution of the Western Hero from the 1940's and 50's as an action hero, his relation to realism, myth, and history and the subsequent roll and place of the Western hero in film at the end of the 20th century.

6. Write critically about Western filmic connections to contemporary American political and economic ideologies and what relationship this may have to a nostalgic longing for a mythic, Western past.
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Course Procedures:

This is an online distance learning four credit hour ALS seminar to be first offered in the fall 07 semester and then as an eight week summer session course at a latter time. Student activities will involve viewing eight full-length feature Western films, reading a class text along with selected critical essays, researching online, responding to questions on a class Bulletin Board, completing short answer questions, writing essays and completing two examinations. This course requires about two hours of film viewing per week along with about two hours of research and writing per week to fulfill the requirements. Since this course may also be submitted for WAC approval sometime in the future, students should be prepared to handle a variety of writing exercises in the form of Bulletin Board short answers, a weekly film journal, peer reviews on the research essay project and essays on examinations.

Course Text:

Kitses, Jim. *Horizons West: Directing the Western from John Ford to Clint Eastwood*.
BFI Publishing, 2004