

**CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY
LEVIN COLLEGE OF URBAN AFFAIRS
DEPARTMENT OF URBAN STUDIES**

UST 250—THE CITY ON FILM

Instructor	{	Jacqueline Keeling Holland
Meeting time	{	Tuesdays & Thursdays, 8:00 AM – 9:50 AM
Phone	{	216.687.2136—leave a message
Classroom	{	MC 405
Office Hours	{	Before, after class or by appointment

Course Description:

This nature of this course makes it experimental in temperament. We are all observers. From the beginning of the arts up until today, the city is used as a backdrop for every kind of conceivable narrative. The city shapes and forms character. The city may furnish a pivotal point in the plot, or provide cultural context from which to understand the message of a film. It is also important to note that it is often the city that has been the energy and infrastructure supporting the stage.

Like filmmaking, architecture, urban planning and urban designs are visual provisions that support the professions. The class is based on the pedagogic premise that film as an enormously popular art form, has influenced public attitude from its birth. Attitude is reflected in approaches/dispositions toward urban issues.

It is the really talented directors and producers of yesterday and today who have presented films that don't expect us to make the past relevant to today, but make us relevant to the past. Kenneth Tynan wrote in a journal entry dated, October 12, 1975, *The most powerful influence on the arts in the West is—the cinema. Novels, plays, and films are filled with references to, quotations from, parodies of—old movies. They dominate the cultural subconscious because we absorb them in our formative years (as we don't absorb books for instance); and we see them again on TV when we grow up. The first two generations predominately nourished on movies are now of an age when they rule the media: and it's almost frightening to see how deeply—in their behavior as well as their work—the cinema has imprinted itself on them. Nobody took into account the tremendous impact that would be made by the fact that films are permanent and easily accessible from childhood onward. As the sheer number of films piles up, their influence will increase, until we have a civilization entirely molded by cinematic values and behavior patterns.*

This course is intended to be FUN and educationally enriching. It will be approached from an interdisciplinary point. Text and readings will support the film viewing. The course design and intent is to present a sweep of urban issues to be discussed in class meetings. Speakers will provide spectacular opportunities to explore the arts from their particular perspectives. The goal is to provide a personal growth in understanding the arts and its relationship to urban growth.

Because of the extent of film viewing that often goes beyond a 2 hour class allotment, students are required to view films on their own and attend class on Tuesdays only for lecture, discussions, and guests. **Films not available in video stores will be shown during class time.** To supplement the class, at least one field trip will be offered. Students will be required to write reviews and papers, and in class, discuss related problems discussed in the films surrounding politics, history, suburban issues, architecture, culture, environment, immigration, and race.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to examine the growth and change experienced in urban areas through historical events and political (both official and unofficial) influence. The purpose of the course is the achievement of a greater understanding of the cultural, historical, and political infrastructure that underpin the present-day city. Films such as *City Hall* will offer a glimpse into the political machine that has historically been a driving force in the manipulation of daily city procedures. These movies are instrumental in learning about the operation of contemporary American urban institutions and issues. They will offer opportunities to investigate how cities operate, and provide discussion on both how things are vs. how we may think they are supposed to be.

COURSE METHODS

This class is scheduled for two mornings—3 hours and 40 minutes per week. You are required to be in attendance on Tuesday mornings only. To compensate for not being required to be in class on Thursday, you are asked to view the assigned film on your own, take notes in your film diary, do papers, and bring them to class every Tuesday. Rationale: Most of the films are 2 hours in length more or less. Most of you have another class after this one. Viewing them on your own allows you to watch them at your own leisure and review/rewind as necessary. The films can be obtained and viewed free at the CSU library or rented at any video store in the area. Viewing films on your own will free class time on Tuesdays for lecture, discussion, and guests. It is understood that you will be viewing these films and be prepared for each class.

This class offers an opportunity for you to be a film critic. Every film will be judged according to the plot, historical setting, accuracy, urban issue, and message. In this class, it is your educated opinion from the angle of urban studies that will be developed. This course will consist of one film to be screened in each of the 15 weeks of the semester. Attached is a sample of a screening diary to be copied—one to be used for each film. While watching the film, you may want to take notes and later transfer some of this information onto your screening diary that will be turned in.

Readings will be made available as the course progresses.

