



Universidad  
de Alcalá

# ESTADOS UNIDOS A TRAVÉS DEL CINE // THE US THROUGH ITS MOVIES

Grado en Estudios Ingleses  
Grado en Lenguas Modernas y Traducción  
Universidad de Alcalá

Curso Académico 2019/2020  
3º y 4º Curso – 1º Cuatrimestre

## GUÍA DOCENTE

Nombre de la asignatura:	ESTADOS UNIDOS A TRAVÉS DEL CINE // THE US THROUGH ITS MOVIES
Código:	251054
Titulación en la que se imparte:	Grado en Estudios Ingleses Grado en Lenguas Modernas y Traducción
Departamento y Área de Conocimiento:	Departamento de Filología Moderna Área de Filología inglesa
Carácter:	Optativa
Créditos ECTS:	6
Curso y cuatrimestre:	3º y 4º curso, 1º cuatrimestre
Profesorado:	Julio Cañero Serrano
	Por determinar
Idioma en el que se imparte:	Inglés

### 1a. DESCRIPCIÓN DEL CURSO

Hollywood es el mejor ‘arma’ que tiene Estados Unidos para mostrar al mundo cómo es la sociedad estadounidense. De esta manera, las creaciones cinematográficas de Hollywood sirven a la ‘diplomacia pública’ estadounidense para mostrar – mayoritariamente en positivo,- los valores y costumbres más arraigados en el país anglosajón. Hollywood se ha convertido, pues, en un filtro por el que el resto del planeta ha ido conformado su percepción de los Estados Unidos. Este curso tiene la intención de explorar cómo Hollywood ha modulado y transmitido ese carácter estadounidense. Pero lo va a hacer de manera dialéctica, tratando por un lado de ofrecer la versión oficial de determinados acontecimientos o actitudes y, por otro lado, ver si hay una versión alternativa a la dominante. Este curso cubrirá aspectos no estudiados en otras clases de historia o cultura y civilización.

### 1b. COURSE DESCRIPTION

It is undeniable that Hollywood has shaped our conception of American society. We have learnt about the US values and beliefs through its movies, assuming as right every piece of information that the American film industry has nationally and internationally transmitted. In that manner, Hollywood’s representation of the American personality has made its films valuable cultural and social documents. Thus, much of the information about the US that we have received has come filtered through Hollywood. This course explores, then, how the biggest film industry on Earth has helped to model/articulate that character, and the mechanisms it has employed to extend it worldwide. Besides, the core of the course will be to confront the students with a dialectic approach to the mainstream/commercial films – those that have exalted a particular historical character or figure, a particular moment or a progression of events, or a singular value or multiple beliefs, - and to movies (usually

noncommercial/nonmainstream) that have offered an alternative view over the same issues. Needless to say that the course covers aspects related to the American society and history that have not been studied in any other previous courses.

### Prerequisites and Recommendations

Since all activities will be conducted in English, students are expected to have at least a B2.1 level in the language within the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Students are expected to have a B2.2 level of English (CEFR).

## 2. COURSE OBJECTIVES

### Generic Competences:

1. To shape in students the idea that cinematic constructs can be approached from a critical perspective.
2. To increase the students' critical thinking and to strengthen the idea that cinema can be interpreted in manifold ways
3. To handle bibliography and to quote from specialized sources in an appropriate and effective way.
4. To develop the capacities for self-assessment, self-improvement and team work
5. To be efficient presenting information in an oral report.

### Specific Competences:

1. To be able to interpret a movie as a source of understanding political and cultural propaganda.
2. To help students acquire a perception of issues related to the American character traditionally transmitted through Hollywood's movies.
3. To encourage students to thoroughly evaluate American values and beliefs through US movies critical on and supportive of them.
4. To put in dialogue filmic creations in order to better judge and decide about those traditional US values and beliefs.

