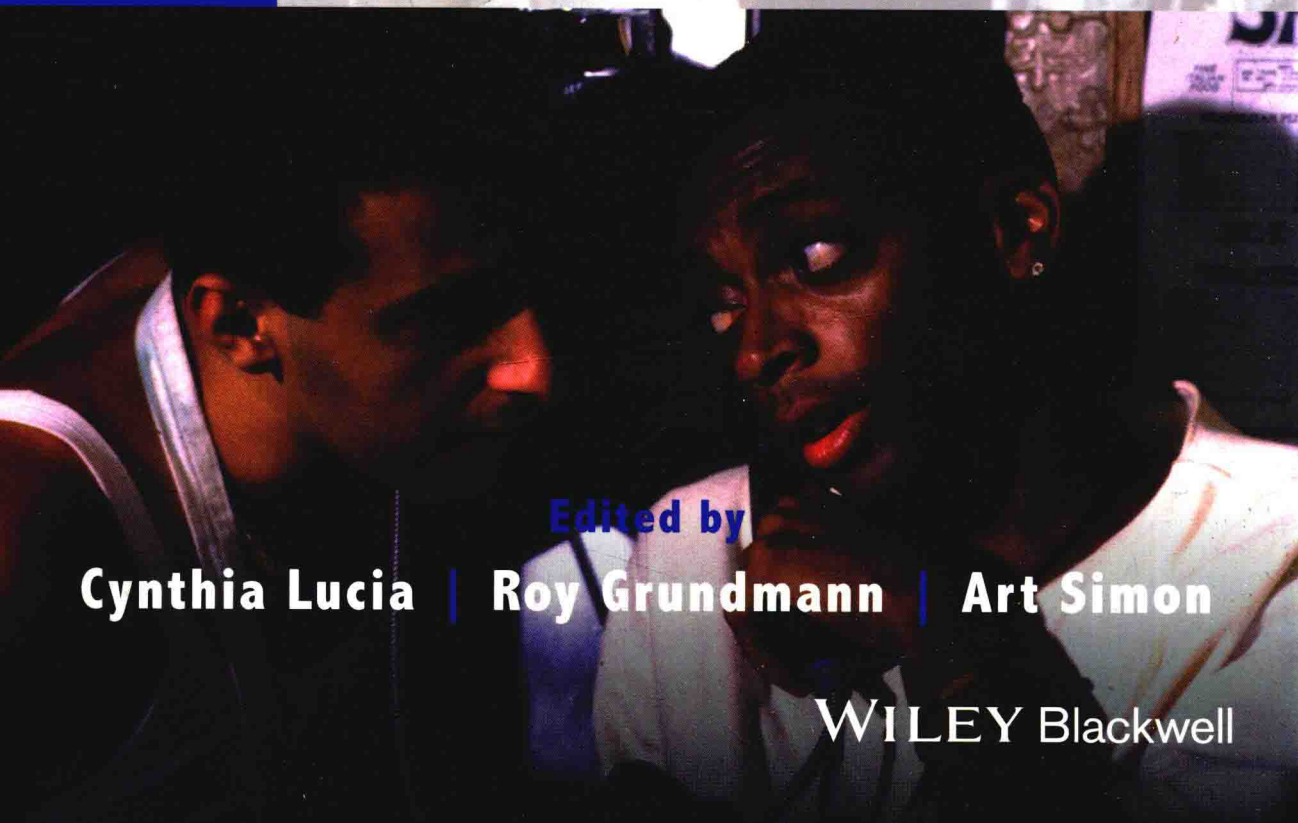




American  
**film** HISTORY

Selected  
Readings,  
1960 to the  
Present



Edited by

Cynthia Lucia | Roy Grundmann | Art Simon

WILEY Blackwell

# American Film History

*Selected Readings, 1960 to the Present*

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Cynthia Lucia, Roy Grundmann, and Art Simon

**WILEY** Blackwell

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# American Film History

# The Editors

**Cynthia Lucia** is Professor of English and Director of Film and Media Studies at Rider University. She is author of *Framing Female Lawyers: Women on Trial in Film* (2005) and writes for *Cineaste* film magazine, where she has served on the editorial board for more than two decades. Her most recent research includes essays that appear in *A Companion to Woody Allen* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), *Modern British Drama on Screen* (2014), and *Law, Culture and Visual Studies* (2014).

