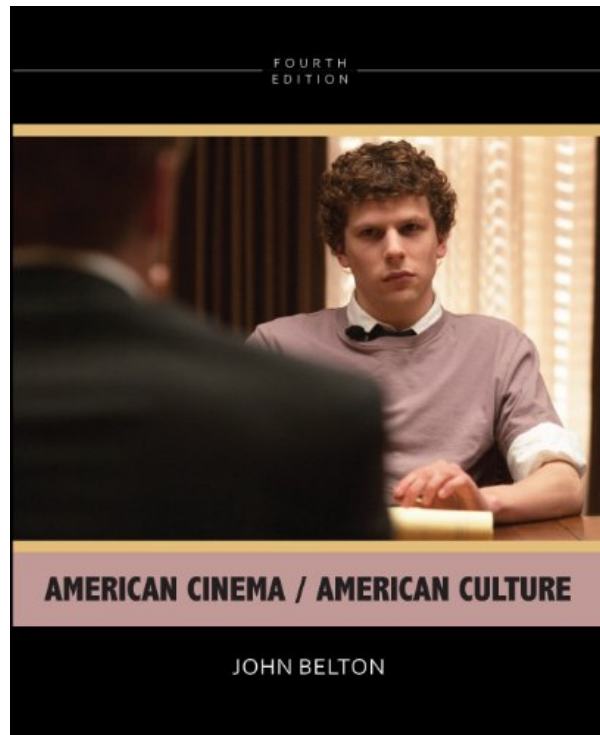


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About the Author

John Belton, Assistant Professor of English at Rutgers University, is widely admired in film studies for his work with the National Film Preservation Board. He is the coeditor of *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* and the author of *Cinema Stylists* and *The Films of Robert Mitchum*.

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BY JOHN BELTON PDF

American Cinema/American Culture looks at the interplay between American cinema and mass culture from the 1890s to 2011. It begins with an examination of the basic narrative and stylistic features of classical Hollywood cinema. It then studies the genres of silent melodrama, the musical, American comedy, the war/combat film, film noir, the western, and the horror and science fiction film, investigating the way in which movies shape and are shaped by the larger cultural concerns of the nation as a whole. The book concludes with a discussion of post World War II Hollywood, giving separate chapter coverage to the effects of the Cold War, 3D, television, the counterculture of the 1960s, directors from the film school generation, and the cultural concerns of Hollywood from the 1970s through 2011.

Ideal for Introduction to American Cinema courses, American Film History courses, and Introductory Film Appreciation courses, this text provides a cultural overview of the phenomenon of the American movie-going experience.

An updated study guide is also available for American Cinema/American Culture. Written by Ed Sikov, this guide introduces each topic with an explanatory overview written in more informal language, suggests screenings and readings, and offers self-tests.

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Most helpful customer reviews

24 of 24 people found the following review helpful.

A very useful beginners guide to American film.

By C. Burkhalter

Years ago I took an intro-level film class at a community college. This was the text for the class. It was accompanied (at least in my class) by a PBS video series that combined film clips with interviews and historical information. Going into the class I had little more than a passing interest in film and film history. But after taking that class, my passion for film has grown exponentially with each year. But back to the book, I really liked this book and highlighted my way from the front cover to the back cover. There are of course limitations to this book. Firstly, it deals only with American films. Secondly, this book barely breaks the 300-page mark - hardly a comprehensive volume. You aren't going to get any information on John Cassavetes here or anything. Now if you have a chance to use this book in conjunction with the PBS films, I think you'll do much better (in fact I think the vids even give a nod to Cassavetes), but even then please note that this material is for an INTRO-level film class, and won't be much good for someone who already knows a fair amount about American film. But with that in mind, the book still has a lot to offer someone looking to introduce themselves to film history.

The first third of the book starts with the birth of film, moves quickly on to the Hollywood studio system, and walks us through the basics of film style (camerawork, lighting, editing, etc.). The second third covers the basics of film genre; there is a chapter about film noir, one on comedies, one on war films, and one on westerns. This second section was particularly useful to me. I could read each chapter, jot down a list of promising titles, hit my local video store, and I was good to go. The third section covers American film after World War II. In this section things seem a little compressed. 110 pages for 50 years of film? A lot is lost on the cutting room floor. But there's lots to dig into all the same. There's a chapter on Hollywood during the McCarthy years (yikes!), one on film's evolution during the emergence of television, a chapter on 1960s counterculture films, one on the film school directors of the 1970s and 1980s, and finally a pretty weak chapter on film in the 1990s. Oh yeah, and at the end of the book there's a handy glossary (in case you're ever stuck on what point-of-view editing is) and a pretty thorough index.

