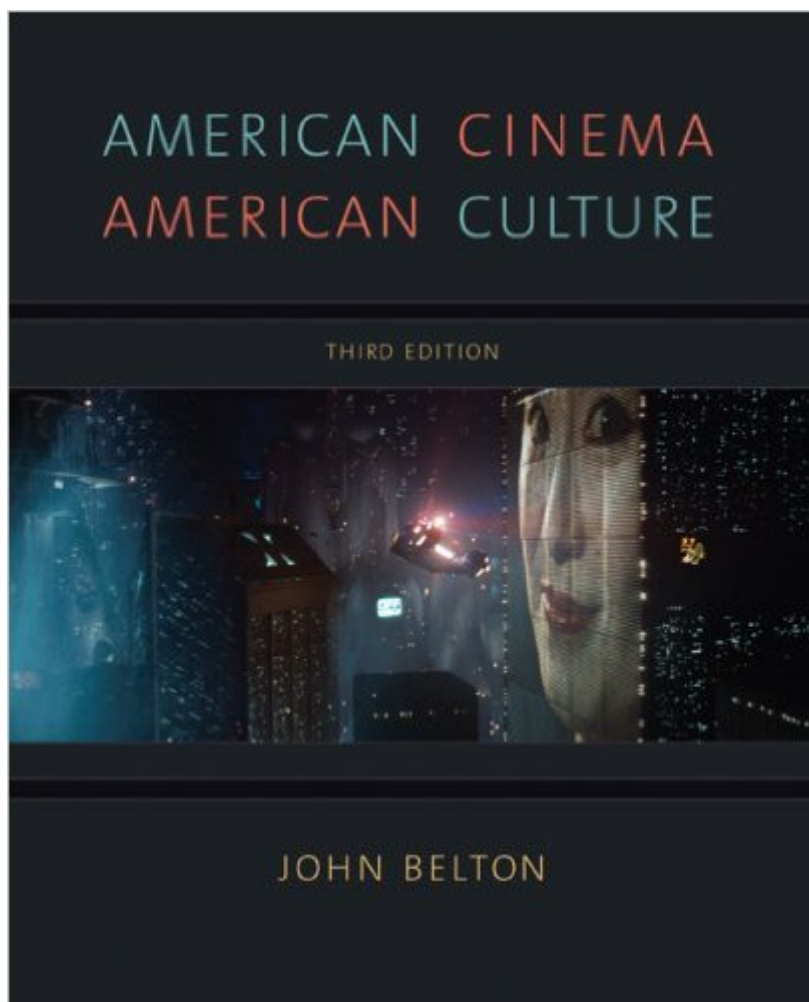


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# American Cinema/American Culture



## Synopsis

Ideal for Introduction to American Cinema courses, American Film History courses, and Introductory Film Appreciation courses focused on American Film, this text offers a cultural examination of the American movie-making industry, with particular attention paid to the economic and aesthetic institution of Hollywood.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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.

I read this book for my American cinema class. This book has a lot of information and can be overwhelming at times 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 of 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 led 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 be 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.

*American Cinema / American Culture* is the book I had to purchase for my American Cinema course. The book is a historical journey of the American film and movie industry from the late 1800s and through the year 2011. The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 consists of chapters 1 through 5 discuss the early emergence of cinema as an institution from Edison's invention of the Kinetoscope, peepshows and projectors. Part 2 deals with the genres and the different genre movies from the silent film melodramas, musicals to American comedy and war movies. Part 3 takes a look at post war history. There is one thing I learned from this book that I will not forget, the

meaning of Nickelodeon. I thought Nickelodeon was a cutie name someone came up with for a network dedicated to kids programming. Chapter 2 and 3 examines the classical Hollywood cinema narration and the classical cinema style. I enjoyed reading about the old Hollywood studio system and star system. Without a doubt stars sell films and I was surprise to learn who the three stars were that appeared in seven consecutive blockbusters that have earned over \$100 million each. It was interesting to get a better perspective of how Hollywood sees minority and black actors. I learned how pioneers like Thomas Edison, and George Eastman inventions contributed to the film industry. Also, how companies like Bell Telephone, Western Electric, American Telephone & Telegraph, General Electric and Westinghouse help the mass production of movies. I have a better understanding of musicals, but I am not a big fan of musicals. But, for those who are, you will enjoy reading about the evolution of these films. I did not know that there were so many categories of comedy. Silent, slapstick, romantic, screwball and geek are all forms of comedy.

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