**Roy Grundmann** is Associate Professor of Film Studies at Boston University. He is the author of *Andy Warhol's Blow Job* (2003) and the editor of *A Companion to Michael Haneke* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). He is Contributing Editor of *Cineaste* and has published essays in a range of prestigious anthologies and journals, including *GLQ*, *Cineaste*, *Continuum*, *The Velvet Light Trap*, and *Millennium Film Journal*. He has curated retrospectives on Michael Haneke, Andy Warhol, and Matthias Müller.

**Art Simon** is Professor of Film Studies at Montclair State University. He is the author of *Dangerous Knowledge: The JFK Assassination in Art and Film* (2nd edition, 2013). He has curated two film exhibitions for the Solomon Guggenheim Museum in New York City and his work has been published in the edited collection *"Un-American" Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era* (2007) and in the journal *American Jewish History*.

Together they are the editors of the four-volume collection *The Wiley-Blackwell History of American Film* (2012) and *American Film History: Selected Readings, Origins to 1960* (2016), both published by Wiley-Blackwell.

# Acknowledgments

These volumes would not have been possible without the outstanding research and scholarship of our respected cinema and media colleagues whose essays appear on these pages. We thank them, along with other scholars whose advice has been invaluable along the way. We are deeply grateful to Wiley-Blackwell editor Jayne Fagnoli, who was instrumental in helping initiate this project and whose continued support and advice have been crucial. We also thank the highly professional and supportive Wiley-Blackwell editorial team, including Julia Kirk, Mary Hall, Mark Graney, Annie Jackson, Brigitte Lee Messenger, and so many others who have devoted their time and effort to designing these volumes. We also are grateful to Colin Root, Robert Ribera, Virginia Myhaver, and Nicholas Forster of Boston University who assisted in completing the four-volume hardcover edition from which this two-volume paperback edition is drawn. And there are so many others – both colleagues and students – at Rider University, Boston University, and Montclair State University to

whom we owe our thanks. We also acknowledge the support of Rider University summer fellowships and research leaves that were instrumental in helping us complete both the hardcover and paperback editions.

We deeply appreciate the support of our families and friends through the years we've spent on this project, without whom we could not have sustained our efforts. We remain forever grateful to Barbara Berger, Isaac Simon and Tillie Simon; Mark Hennessey; and Ray Lucia for their love, patience, and support.

We especially want to acknowledge Robert Sklar. Bob's contribution to these volumes goes well beyond the two essays that appear here. His mentorship, scholarship, and friendship meant so much to us over the years. It is with great respect and gratitude that we dedicate these volumes to his memory.

The Editors

# Preface

In many ways, this project began in the classroom. When organizing American film history courses, often taught over two semesters, we encountered the recurring problem of how best to select readings for our students. A strong narrative history seemed essential and several of these are available. But because of their scope and synthesis, these texts do not have space for lengthy discussions of important events, film cycles, or artists. We wanted to create a collection of essays that would provide such in-depth discussions. We also wanted original treatments of “bread-and-butter topics” – the rise of the star system, the place of specific genres like the musical and gangster film, the operations of classical-era studios and their executives – as well as less frequently discussed topics. As a means of introducing new areas of inquiry into our courses and the larger field of film scholarship, we especially wanted essays that would cover film production on the margins, such as the avant-garde and documentary, and films made by and on topics associated with underrepresented groups – whether women, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, or gays and lesbians. Although we gladly reprinted several important essays, we mostly asked scholars to contribute new work, extending arguments they had made elsewhere or tackling entirely new areas. The result was *The Wiley-Blackwell History of American Film*, published in 2012, in four-volume hardback and online editions.

The book in front of you is part of a two-volume paperback collection of essays selected from the four-volume hardback/online edition. New material has been added, including expanded introductions and brief overviews of individual essays, designed to guide students by highlighting key concepts and separately listing “additional terms, names, and concepts” of importance. Overviews also reference related essays in the paperback and hardback/online editions,<sup>1</sup> encouraging readers to expand their understanding and further their research. Professors adopting this paperback volume(s) also will have access to pedagogically oriented materials online, including sample syllabi for survey courses in American film history and

syllabi using these volumes to create more focused “special topics” courses.

With the classroom in mind, new and expanded introductions address historical time periods marked by each section division. These introductions, it must be noted however, do not pretend to be all-inclusive treatments of their particular periods nor do they systematically survey every essay within each volume – that task is performed by the overviews accompanying individual essays. Rather, the introductions function as a type of establishing long shot, a perspective on some of the more significant events, individuals, films, and developments in a given era, with collected essays providing closer, more detailed views. We also acknowledge that lines of demarcation from section to section, period to period, should always be understood as permeable, never rigid. As such, we do discuss films in the introductory essays that, from time to time, cross these flexible boundary lines.

