MACS 261: Survey of World Cinema I

Fall 2019 – Prof. Derek Long

Description: This second paper is an exercise in doing primary historical research on an early sound film.

Assignment:

1. Choose **one** of the following films and watch it at the Undergrad Library (all are on reserve).

*Applause* (Rouben Mamoulian, Paramount Pictures, 1929)

*Hallelujah*(King Vidor, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1929)

*The Cocoanuts*(Robert Florey and Joseph Santley, Paramount Pictures, 1929)

*The Love Parade* (Ernst Lubitsch, Paramount Pictures, 1929)

*King of Jazz* (John Murray Anderson, Universal Pictures, 1930)

(You are also free to choose another early sound film not on this list if you are interested in it—just come see me about it)

Do some PRIMARY historical research on your film. Primary research means sources that appeared close to (let’s say within five years of) the original release date of the film. **Secondary sources—i.e. recent academic writing, reviews of your film from much later, etc.—do not count.** Primary sources include: reviews contemporaneous with the film’s release, articles in magazines and other print sources, articles in technical journals, interviews in fan magazines, advertising for the film in newspapers, ancillary products, fashion tie-ins, studio pressbooks, etc.

1. Your goal is to collect a minimum of SIX primary sources that are directly related to your film. The source must be directly *about*your chosen film—it cannot simply mention the film in passing.

To find primary sources, start by consulting the Media History Digital Library, Lantern, Proquest, and the AFI catalog. See below for links and tips on collecting your sources.

There are a number of rules about what kinds of sources can make up your minimum of six:

* 1. Only **one** of your sources can be a primary source already listed in your film’s AFI catalog entry
	2. Only **one**of your sources can be a primary source already listed on the film’s Wikipedia page
	3. Your sources must come from at least **three** different publications
	4. No more than **four** of your sources may be ads (and you should only have this many if you are explicitly interested in presenting an argument about advertising - see the point about ads under #4 below).
	5. Modern internet sources, including the film’s Wikipedia, IMDB, or AFI page, do not count toward your six minimum. These sites are fine places to *start* your research and find other sources, however.

Save all the sources you find as PDFs or JPEGs. You will need to attach them to your bibliography (see below).

1. After you have collected your six (or more) sources, write a **1200–1700 word** (about 5–7 page) **research report** in which you do two things:

	1. *Summarize* each of the sources you found in a logical order, explicitly stating what the source is and what kind of historical knowledge it gives us—be it about the film itself, reaction to the film, production/distribution/exhibition history, the film’s marketing, or something else. If the source has an obvious bias or goal in mind (if it is studio advertising, for example), be sure to state that in your summary.
	2. At the end of your report, include *at least one paragraph* about what your research (in aggregate) suggests about the film overall. Consider the following questions in writing this section:

	What kind of larger project (article, dissertation, book) might the material support?
	What kind of historical argument, or historical questions, do your sources seem to support or at least point toward?
	What *additional* kinds of evidence would you need to shore up the argument suggested by the sources you found?

	Include a bibliography at the end of your paper (**this does not count toward your paper’s required length**). See the sample paper for an example format.

	Finally, **include the PDFs or JPEGs of the sources you found.** You can download individual pages directly in Lantern, or right-click them in the BookReader interface and "download image."
2. The goal of this assignment is to get your feet wet finding primary sources and thinking about them—it’s **not** for you to make a full-fledged argument about your film. Concentrate on the sources and what they seem to suggest—it’s perfectly fine to have a speculative argument, as long as you acknowledge what your sources *don’t*say or support, and what kinds of additional sources you would need to actually make a full argument.

Your research report will be assessed based on:

* Whether you fulfilled the guidelines of the assignment (you had at least six sources that follow the designated rules, you wrote at least 1200 words summarizing your sources and critically speculating on a potential argument they might support, you had the required bibliography and provided images of your sources, etc.)
* The extent to which your sources actually support your speculative argument. For example, if your speculative argument is about the sound techniques and strategies used to produce *Applause* and your sources say little or nothing about the film’s sound, you haven’t really fulfilled the spirit of the assignment.
* Your resourcefulness in finding and analyzing the sources found in your research.

A NOTE ABOUT ADS: Probably the simplest way to go about this assignment is to look at your film's advertisements. These are easy to find on Lantern. It's fine if you do this, but know that you cannot simply present a bunch of ads and call it a day. You need to contextualize those ads with other (non-ad) sources that point to a broader argument about how the film was positioned in the cinema marketplace, or what plot/text/star elements were emphasized, or what the ads suggest about the film's production, or some other broader idea than "here's the ad campaign." Hence the 4-ad cutoff.

