

Historical Insights

Focus on Teaching



HOLLYWOOD FOR HISTORIANS

Andrew Dawson



Historical Insights: Focus on Teaching
Hollywood for Historians

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Introduction



Paramount Gates, 1954

Historians find Hollywood neither obscure nor difficult. Indeed, it is its seeming familiarity that has made Hollywood a maligned and underused resource for 20th-century historians. My intention in *Hollywood for Historians* is to demonstrate that both film and the industry are worthy of the aspiring tutor's attention. Colleagues who teach first or second year courses on the social and political history of the modern world, but who see no place in the curriculum for film are particularly encouraged to read on. For those colleagues who protest that they are already innovative teachers and are using feature films in their classroom I want to persuade them to take the extra step and expose their students – at appropriate

moments – to the study of Hollywood as a set of industrial and political institutions deeply embedded within 20th-century America. Thus, fully deployed, Hollywood acts as a flashlight illuminating the culture and political economy of America and, indeed, the globe. Along the way, I also want to suggest a way of locating history films within the curriculum. The use of history films presents a thorny problem for the profession and in order to secure a place for the genre we need to move beyond the rather acrimonious but sterile debate between postmodernists and positivists. I am going to argue that historians need to abandon judging a history film by its interpretation of the past; instead, they should focus their attention on what the film tells us about the political and social moment of the film's first exhibition.

Historians have been reluctant to turn to film as a source, often for very good reasons. Throughout much of the 20th century film has been dismissed as 'escapist' and as 'harmless entertainment' for the distraction of the masses. For historians of social processes and movements there is the additional disadvantage: much of the literature on Hollywood is biographical, serving up questionable accounts of the lives of stars, directors, and moguls while presenting an old fashioned, exclusively top-down, 'great men' and 'great women' approach to history. While literary and cultural studies specialists quickly understood the potential of Hollywood as a field of intellectual enquiry, historians were last to use film in the classroom.

Approaching Hollywood

Historians take their lead from the US Supreme Court which in the 1915 Mutual decision rejected movie makers' aspirations to be taken seriously and have their right to free speech protected. Instead, the Court ruled that the industry was 'a business pure and simple.' It was not until 1952 that the case was overturned, giving film protection under the First Amendment to the Constitution. In the 1930s the Frankfurt School of Marxist sociologists, comparing mass produced films to *avant garde* art, judged movies to be nothing more than bourgeois ideology, a mask for real social relations of dominance and exploitation. If Hollywood culture is dismissed as insignificant, why should we have our students pore over 'low-brow,' ephemeral celluloid documents when they could be better employed, for example, dissecting the speeches of Martin Luther King or the transcript of a Congressional inquiry? Yet Hollywood, since it is woven into the fabric of American culture and society, represents or embodies many of the themes that political historians identify as central to the study of modern societies – class, race, gender, and the cultures of authority and resistance. The motion picture industry has immense cultural, political and economic power. It acts as an important ideological force in its own right while also being a barometer of important political and cultural trends. In addition, the industry is a strategic component of the US economy, a significant employer of labour in southern California, Canada and Western Europe, and a major component of world trade. Millions flocked to cinemas across the world during Hollywood's heyday, and still watch movies on terrestrial TV channels, cable, satellite, internet, VHS and DVD. At the same time, the industry has long-standing intimate relations with the US government, and other states throughout the world.