Again, not a book for someone who already has a good feel for film history. But definitely a great resource for someone new to film studies, or for someone who has trouble finding a movie at Blockbuster on Fridays. It did a great job getting me excited about movies, and I imagine its done the same for others.... A good companion to this text (or possibly an all-out replacement of it) is Scorsese's VHS/DVD, "A Personal Journey With Martin Scorsese Through American Movies."

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

A lot of information but worthwhile if you are interested in cinema

By DuaneP

I read this book for my American cinema class. This book has a lot of information and can be overwhelming at time if you are reading a lot in one sitting. I think this book is great for someone who really wants to know the history of cinema and is interested to know how films are structured and designed. I will give you a brief summary of each chapter. The author John Belton divided the book into main parts. Part 1 is titled "The Mode of Production". Chapter 1 is about the emergence cinema as an institution and talks about how cinema functions as both a social and technological institution. He talks about Thomas Edison and the kinescope which lead to nickelodeons and eventually full films. Chapter 2 is titled "Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narration" and is about how cinemas shifted to more of a narrative style. He then talks about segmentation

and circular patterns in which Charlie Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* is analyzed and broken down. The next chapter talks about cinema style and explains details in films including camera angles and distance. There is a whole section on lighting and shows you the different kinds including three-point lighting and high/low key lighting. Chapter 4 is about the studio system which was created to mass produce films. During this time period movie stars were locked into seven-year contracts. The author lists the movie studios that were around in this era and continue to me around like M.G.M, Paramount, Warner Bros, and Universal Pictures to name a few. Chapter 5 explained "The Star System" which involves making stars and star power itself. He explains the differences between a star and an actor. The author explains the characteristics of the stars of different eras.

The next section is "Genre and The Genre System" which starts off with chapter 6 "Silent Film Melodrama ". Melodrama means a drama accompanied by music. This leads into the next chapter which covers musicals. He goes into the different musical forms which include backstage musicals. Integrated musicals include the very famous *Singin' in the Rain*. Chapter 8 is about American comedy which discusses the different kinds including romantic comedies and screwball comedies. War and Cinema is the next chapter and talks about how the different wars influenced cinema. There have been dozens of movies that are set in World War II which include *Saving Private Ryan*. The next chapter is "Film Noir: Somewhere in the Night". Film noir is a French phrase that means black film. It refers to an American phenomenon of films that dealt with postwar despair and alienation. The next two chapters deal with three different genre of American film: westerns, horror, and science fiction.

The last section is dealing with postwar history which chapter 13 starts with the cold war. It explains how the tensions of the cold war were reflected in films. Movies of this time reflected cold war paranoia. Hollywood in the age of television is the next chapter and talks about the role of television including the introduction of tapes/dvd. Chapter 15 talks about the 1960s which saw the civil rights movement and counter culture. The next chapter discussed the film school generation which saw directors as stars for the first time. The last chapter goes into the twenty-first century. Reaganite entertainment is discussed here. These films are centered on reassurance, optimism, and nostalgia. As you can see there are a lot of topics covered in this book. However of you are really into films and all its workings, this book is for you.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Meloy9156

By MeloyW

This book helped me understand more about American film than I ever expected. It brought me from the 1890's all the way up through 2011. Which is a huge difference in movie making and in history. This book has a strong sense of history throughout its pages, guiding the structure of a lot of the chapters as a whole. I enjoyed how it was structured and how the message was given to the reader. The book not only is a history lesson of film but it introduces you to the aesthetics and film form basics. It introduces and explains basic vocabulary of the narrative and the stylistic practices. It gives you the insight to see how things were done and even more importantly why they were done that way. There is a lot that a person can learn from this book as long as they take the time to actually read and absorb its content. It is a very informative book and it keeps your attention throughout. It is not the typical textbook, that tends to be bland and un-interesting, it will definitely give you the necessary perspective to learn more about American Cinema.

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