

# Reflections on Society and Culture in American Movies

BBLAN09100

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Venue: online (2 March, 6 April), DAN 214 (25 May)

Course material: MS Teams

## Course Schedule:

2 March (8.15–12.30): American cinema and the past

- Cinematic reflections of society and culture
- Reflections on the past: Origin myths (*Birth of a Nation*, *1492: Conquest of Paradise*)
  - Nostalgia for the West (*Stagecoach*; *Unforgiven*; *Dances with Wolves*; *Lone Ranger*)
  - Dealing with the Other: masters and slaves (*Gone with the Wind*; *12 Years a Slave*)
  - Recent history (Vietnam, the Middle East) (*Forrest Gump*; *Green Zone*; *American Sniper*)

6 April (13.15–17.15): American cinema and the present

- Anxieties concerning law and order: film noir, thriller, crime (*Godfather*; *The Irishman*, *Fracture*)
- Moral anxieties: the American family (*Kramer vs Kramer*; *The Stepford Wives*; *Marriage Story*) and work ethics (*The Wolf of Wall Street*, *Nightcrawler*; *Money Monster*)
- Social issues: racial conflicts, class divides (*Crash*; *The Help*, *Hidden Figures*, *Good Will Hunting*)
- Institutional crimes, problems of representation (*Spotlight*; *The Post*; *Bombshell*)

25 May (13.15–17.15): American cinema and the future – DAN 214, in person!

- Present or future? Apocalyptic visions of epidemics, climate change, terrorism (*Contagion*)
- Anxieties about the future in young adult films (*The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, *Maze Runner*)
- Post-apocalyptic dystopias (*Interstellar*, *Blade Runner 2049*; *Dune*)
- Technology as a Threat or an Opportunity – Artificial Intelligence (*Ex Machina*, *The Martian*, *Minority Report*)

## Requirements:

- active participation (no more than 5 hours/one day missed)
- two **reflections** (appr. 500 words each) about the film(s) you watch for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> occasion; you can focus on one or more of the topics/issues raised; reflect on one or more specific films; ask questions, mention other films with a similar topic, etc. You don't need to do any research for this task, just describe your impressions, tell me your opinion – feel free to be critical, personal, subjective – be yourself! **Deadline: the Sunday after each class (7 April, 26 May)**
- watching films at home
- **home essay** (appr. 2000 words), analysing an American film (or comparing several films), interpreting its representation of some social or cultural issue, **deadline: 31 May**

Recommended readings (available in the Teams folder):

- J. Emmett Winn: *The American Dream and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*
- Leonard Quart and Albert Auster: *American Film and Society since 1945*
- Pat Brereton: *Hollywood Utopia: Ecology in Contemporary American Cinema*
- *The Columbia Companion to American History on Film*, ed. Peter C. Rollins
- Norman K. Denzin: *Reading Race: Hollywood and the Cinema of Racial Violence*