### 3. COURSE CONTENTS

Week	Units / Contents
1	Unit 1. General Introduction to the course. The American Ethos.
2	Unit 2: History (in) movies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The influence of films in the construction of historical events</li> <li>• The example of the Reconstruction Era</li> <li>• <i>Gone with the Wind</i> (1939)</li> </ul>
3	Unit 3: The US as the Champion of Freedom <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Foreign Policy during the 20<sup>th</sup> C</li> <li>• US Foreign Policy in movies</li> <li>• <i>Dr. Strangelove</i> (1964)</li> </ul>
4	Unit 4: Manifest Destiny and the Conquest of the West <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Native Americans: Fighting against Dispossession</li> <li>• The Western as a Film Genre</li> <li>• <i>The Searchers</i> (1956)</li> </ul>
5	Unit 5: American Antiheroes: The Gangster and the Mafia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crime and the Mafia</li> <li>• From gang to gangster in American films</li> <li>• <i>The Godfather: Part II</i> (1974)</li> </ul>
6	Unit 6: The (Moral Decay of the) American Youth and their Families <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why American families have problems?</li> <li>• American families in films</li> <li>• <i>Rebel without a Cause</i> (1955)</li> </ul>
7	Unit 7: A Violent Society <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An armed nation</li> <li>• Films and violence</li> <li>• <i>Bowling for Columbine</i> (2002)</li> </ul>
8	Unit 8: Racial identity in American cinema <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethnic culture(s)</li> <li>• Latinos in Hollywood</li> <li>• <i>El Norte</i> (1983)</li> </ul>
9	Unit 9: New York, New York <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The City that never sleeps</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All you know about New York through the movies!</li> <li>• <i>Manhattan</i> (1979)</li> </ul>
10	Unit 10: Environmental Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• US Environmental policies</li> <li>• Hollywood and the environment</li> <li>• <i>Erin Brockovich</i> (1983)</li> </ul>
11	Unit 11: Dystopian America <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What would the US look like after the end of the US?</li> <li>• The end of the world in movies</li> <li>• <i>The Planet of the Apes</i> (1968)</li> </ul>
12	Unit 12: A Nation of (Comic) Superheroes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comics as part of American culture</li> <li>• Marvel and DC and their cinematographic universes</li> <li>• <i>Superman</i> (1977)</li> </ul>
13	Unit 13: Slasher Films and the Final Girl <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serial killers and psychos</li> <li>• The history of the serial killer in US films</li> <li>• <i>Halloween</i> (1978)</li> </ul>
14	Unit 14: The (Sacred) Presidential Figure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presidential biopics</li> <li>• The presidential figure in fiction films</li> <li>• <i>Lincoln</i> (2012)</li> </ul>
15	Unit 15: The (Genuine) American Character? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An innocent nation: American Values and Beliefs</li> <li>• The American character in the movies</li> <li>• <i>Forrest Gump</i> (1994)</li> </ul>

The teacher will provide a detailed program for each unit at the beginning of the course. Students must be aware that, although every unit specified in the syllabus will be covered in the course, the hours assigned for each are tentative and might vary in order to properly attend the learning needs of the group.

## 4. METHODOLOGY AND CLASS ACTIVITIES

### 4.1. Student workload

Class contact hours: 45	15 lectures 30 seminars + activity workshops (depending on student numbers) + 1 ECTS tutorial
Independent study hours: 105	This time includes studying lecture notes, reading cultural texts, seminar preparation, which involves fulfilment of [type] written assignments, researching and working with other students to co-produce different kinds of assignments.
Total hours: 150	

## 4.2. Learning activities, materials and resources

Face-to-face hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lectures will provide the theoretical explanations of the topics under discussion.</li> <li>- Seminars will explore the issues in more detail through analysis and discussion in individual and/or group work. Seminars will be based on the interpretation of movies.</li> </ul>
Written and oral assignments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Guided reading of the movies.</li> <li>- Each reading together with the programmed activities for each unit will prepare students for active discussion and further reflection in an associated seminar.</li> </ul>
ECTS Tutorials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students will attend a group tutorial providing a more personal, individual attention to their learning and, if necessary, recommend extra activities and resources in order to enhance their progress. These hours will be established by the instructor at the beginning of the term. Students will be informed in class of the weekly time the lecturer can be contacted at her/his office.</li> </ul>
Workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students will attend and participate in three workshops designed to complement both lectures and seminars.</li> <li>- Students will be distributed in groups of approximately 10-15 in order to work</li> </ul>

	<p>on various tasks such as film viewing, web search, debates, and others to probe into the analysis of selected issues and films.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- They will also work on the planning and design of their oral presentations and final research project.</li></ul>
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Materials will be provided by the teacher at the beginning of the course. They will include diverse material, such as questionnaires, movies, academic articles, political/historical documents, websites, etc.

Students may be supported through a platform (EPD) or Dropbox, which will be used mainly for class communication.

## 5. ASSESSMENT

### Assessment criteria

Students should have acquired the desirable level in each of the competences specified in the assessment criteria:

- A thorough knowledge and understanding of a variety of films.
- A capacity to relate the student's own assumptions about the construction of reality with given US values and beliefs.
- An ability to respond to films critically, sensitively and in detail, using appropriate terminology and filmic evidence, and coherent, accurate written expression.
- Understanding of the significance and influence of the social, cultural and historical contexts in which films are embedded in US culture.
- A considerable level of class participation, which will be assessed in all the learning activities.
- High standards of presentation and of written and oral English in all submitted coursework. By the end of the module students are expected to have reached the competences and communicative skills at the B2 level of the Common European Framework.
- A capacity to pass an exam on the topics covered along the course.