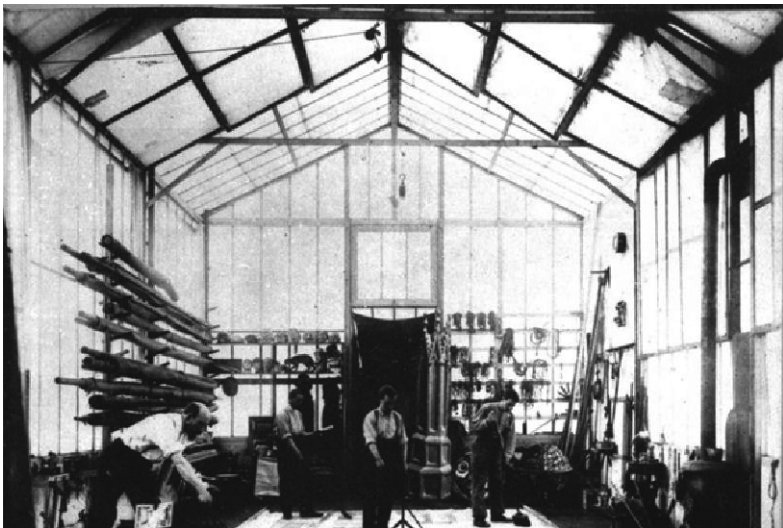


Hollywood sign in Hollywood, Los Angeles by Sten Rüdriich

The history of the movie colony

Even for favourably inclined historians, including Hollywood in the curriculum presents a major obstacle because its history is hardly written. As film historian Melvyn Stokes points out, serious academic study of the motion picture industry is only just over a quarter of a century old. Lacking academic respectability, early historiography was left in the hands of a small number of industry insiders who lavished attention on great inventors, studio bosses and, in some cases, important films. Terry Ramsaye, Benjamin B. Hampton, and Lewis Jacobs, authors of *A Thousand and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture* (1926), *A History of the Movies* (1931) and *The Rise of the American Film* (1939), respectively, all combined careers in film making with journalism.

It was the massive expansion in university-taught film courses in the 1970s that sparked academic interest in film history. Realising the limitations of the early approaches of Ramsaye, Hampton and Jacobs, historians turned to archival sources and looked beyond the lives of great men to study business institutions and social processes. The radicalism of the late sixties, particularly the Civil Rights movement and feminism, also made a major impact. French film theorists, politicised by the events of May 1968, examined the ways cinema buttressed bourgeois ideology, while British social historians, such as E.P. Thompson, encouraged an engagement with the lives of the oppressed and historically marginalised.



Georges Méliès (left) painting a backdrop in his studio

Further, many were influenced by the writings of Antonio Gramsci which opened up the possibility that bourgeois ideology was not monolithic but a site of contestation as classes battled with each other. Now, cinema's popularity with the masses was an attraction for academics, not a turn off. Ironically, at the precise moment that the old cinema-going culture disappeared for good, historians turned their attention to the origin and development of the industry. As a result, during the mid seventies a series of seminal works appeared laying the ground for much of the later writing. In my view much the most important was Robert Sklar, *Movie Made America* (1975), but others were Garth Jowett, *Film: The Democratic Art* (1975), Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black* (1977) and Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape* (1974). Yet, outside of these early pioneers, historians were slow in taking up the challenge. Film studies was the intellectual child of literature, philosophy and art history. To those disciplines, film was an aesthetic text worthy of consideration in its own right and often treated, in practice, as unconnected with wider social structures. Film specialists developed *auteur* theory, and drew upon structuralism, semiotics, and psychoanalysis. At best, these approaches were ahistorical, and at worst they were anti-historical. Not surprisingly, most historians were reluctant to create space for film within the curriculum.

Film history started to place the study of Hollywood on firmer professional grounds through the development of fresh documentary sources of historical evidence. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences made available the extensive Production Code Administration case files covering the years 1927 to 1967. The Twentieth-Century Fox papers are available for scrutiny at the University of California, Los Angeles, as are the voluminous Warner Brothers Archives at the University of Southern California. In addition, historians have paid attention to oral history, government archives, municipal and state censorship boards, trade press, political parties, pressure groups, labour organisations and social science surveys. (Melvyn Stokes provides an excellent historiographical overview. See Selected Bibliography.)

Only as historians threw off the constraints of academic inertia and sought their own way of incorporating film (and later the motion picture industry) within their scholarship did the body of work on the subject expand. As can be seen from the case studies and bibliography, what we have now is a small but, nevertheless, growing literature on film history which historians can look to for pedagogical support.

Using feature films

Recently, increasing numbers of historians have turned to using feature film as an alternative to or augmentation of traditional sources, even if they remain unsure of the precise theoretical tools needed to unlock their meaning. Ironically, the use of film

was facilitated, in the first instance, by the collapse of the studios and the sale of their back catalogue of films to television. But the big upsurge had to wait until the arrival of cheap video cassette players for off-air recording and the equipping of teaching rooms with televisions and play-back facilities, which made it possible to show films to a class on a regular basis. *Mrs Miniver* (1942) might be used to illustrate Britain's plucky wartime spirit; *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) to reveal the paranoia of Cold War America. These films are historical documents in much the same way as census returns or biography, but what attracted historians was film's ability to lay bare something of the ambiguity and contradictions of the prevailing cultural spirit.