**WORDS OF ADVICE and STRATEGIES FOR FINDING SOURCES:**

1. Above all else, **read this assignment sheet carefully!** Bring any questions to class.
2. **Get started early.** Do not wait to start this assignment until a week before it is due. Finding sources takes time, and you’ll need to spend some time sorting through them. You will not have a problem finding sources—the trick is in finding the *right* sources.
3. One of the first things you should do is figure out the exact date your film premiered. This will help you narrow down when you are likely to find the most sources. Release dates are slightly more complicated than you might think, because studios often “prereleased” (premiered) films for long runs in New York before their “general release.”

The AFI catalog is a good source for determining both a film’s premiere date (generally, but not always, in New York) and the beginning of its general release: <https://aficatalog.afi.com/>

The AFI catalog is like a supercharged IMDB—it’s generally more reliable and offers more detailed information. It will list a few primary sources for your film—feel free to consult these, as they might lead you down interesting paths—but remember that only one of them can count toward your six.
4. For your sources, be sure to search *around* your film’s premiere and release dates (that is, at least six months before *and* after those dates).
5. When searching, it’s often a good idea to put your film’s title in quotes in the search box (i.e., “the Love Parade”), but be flexible. Also make sure to search for any alternate or working titles for your film, and be creative—remember that newspapers might easily misspell a film’s title.

It will also be worth searching for other terms connected to your film, such as its director, stars, or its studio/distributor. (ex.: the Love Parade AND Paramount) Be hungry here. If you find an interesting path or term that might lead somewhere interesting, follow it!

Some of the online resources you might consult:

**The Media History Digital Library** (MHDL): [www.mediahistoryproject.org](http://www.mediahistoryproject.org/)

A collection of more than two million digitized pages of historical trade magazines and technical journals from Classical Hollywood and World Cinema, including *Variety*, *Motion Picture Herald*, *American Cinematographer*, and more. If you can read a language other than English, see if you can find any material on your film in the international cinema collection!

**Lantern**: <http://lantern.mediahist.org/>

A search engine for the MHDL. Be sure to browse the MHDL rather than just searching it using Lantern—not everything in the MHDL will necessarily be indexed in Lantern, and browsing is a better practice for seeing your sources in their full context (i.e., what kinds of other material are in the issue), helping you to understand their function.

**Proquest**: <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/>

Your tuition dollars pay for this gigantic search index. Hit the “databases” tab at the top for sub-collections of material. The “American Periodicals” and the various “ProQuest Historical Newspapers” collections should be particularly useful.

Note that there were a number of major African-American newspapers during this period, including the *Chicago Defender* and the *Baltimore Afro-American*, as well as publications serving other communities of color. ProQuest also includes numerous sources not in English—absolutely feel free to use them if you can read a non-English language and they include coverage of your film.

You should also feel free to consult secondary sources (more recent books and articles) on the topic—the library website should be helpful here (<https://www.library.illinois.edu/>). Even though your goal is to find primary sources, secondary sources can help point the way to primary sources. I suggest you find a good academic book on your film or its director, and consult its sources for primary coverage of the film.

Furthermore, remember that not everything is available online. While it is possible complete this assignment entirely online, I would strongly encourage you to consult the physical holdings in the library. There are TONS of newspapers not indexed on Proquest at the library. Check out this link—<https://www.library.illinois.edu/hpnl/newspapers/>—to browse the library’s holdings (under “Browse Newspapers by Title”). This will list those newspapers held by the library in either print or microform, if you are feeling adventurous and want to do some actual shoe-leather research that takes you outside your dorm room. Here is a guide to microform holdings at the library:

[http://guides.library.illinois.edu/?b=s](http://guides.library.illinois.edu/?b=s" \o "http://guides.library.illinois.edu/?b=s" \t "_blank)

 Good offline library sources include (but are not limited to):

            Alexander Bakshy’s writings in *The Nation*

*Vanity Fair*

*Time*

*Ladies’ Home Journal*

*Atlantic Monthly*

*The New Yorker*

*Commonweal*

*Science*

*Scientific American*

*Saturday Evening Post*

*Harper’s Weekly*

1. If you do want to get sources from the library, always feel free to ask a librarian for help. That’s what they’re there for!
2. If you are looking for reviews, it helps to know that headlines for reviews might not have the film’s name in them, but something descriptive about the film alongside the reviewer’s name. The main reviewer for the *New York Times* during this period was Mordaunt Hall, and his equivalent at the *Chicago Tribune* was Mae Tinee. The reviewer of your film may not be this person, but it helps to know these names.
3. Finally, please, please stop by my office hours if you are having trouble. Good luck and have fun researching your film!