Screening Diaries: By maintaining a screening diary, students will transform a passive viewing experience into an active synthesis of ideas. These diaries will be turned in and graded. Students will also be required to write 2 short papers and take a final exam based on discussions and readings.

Course Requirements and Grading

- I. Screening Diaries:** #1 to be handed-in at the end of week #7
#2 to be handed-in at the last day of class
- Maximum Points:
2 Screening Diaries @ 15 points each = **30 points**
- II. Two short essays (5 pages):** #1 to be handed-in at the end of week #7
#2 to be handed in the last day of class
- Maximum Points:
2 short essays @ 15 points each = **30 points**
- III. Final exam** with questions drawn from films, videos, text, readings:
Maximum Points:
Final exam @ 30 points = **30 points**
- IV. Classroom discussion:**
Maximum Points: **10 points**

Grading Scale

- A = 100 - 90 points
B = 89 - 80 points
C = 79 - 70 points
D = 69 - 60 points
F = 59 - 0 points

How to pass this course:

1. Attend
2. Watch the assigned videos the week intended
3. Participate in class discussions
4. Hand in screening diaries and essays on time.

Late papers, papers that are less than college quality (bad grammar, excessive spelling errors) will be downgraded.

Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies. NY: Vintage Books
Urban Society, 9th Edition, 1999.

Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to attend class. Reading assignments as well as film viewing are to be current with the week assigned. Attendance will be taken.

University Policies:

Refer to the undergraduate CSU Bulletin for procedures on course add/drop and withdrawal, grading, and incomplete procedures.

Special needs: Anyone anticipating special accommodations to take exams or complete assignments must identify themselves to the instructor by the end of the second week of classes. These include accommodations for physical handicaps, learning disabilities, and English as a second language.

Texts: **Movie-Made America by Robert Sklar**
Urban Society, 99/00, ed. Fred Siegel and Jan Rosenberg
Read: **Blonde: A Novel by Joyce Carol Oates**

Screening Schedule Fall 2000

Week 1 Introduction—To be a critic! What we are looking for.
 August 28 Urban history; Industrialization and class struggle.
Metropolis (Fritz Lang, 1927 120 min. black and white
 Shown in class Futuristic, inhumane city of the machine age. Startling design and
 suggestion of class struggle.
 Movie Made America: Chapter 1
 Urban Society: Chapter 1,2, & 3 (pages 6-30.)

Week 2
 Sept. 4 Lecture and discussion of Metropolis
Taken for a Ride, 55 min. CSU Library
 Excellent film documenting the “torching of the trolley,” and public
 transportation in general. Explains the American love affair with the
 car and exposes the propaganda campaigns that obliterated the
 nation’s streetcar systems.
Changing Open Spaces, 1995 CSU Library
 Examines African-American culture as it clashes with design of the
 modern American City. The film is both a critical examination of the
 design and histories of American open space, as well as a
 celebration of leisure, recreation, and resistance. Film was shot in
 Columbus, Oakland, Birmingham, New Orleans, and Detroit.
 Movie Made America: Chapter 2
 Urban Society: Chapter 4, 5, 6 (pages 42-59)

Week 3
 September 11 Lecture and discussion of urban transportation
On The Town: 1949. 1 hr., 38 min. Frank Sinatra, Gene Kelly
 Post WWII musical portraying the city in an almost cardboard yet
 amusement park-type context. Note art deco architecture—stores,
 etc.. Just a love story or what?
 Movie Made America: Chapter 3
 Urban Society: Chapters 12, 13, 14, 15, & 16 (pages 88-99)

Week 4
 September 18 Lecture and discussion (real vs. high fiction) on “On the Town.”
Chinatown: 1974. 2 hrs. 20 min. Roman Polanski, Director.
 Oscar for best screenplay one of the best 100 films of 20th Century.
 Text: Chapter 4

Week 5:
 September 25 Lecture and discussion of Chinatown. Environmental issues and
 water politics in LA, wrapped inside a murder mystery.
Avalon, Barry Levinson, 1990
 Text: Chapter 5

Week 6: Discussion of Immigration
October 2 **Do the Right Thing:** 1989, 120 mins. Spike Lee.
Color adjustment—Cuyahoga County Library/Cleveland Public Library

Movie-Made America: Chapter 6
Urban Society: Chapters 21—26 Pages 134—152

Week 7 Paper Due:
October 9 Lecture and discussion of racial tension.
Roger and Me, 1990, Michael Moore, 1 hr. 27 min.
Industrial decline and redevelopment in Flint, MI. Ironic documentary film about GM's plant-closing and the city.