Charlie Chaplin in *The Gold Rush* (1925)

(2000), and Leonard Quart and Albert Auster, *American Film and Society Since 1945* (third ed., 2002). Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema* (second ed., 2003) offers both a sound introduction to the film industry and a review of film theory. Nathan Abrams, Ian Bell and Jan Udris, *Studying Film* (2001) is a very accessible introduction to the language of film, especially for those outside media and film studies. Significantly most of these texts are written by those with backgrounds in American studies, cultural studies, political science and film studies.

A number of helpful texts have made the process of blending film within the history curriculum much easier. Perhaps the most useful, given historians' preoccupation with the nature of power, explore film politics. Brian Neve's *Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition* (1992) is still useful, though in need of advancing the narrative beyond the 1950s. Other valuable titles include Ian Scott, *American Politics in Hollywood Film*

History film as stumbling block

While many historians are persuaded that there is a place for film in the modern history curriculum, history films – those that makers claim truthfully represent the past – are a more contentious issue within the profession. A few historians insist that they, not screenwriters and directors, are the gatekeepers of the past. Robert Rosenstone, and others, suggest ways to test history films and their suitability for admission to the discipline but to many practitioners the acceptance of fabrication alongside real historical events is a step too far. A good deal of antipathy has been created by postmodernists, such as Hayden White, who want to use history film in much the same fashion as they would use other historical evidence, claiming that both are stories put together by an author. Most historians argue that there is a distance between themselves and the object of study, that a clear distinction needs to be drawn between fact and fiction, and that although historians' judgements are personal and individual, history should not involve fabrication and, consequently, that not all interpretations are equally valid. Fiction sits uneasily alongside the historian's training to interrogate sources rigorously and search for the truth.

Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies (1995), edited by Mark Carnes, illustrates both the progress in embracing history films and the limits placed upon them by a reluctant profession. In the collection a number of historians contributed short film reviews that touched upon their area of research expertise. On one level, this is evidence that historians are taking Hollywood seriously but, on another, *Past Imperfect* reveals a lack of understanding of the medium. Contributors emphasise the difference between historical fact and celluloid fiction and the films examined are arranged in historical order rather than in the order of the films' first exhibition, which would make more sense.

History films are bound to come off a very poor second when exposed to such scrutiny. But the problem stems not from history films but from the failure of historians to understand the medium. History films need to create characters, clothing, dialogue, décor, locations and events because complete information about the past is never possible. This is especially true the more we move away from well-known figures and well-documented events. While invention would be the end of a historian's career it is integral to history film making. *Past Imperfect* includes a very interesting debate between filmmaker John Sayles and historian Eric



Theda Bara as Cleopatra and Fritz Lieber as Caesar in *Cleopatra* (1917)

Foner, in which – for my money – the filmmaker has the better of the argument. Historians need to point out the limitations of feature film, yet to set up a ‘fact vs. fiction’ binary, as demonstrated in *Past Imperfect*, fails to advance our understanding of the appropriate place of history films in the discipline. Certainly, it is essential for historians to make the distinction between filmic invention and reality if the discipline is not to slip into the multiple worlds of postmodern history, since to allow equal status to fabrication would undermine the whole ethos of academic scholarship. But, acting solely as ‘fact police’ narrows discussion among historians, constrains the use of film in the classroom, misunderstands history film making and, crucially, limits the role of the historian within the discipline and in wider public debate. Faced with some historians’ intransigent rejection of fiction, film makers can rightly complain that historians fail to understand the nature of history films which by necessity need to invent the past.