Students should have acquired the desirable level in each of the competences specified in the assessment criteria. Specific assessment criteria are the ability to distinguish between the facts and the abstract patterns which emerge from the facts, and which are elaborated on throughout the course, the ability to memorize and use the most relevant facts, and the ability to recognize the aforementioned patterns in texts and movies. Patterns cover both the more specific knowledge about the US culture, as well as the meta-knowledge about the validity of the first set of patterns. The term 'patterns' also covers the acquisition and use of strategies designed to deal with a variety of text-forms, such as statistics, maps, or informational texts. A further assessment criterion is the ability to write an essay in a methodologically and formally correct way.

Students are warned that plagiarism will not be tolerated. The ideas from other sources, **regardless of whether they are quoted, summarized or paraphrased**, must be documented adequately. According to article 34 of the University regulation on evaluation, any plagiarism found in the final version of a paper will be penalized and could result in the failure of the module. The teacher will provide students with assessment cover sheets for written work, which certifies that their submitted work is entirely their own or appropriately referenced.

## Grading criteria

The final grade of the students will depend on their active and valuable participation in class (15%), a final exam (15%), an analysis of the movie studied that week (40%) and a research paper (30%). Participation in class is HIGHLY encouraged and it will be assessed accordingly. Active participation will not only be restricted to the seminars, but also to lectures, which will also be conducted upon the comments and ideas posed by students.

Likewise, their final grade will be based on the following grading criteria:

- **Outstanding (MH):** Students display an outstanding grasp of the aims and contents of the module. All assessment criteria have been achieved at an exceptionally high level. Performance in all the tasks shows that students have read and thought at a level well beyond what is expected in the module. Students attend lectures and are always well-prepared for discussion in seminars. They obtain outstanding results in the exams.
- **Excellent (SB):** Students display an excellent grasp of the aims and contents of the module. All assessment criteria have been achieved at a very high standard and an exceptionally high level. Performance in all the tasks shows all or most of the appropriate characteristics expected for this type of work. Students attend lectures and are practically always well-prepared for discussion in seminars, with almost no absences. They obtain excellent results in the exams.
- **Very Good (N):** Students display a very good grasp of the aims and contents of the module. All assessment criteria have been met fully and many have been achieved at a good or very good standard. Performance in all the tasks shows a good knowledge of the syllabus contents. Students attend lectures and seminars, with few absences, and have done most of the preparation for them. They have a good foundation in the prescribed readings and build on ideas put forward in lectures and seminars. They obtain very good results in the exams.
- **Satisfactory (A):** Students show a satisfactory grasp of the aims and contents of the module. All assessment criteria have been met, but some barely exceed the threshold standard to pass the module. Performance in all the tasks shows some of the appropriate characteristics in relation to content, illustration, organization and expression. Students are present in lectures and seminars, with few absences, and occasionally contribute to discussions. They obtain acceptable results in the exams.
- **Fail (S):** Students show an unsatisfactory grasp of the aims and contents of the module. Some assessment criteria do not reach the threshold standard to pass the module. Performance in all the tasks shows limited understanding of essential concepts and/or minimal research. Students have multiple absences and when



they come, they are often not prepared or they do not say much. Their results in the exams are insufficient considering the requirements of the course.

## Assessment procedures

The main assessment process in this course will be continuous. Thus, students have to attend at least 80% of the classes, including lectures, seminars, workshops and ECTS tutorials. They also have to do and submit all the activities requested in them, which are the following:

- They will have to present an analysis of the movie studied each week.
- Hand in an academic essay (2,500-3,000 words) towards the end of the course
- An exam on the topics covered during the contact classes.

If students consider that they will not be able to follow the continuous assessment process, within the first two weeks of the course they will have to request the Dean of the Arts Faculty to be exempted from this assessment process and to be assessed through a comprehensive final exam.

In accordance with the University regulation on evaluation, for those students who are not able to follow the continuous assessment scheme there will be one final summative two-hour written exam over the material covered during the module. This exam may include objective test questions, short answer questions and discussion questions. Students who fail the ongoing evaluation cannot sit this final exam in May.

There will be a reset opportunity at the end of the second semester for students who have failed their ongoing examination or the final exam. This will also take the form of a two-hour written exam, with a similar format to the above-mentioned final examination, which will constitute 100% of the reset mark.

## 6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Basic bibliography

- Belton, John. *American Cinema/American Culture*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2013.
- Benshoff, Harry M. and Sean Griffin. *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality at the Movies*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Campbell, Neil & Alasdair Kean. *American cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture*. London: Routledge, 1997.
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- Lewis, Jon. *American Film: A History*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2008.
- Luedtke, Luther S (ed.). *Making America: The Society & Culture of the United States*. Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P, 1992.
- Rawlinson, Mark. *American Visual Culture*. Oxford and New York: Berg, 2009.

Whitfield, Stephen J. *A Companion to 20<sup>th</sup>-Century America*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005.

### Additional bibliography

Grant, Barry Keith (ed.). *American Cinema of the 1960s: Themes and Variations*. 2008

Halliwel, Martin. *American Culture in the 1950s*. (2007)

Robertson, James Oliver. *American Myth, American Reality*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1980.