Movie Made America: Chapter 7
Urban Society: Chapters 32, 33 (Pages 194—203)

Week 8 Lecture/ of industry, brownfields, greenfields, redevelopment
October 16 **City of Joy,** Patrick Swayze, Directed by Roland Jaffe
Swayze is a Houston surgeon mugged and stranded in Calcutta. Story addresses problems of mafia, government, and politics—even in India. Could the movie be placed in any other city? Where? As Americans, why can we relate to this film based in a foreign culture, poverty, and strange customs?

Movie-Made America: Chapter 8
Urban Society Chapters 27 & 28 (Pages 154-168)

Week 9
October 23 Discussion of City of Joy and International Urban Problems
Chaplin, Robert Downey, Jr.
Have Blonde: A Novel Read by Next week.

Movie-Made America: Chapter 9
Urban Society: Chapters 29—31 (Pages 178—179)

Week 10 Can a city make or break and individual?
October 30 City of Hope, 1991. John Sayles, 2 hrs., 9 min. Gritty, despairing tale of corrupt politics, economic development, and tragic urban love story.

Movie-Made America: Chapter 10
Urban Society: Chapters 16—20 (Pages 104—132)

Week 11 Lecture and discussion of politics and machine politics
November 6 **City Hall,** 1996. Al Pacino, John Cusack, Bridget Fonda, Danny Aiello. Directed by Harold Becker. When a child is killed during a shoot-out between an undercover officer and a drug dealer, the mayor's right hand man investigates and finds a conspiracy.

Movie Made America: Chapter 11

Week 12 Reality of public service and media's projected image of the public servant.

Movie Made America: Chapter 12

November 13 **Guess Whose Coming to Dinner?** Stanley Kramer, 1967—order from CCPL
Racial and class issues gently explored by Poitier, Hepburn, and Tracy. Oscar winner for story and screenplay.

Week 13 Discussion about racial tension. What is the message in the movie for the context of the time? Is it valid today?

Movie Made America: Chapter 13

November 20 in the movie for the context of the time. Is it valid today?
New York Stories—Woody Allen—the expert on using NY as the backdrop for the city.

Week 14 Lecture: Why is NY a fascinating backdrop for movies. What does
November 27 Woody Allen continually bring out of NY—only the Jewish element?
Bladerunner, 1992. 1 hr. 56 min.—21st Century “future” set in LA complete with decaying environment and murderous replicants.

Movie Made America: Chapter 14

Urban Society Chapters 34—37 (Pages 206—222)

Week 15 Lecture: What is the future of the city?
December 4 Movie of the Week To be announced

Movie Made America: Chapter 15

Week 16

December 11 Final 8:30 AM—10:30 AM

UST 250—THE CITY ON FILM

SCREENING DIARY

YOUR NAME _____

TITLE OF FILM _____

STUDIO/DIRECTOR _____

YEAR RELEASED _____

PLOT (IDEAS THAT DROVE THE FILM)

HISTORICAL SETTING

URBAN ISSUES DISCUSSED

RESOLUTION OF ISSUES

WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THE FILM? WHY? ANY OTHER COMMENTS?

A WORD ABOUT CONDUCT IN CLASS

To make our time together as valuable as possible, we both have to work hard at it. The following basic principles will give us some guidelines:

Every student has the ***right*** to learn as well as the ***responsibility*** not to deprive others of their right to learn.

Every student is accountable for her or his actions.

In order for you to get the most out of this class, please consider the following:

1. Attend all scheduled classes and arrive on time.
Late arrivals and early departures are very disruptive and violate the first principle listed above.
2. Please do not schedule other engagements during this class.
You probably wouldn't like it if I did! I will try to make class as interesting and informative as possible, but I can't learn the material for you.
3. If you have trouble hearing the lecture or media presentation because of distractions around you, quietly ask those responsible for the distraction to stop. If the distraction continues, please let me know. It is often impossible to hear such things from my position in the classroom.
4. All cell-phones are to be turned off and pagers inaudible during this class.
5. Please let me know immediately if you have any problem that is preventing you from performing satisfactorily in this class.

I am looking forward to working with you this semester.