Douglas Fairbanks as Robin Hood and Enid Bennett as Maid Marian in *Robin Hood* (1917)

Roy Collins, who recently completed a University of Greenwich MPhil on American Civil War films, suggests a way forward. Film makers and historians, he says, have two different ways of engaging with the past: for historians an interpretation of the past is constructed through a dialogue between the questions and priorities suggested by the present and a past which needs understanding in its own terms. Film makers, in contrast, give priority to the present because of commercial considerations and the demands of audience accessibility. As a result, historians should not be studying history films for the information they convey about the past but what a film reveals about the moment of its creation and first exhibition. Thus, *Glory* (1989), to take one example, tells us little that is reliable about African-American experience in the 1860s, but in

a very nuanced way it reveals a great deal about 1980s attitudes toward race relations and the state of race politics. As a result, a history film is a historical document in its own right and is an amazingly useful resource in revealing the complexity of popular ideology – the *zeitgeist* – at the time of its production. Further, exploring genres such as Civil War films or Westerns, over an extended time period – the kind of activity historians are good at – brings to light subtle cultural shifts, ambiguity, and silences that are of immense significance to the historian. History films are a useful source of ‘innocent’ commentary in much the same way as another Hollywood genre, science fiction, allows contemporaries to engage with a world seemingly insulated by time from today’s controversies.

The motion picture industry and why it matters

Hollywood is not only about movies, it is also about production, distribution, audiences and popular culture. Over the last 20 years historians (and some political scientists), sometimes refugees from specialisms in decline such as labour history, have been joined by film studies practitioners dissatisfied with the discipline's emphasis upon the text in the study of film production. Shifting attention away from film allows historians scope for their greater professional expertise in understanding business institutions, technological change, government, and popular social movements over long periods of time. The industry, which is now more than a hundred years old, offers massive scope for critical historical inquiry. While the early days were largely unnoticed by polite society, from 1920, with the relocation of the motion picture industry in Southern California, and the emergence of oligopolistic studios attracting large film audiences, the commercial and cultural power of the new industry was revealed. 'Classic Hollywood,' with its mass produced films moved to the centre of political power as government turned to it for support during the profound economic crisis of the 1930s, and World War Two. The studio system disappeared in the post-war years, undermined by the ideological straitjacket of anti-communism, competition from TV and the movement to the suburbs. Since the 1960s the industry has transformed itself into 'New Hollywood', fusing the making of movies, TV programmes, music, and computer games within powerful multimedia corporations with global reach.

Recent scholarship explores many facets of the industry's development from the silent era to the present and offers insights not only into the inner workings of the system but also how an evolving modern American society is constituted. Thomas Cripps adds to our understanding of race through a study of the black community and the films that it and white society saw; Steven Ross's investigation of working-class and socialist film makers casts light on social conflict in the Progressive period; Michael Denning reveals the power of Popular Front politics in the 1930s in a study of the art it produced, including film and film makers; while Gerald Horne's



examination of studio labour helps us better understand the nature of working-class consciousness and the impact of the Cold War. Horne's work, and my own, overlap with the more traditional areas of labour history. Space permits in-depth exploration of only two areas – movie regulation and audience studies – which illustrate the findings of the new film history and reveal its broader historiographic potential.

Until fairly recently censorship has been viewed as a rather specialist subject involving disputes over moral, constitutional, and religious principles. (The term 'regulation' is often used by film historians instead of 'censorship' as this not only encompasses the control of movie content but under what conditions movies are viewed by the public. Thus, enforcement of municipal fire regulations, and Sabbath observance, for example, would also be important.) But as film historians' interests have widened, so the place of movie regulation occupies a more complex and central place. While Hollywood saw the conflict between themselves as enlightened supporters of free speech, on the one side, and a small unrepresentative group of old-fashioned bigots, on the other, in truth the demand for regulation echoed widely throughout America in the 1920s and early 1930s and went to the heart of fundamental social and political issues of how men and women should behave toward each other, to relations between the classes, and attitudes toward authority and the state. 'Determining what is legitimate to say, hear and see', argues Francis Couvares 'is a central activity of all societies and social groups'. (*Movie Censorship*, p. 12. For full reference see case study 4.)

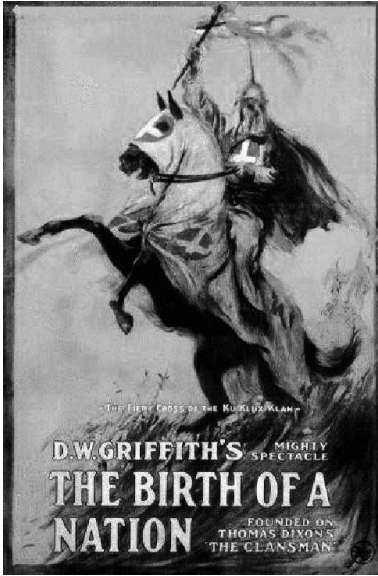
These culture wars, sparked by the struggle to control the movie screen, are vantage points for our students giving them a clearer understanding of the modern world. Identifying the social background and political agendas of the groups that sought to regulate the movies is crucial in understanding the operation of American society as it sloughed off rural, small town culture and embraced big city and monopolistic business practices. Hollywood was both a participant in this process of cultural change and a lightning rod for popular and upper-class opinion.