As with every such collection, and with narrative accounts of film history, we were forced to make difficult decisions about those topics and essays from the 2012 edition that we would include or omit. Undoubtedly, readers will wonder about the inclusion of some subjects and the absence of others. This is perhaps particularly the case when it comes to individual artists. There are essays here devoted to Griffith, Capra, and Wilder but not to Ford, Hawks, and Hitchcock. All historians are painfully aware of who and what gets left out. Moreover, the essays focusing on individuals certainly favor directors over screenwriters or cinematographers. On the other hand, the critical importance of the star is addressed in several essays, many of which simultaneously take up the issue of genre. Our choices grew from the desire to create volumes that could most usefully be integrated into American film history courses as they typically are taught. Although our expanded introductions aim to fill in gaps, we acknowledge that more than a few gaps do, inevitably, remain.

Two approaches to American film history have guided the best work in the field over the past



30 years. The first is a cultural history approach offering an account that combines attention to the industry and its development with a focus on the political and cultural events central to US history in the late nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. A second approach undertakes a far more intensive study of the film industry's production, distribution, and exhibition strategies, tracing the emergence of a "classical" language and recording the shifting authorial forces within the industry. This has been accompanied by important work inside studio archives and with the professional/personal papers of key artists. In writing a history of American film, both approaches are indispensable.

With the 2012 *Wiley-Blackwell History of American Film* and this two-volume edition, we have sought to add a third, vital component – one that pays closer attention to the films themselves. Because the best narrative American film histories have limited space for elaborate, close readings of the films they reference,<sup>2</sup> we believe there is room in historical studies for attention to the relationship between representational or formal strategies of specific films and their narrative or thematic concerns. At the same time, we recognize that a call to include close reading in historical analysis is not without its problems. The wider historical picture can sometimes get lost in studies too focused on one film or a narrow selection of films. Furthermore, interpretive claims about a film do not lend themselves to the type of verification offered by work that draws significantly on archival sources. Still, we believe that close reading is an essential activity and makes a significant contribution. Although the essays published here adopt a "selected topics" approach, we believe they strike a rewarding balance between close readings that contribute to and those that complement the cultural history and history of industry approaches to American film history.

It is commonplace by now to understand cinema not as simple reflection but rather as a form of mediation that produces a perspective on, but by no means a transparent window onto, the world – a world it also simultaneously helps to construct. The relationship between the cinema and the world it represents travels a nuanced route that first passes through the conventions and pressures of the film industry itself. As Robert Sklar has argued in his seminal text *Movies Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*,

We need to be wary of postulating a direct correspondence between society and cinema or condemning its absence. Film subjects and forms are as likely – more likely – to be determined by the institutional and cultural dynamics of motion picture production than by the most frenetic of social upheavals.<sup>3</sup>

With this in mind, we have found it useful to think in terms of groups or clusters of films, closely examining patterns or cycles that form a cinematic landscape. Such clusters or groupings, whether folk musicals of the 1930s and 1940s or comic Westerns of the 1960s, form a coherent field that past audiences had encountered over a relatively concentrated period of time. Essays built along such lines can serve the needs of scholars, students, and teachers who may have time to see or show only one film in class. The significance of that single film hopefully will be illuminated when placed in dialogue with other films with which it is grouped in any one of our essays.

Not all of the essays published here, however, cover clusters of films. Industry practices, significant moments of experimentation, and various modes of documentary and independent filmmaking also are considered, some as parts of larger cycles and some not. Indeed, the scope of these volumes and the larger 2012 collection permits us to place, side by side, a variety of approaches to American film history. We are pleased to showcase the varied methods employed and the range of material now being examined by film historians. We also are gratified to publish the work of so many people in our field, from senior, well-established scholars to those whose important work has garnered attention over the past several years.

Our hope is that, in moving through each volume in a relatively methodical fashion, students and scholars will discover a rich collage that will open new lines of inquiry and contribute to an ever-expanding knowledge of American film history.

The Editors

## Notes

1. University libraries and individuals can get information about accessing the online edition at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/book/10.1002/9780470671153>



2. We do not mean so much the type of formal analysis of systems offered in a work like David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristen Thompson's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985) with its analysis that theorizes an entire mode of production, but, rather, historical writing that includes interpretive claims about the function of specific techniques — mise-en-scène, camerawork, lighting, editing, etc. — as deployed in a film or set of films.
3. Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*. Revised and updated. New York: Vintage Books (1994), p. 322.

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# Part I

1960–1975

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