Film historians throw light on gender and class composition of the censorship movements but there are many questions still unanswered. Robert Sklar sees the movement to regulate the movies in the 1920s as spearheaded by an older, small



'Negro going in colored entrance of movie house on Saturday afternoon, Belzoni, Mississippi'. Library of Congress, Prints & Photography Division (1939)

town and small business Protestant elite which was attempting to regain cultural hegemony from immigrant Jewish studio bosses. This may be the case, but the modernists who sided with Hollywood to resist the old elite's attempt to introduce Federal censorship remain unexamined.



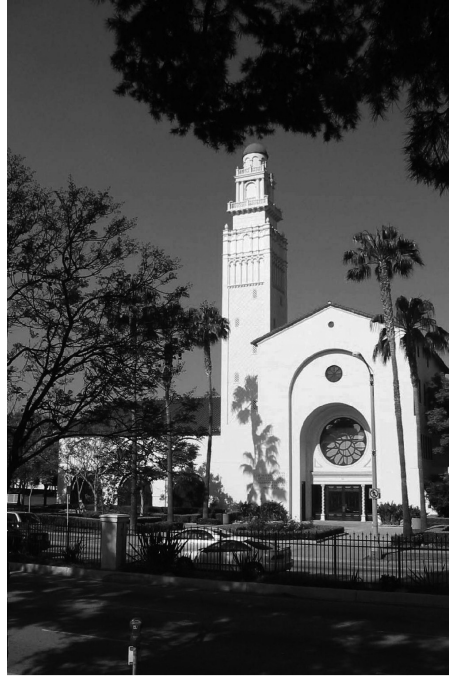
Focusing on audiences also offered historians new opportunities. So long as film studies' major preoccupation was interpreting or laying bare the inherent meaning of an aesthetic text then historians' ability to contribute was limited. For historians, films have meaning in the context of their creation, viewing, and use. Who watched films, under what conditions, and what they understood from them are as important as how the film was made. The heated debate over the class composition of early cinema audiences in Boston and New York City between Russell Merritt, Robert Allen, Robert Sklar, Ben Singer and others has animated much of the historically-inspired scholarship over the last 30 years. Whether audiences were predominately working class, as has commonly been thought, or middle class, as revisionists suggest, has important ramifications for interpreting power relations and hegemony in the Progressive era.

Following in the footsteps of Merritt and Allen, historians have focused attention on early immigrant audiences and the kinds of American and foreign films they saw as part of a wider exploration of national identity and assimilation. Others have moved much further in looking at African American, small-town, and female audiences in later periods.

Buttressed by traditional sources of historical research, such as local newspapers, trade directories, census returns and the like, film history has placed audience studies on firmer grounds. At the same time, by moving beyond the immediate cinematic venue film history can make an important contribution to our understanding of the complex and shifting ideological make-up of American society.

The future

Film industry history continues to widen its scope and add depth to its intellectual project. But, because it is a young sub-branch and, inevitably, one informed by other disciplines it is still to establish its reputation within mainstream history. It has a small but growing band of practitioners although, as can be seen from the following case studies, the same names crop up more times than they should. There are a number of areas that need further exploration. Most research concentrates on the silent era and Hollywood's golden age, with little focus on the period since 1950 which is dominated by television and not cinema. The Washington-Hollywood connection needs closer scrutiny, particularly in terms of its theorisation, as does Hollywood's relationship with imperialism and militarism. We also need to know more about contemporary audiences; especially neglected here are young black men. The motion picture industry transformed itself on a number of occasions – some commentators suggest that it switched from production-line 'Fordism' to 'flexible specialisation' – yet we know little of the impact this had upon the people who actually worked for the industry. Whatever our findings, they will throw light on the cultural make-up of modern America. The great beauty of film history is that it allows us to tackle all these questions from the top down or bottom up.



Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles by the author

Case studies

Case studies have been chosen for the light they cast on the social and political world beyond Hollywood.

1. Early movie audiences and immigrant identity

A good way to start is with Jacob's assimilationist assertion: 'The movies gave the newcomers, particularly, a respect for American law and order, an understanding of civic organisation, pride in citizenship and in the American commonwealth. Movies acquainted them with current happenings at home and abroad. Because the uncritical moviegoer was deeply impressed by what they saw in the photographs and accepted it as the real thing, the movies were powerful and persuasive. More vividly than any other single agency, they revealed, the social topography of America to the immigrant, to the poor, and the country folk. Thus from the outset the movies were, besides a commodity and a developing craft, a social agency.' [Jacobs, Lewis, *The Rise of the American Film* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1939), p.12.]

More recent texts question Jacob's position:

Abel, Richard, *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900–1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999)

Abel, Richard, 'Our country/whose country? The "Americanisation" project of early Westerns', in Buscombe, Edward, and Pearson, Roberta E., eds., *Back in the Saddle Again: New Essays on the Western* (London: British Film Institute, 1998)

Bertellini, Sergio, 'Italian imageries, historical feature films and the fabrication of Italy's spectators in early 1900s New York', in Stokes, Melvyn, and Maltby, Richard, eds., *American Movie Audiences: From the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era* (London: British Film Institute, 1999)

Hansen, Miriam, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991)

Jowett, Garth, *Film: The Democratic Art* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976)

Mayne, Judith, 'Immigrants and spectators', *Wide Angle* 5 (1982), pp. 32–41

Thissen, Judith, 'Jewish immigrant audiences in New York City, 1905–14', in Stokes and Maltby, eds., *American Movie Audiences* (1999)

2. Moving to Hollywood

Why 'Hollywood' became Hollywood and why the motion picture industry migrated to an insignificant suburb of Los Angeles affords students a fascinating look into America's cultural and spatial development, and class conflict in Los Angeles. Again, dissecting a red herring from Jacobs, who suggests that the aggressive behaviour of Thomas Edison's Motion Picture Patents Company encouraged other movie makers to move west, is a good way to begin: 'The establishment of Hollywood as the production center of the industry was prompted by the independents' desire to avoid the attack of the [Edison] trust. ... The safest refuge was Los Angeles, from which it was only a hop-skip-and-jump to the Mexican border and escape from the injunctions and subpoenas.' [Jacobs, Lewis, *The Rise of the American Film* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1939), p. 85.]

Brownlow, Kevin, *The Parade's Gone By* (New York: Knopf, 1968)

Caughey, John and Caughey, Laree, *Los Angeles: Biography of a City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976)

Cripps, Thomas, *Hollywood's High Noon: Moviemaking and Society before Television* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997)

Jowett, Garth, *Film: The Democratic Art* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976)

May, Lary, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980)

Sklar, Robert, *Movie-Made America: A Social History of American Movies* (New York: Random House, 1975)

Starr, Kevin, *Inventing the Dream: California through the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985)

3. The origins of the star system

No need for historians to shy away from this topic even though it has been monopolised by cultural studies, often with little grasp of the broader historical issues. Get students to differentiate between stars and celebrity and ask them to decide if stardom has been a permanent feature of popular entertainment.

Austin, Thomas, and Baker, Martin, eds., *Contemporary Hollywood Stardom* (London: Arnold, 2003). Useful, but confine your attention to the first few pages of the Introduction.

Bordwell, David, Staiger, Janet, and Thompson, Kristin, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985)

Butler, Jeremy G., 'The star system', in Hill, John, and Gibson, Pamela, eds., *American Cinema and Hollywood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

Dyer, Richard, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986)

Dyer, Richard, *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1979)

Gledhill, Christine, ed., *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (London: Routledge, 1991)

Grieveson, Lee, 'Stars and audiences in early American cinema', *Screening the Past*, 14 (2002) <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/classics/cl0902/1gcl14c.htm> [accessed 3 May 2009]

King, Barry, 'Stardom as an occupation', in Kerr, Paul, ed., *The Hollywood Film Industry: A Reader* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986)

Klaprat, Cathy, 'The star as a market strategy: Bette Davis in another light', in Balio, Tino, ed., *The American Film Industry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, rev. ed., 1985)

May, Lary, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980)

Sklar, Robert, *Movie-Made America: A Social History of American Movies* (New York: Random House, 1975)

Stacey, Jackie, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994)

Turner, Graeme, *Understanding Celebrity* (London: Sage, 2004)

4. Censorship and modern America

An excellent start to a growing area of historical inquiry is Francis G. Couvares, ed., *Movie Censorship and American Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996). Contributions cover the period from the early years of the industry to the 1980s. Matthew Bernstein, ed., *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000) is a useful collection of mainly reprinted scholarship from the 1980s onwards with a helpful annotated bibliography.

Black, Gregory D., *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

Doherty, Thomas, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930–1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999)

Grieverson, Lee, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004)

Maltby, Richard, 'The production code and the Hays Office', in Balio, Tino, ed., *History of the American Cinema vol. 5: Grand design: Hollywood as a modern business enterprise, 1930–1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993)

5. Cinema and African-American urban culture 1905–30

The black cinematic experience was bounded by the profound racism of films such as *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), by concerted efforts from Oscar Micheaux and others to found a viable black cinema, and by constant debate within the black community on what constituted a proper cultural experience for black Americans.

Bernardi, Daniel, et al, eds., *The Birth of Whiteness: Race and the Emergence of the US Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996)

Brower, Pearl, and Spence, Louise, *Writing Himself into History: Oscar Micheaux, His Silent Films, and His Audience* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000)

Cripps, Thomas, “‘Race Movies’ as voices of the black bourgeoisie: the scar of shame’, in O’Connor, John E., and Jackson, Martin A. eds., *American History/American Film: Interpreting the Hollywood Image* (New York: Ungar, 1988)

Cripps, Thomas, ‘The making of *The Birth of a Race*: the emerging politics of identity in silent movies,’ in Bernardi, ed., *The Birth of Whiteness* (1996)

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Gomery, Douglas, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992)

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Regester, Charles, ‘Black films, white censors: Oscar Micheaux confronts censorship in New York, Virginia, and Chicago’, in Couvares, ed., *Movie Censorship and American Culture* (1996)

Ross, Steven J., ed., *Movies and American Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002)

6. Capra and the Great Depression

Frank Capra's populist style resonated with the personal deprivation experienced by many during the Depression of the 1930s. There is a vast literature on Capra, and the films of the period; these are just a few suggestions.

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Neve, Brian, *Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1992)

Phelps, Glen A., 'The populist films of Frank Capra', *Journal of American Studies*, 13 (1979), pp. 377–92

Rogin, Michael P., and Moran, Kathleen, 'Mr. Capra goes to Washington', *Representations* 84 (2003), pp. 213–48

Stricker, Frank, 'Repressing the working class: individualism and the masses in Frank Capra's films', *Labor History* 31 (1990), pp. 454–67

Toplin, Robert B., Levine, Lawrence W., and Carter Dan T., 'Frank Capra's America', *Journal of Multimedia History*, 2 (1999) <http://www.albany.edu/jmmh/vol2no1/Capra1.html> [accessed 3 May 2009]

7. The studios and California politics

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8. Hollywood's New Deal

Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal administration was the first to realise the value of the new mass media, radio and cinema. At a time of profound economic crisis for the industry and political crisis for the New Deal, while films such as *Gabriel over the White House* (1933) called for a strong leader to bring order out of chaos, Republican studio bosses found common ground with New Deal Democrats.

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11. America and World War Two

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13. Visions of friend and foe

Hollywood offers a variety of character portraits and national stereotypes of both allies and enemies. For enemies see: *Sahara* (1943), *The Fallen Sparrow* (1943), *Hitler's Children* (1943), *The Master Race* (1944), *The Purple Heart* (1944), and *House on 92nd Street* (1945). For allies: *Sahara* (1943), *Mission to Moscow* (1943), *North Star* (1943), *This Land is Mine* (1943), and *Days of Glory* (1944). Uncritical support for Stalinism was to come back to haunt Hollywood in subsequent years.

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19. Can movies teach history?

Any number of films can be used as examples (see Mark Carnes in this reading list for an interesting selection). Here I use *Glory* (1989).

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20. Hollywood's working class

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21. Cultural imperialism and global culture

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