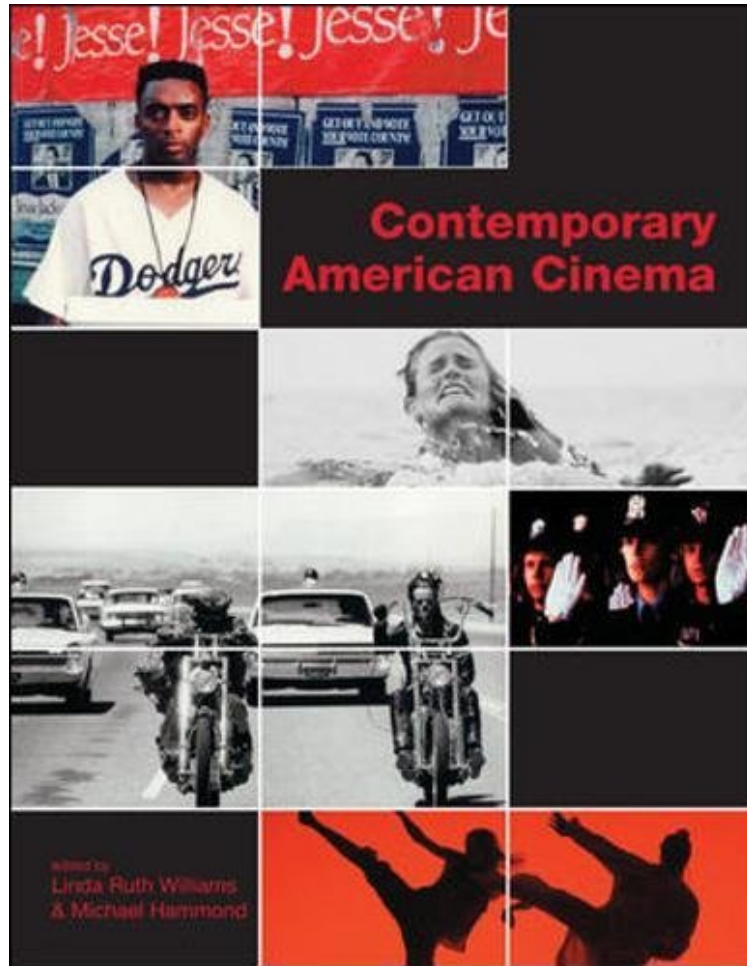


Contemporary American Cinema

Linda Ruth Williams, Michael Hammond
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Linda Ruth Williams, Michael Hammond : Contemporary American Cinema before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Contemporary American Cinema:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy GalaxyGalaxyGreat book on film history!5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. An Outstanding Survey of Contemporary American CinemaBy C.

AndrewsContemporary American Cinema is what it says it is: an overview of post-1960 American cinema that is so thorough and so clear that it will be useful to all film specialists and accessible to virtually all film students. This book is also authoritative, bringing together an all-star lineup of critics and scholars in one fairly compact volume. It was this lineup that convinced me, a reader with avid interest in film and media studies but not a teacher or student per se, to buy the book in the first place. What has made this purchase truly economical is not only the weight of information conveyed by the book but the efficiency with which the book conveys it. Contemporary American Cinema will remind you of what you know even as it tells you something fresh, smart, and disruptive in every new paragraph: and all

without knee-breaking trips to the library. Any review of this book must, then, include a review of its editors and contributors, many of whom are luminaries in film and media studies. (See the list below.) Given that most of these individuals are located in the United Kingdom rather than in the United States, it is worth asking whether it is wise to turn to so many non-American voices when studying American cinema. My short answer: good grief, yes! One of the best aspects of this book is that it provides the sociopolitical contexts that American textbooks often ignore or marginalize. As it happens, American cinema may be even more compelling viewed from the outside--if, that is, there is any true "outside" to American cinema, given that it is so often a global commodity from inception to consumption. Another thing to notice about this group of contributors is its variety. Such diversity affords Contemporary American Cinema its truly outstanding coverage of the field. One of the book's unifying messages, if that is the right word, is the necessity of specialized integration. To understand what American cinema is all about, this book suggests, readers must confront it in as much breadth and depth as possible, while jettisoning value judgments regarding authenticity, aesthetic value, and the like. This is easier said than done, of course, but readers have a better shot of approaching an ideal of specialized integration if they own a book in which the contributors specialize in many forms and many approaches--and if said contributors are committed to summarizing the detail of what they know in the clearest, most communally oriented prose. As a result, this survey dismantles preconceptions rooted in partial visions and in elitist valuations. Contemporary American cinema, it seems, is equally blockbuster spectacle and "underground" spectacle. It is equally the modernist narratives of "the Hollywood Renaissance" (e.g., *Bonnie and Clyde*) and the more traditional narratives of "family entertainment" (e.g., *The Love Bug*). It is simultaneously "blaxploitation," New Queer Cinema, and "smart cinema." It is an evolving array of documentary practices. It is, moreover, the low-budget horror of cult cinema (from *Night of the Living Dead* to *Eraserhead*), the mid-budget horror of neo-noir (from *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* to *Body Heat*), and the high-budget horror of the disaster movie (from *The Poseidon Adventure* to *The Towering Inferno*). It is changing uses of sex-and-gender codes. It is changing technologies and viewer routines. It is a highly unstable collection of rival definitions (of "auteurism," of "independent," of "Hollywood," and so on). It is, moreover, a blizzard of economic figures and an ever-fluctuating set of corporate nameplates. It is all these interlinked data and so many others. And it is all irreducible.

Some notes on the organization of this book. Contemporary American Cinema is divided into four overarching sections that are based on the four decades under examination, with some necessary "bleeding across" these artificial period boundaries. Each of these four sections is then divided into four-to-seven chapters as written by different experts. These chapters provide each writer the most space to delve into the films and filmmakers of each decade--and to explore the critical, cultural, and political contexts that enmesh these films, filmmakers, and decades. Each chapter is, in turn, "interrupted" by short capsule essays devoted to key genres or movements, key films, or key players. At the end of each period section is a set of helpful ancillary materials: box-office figures, award winners, suggestions for reading, and questions for discussion. And at the end of the book as a whole, the editors have included a glossary, a bibliography, a filmography, and an index. What is more, Contemporary American Cinema is amply illustrated with color plates and with black-and-white prints. I found the capsule essays particularly enjoyable. Because of their brevity, I expected these short essays to sacrifice content for ease-of-use. But I found no discernible drop-off in substance relative to the chapters. The capsules break up the chapters by focusing attention on single ideas, objects, or individuals--and they provide some of the book's most astute commentary. Which parts did I find most useful? That's hard to say. Each of the seven chapters on the 1990s had clear strengths, with the pieces by Geoff King ("Spectacle and Narrative in the Contemporary Blockbuster"), Barbara Klinger ("Home Viewing, New Technologies and DVD"), Michael Hammond ("New Black Cinema"), Michele Aaron ("New Queer Cinema"), Yvonne Tasker ("Women in Contemporary US Action Cinema"), and Jeffrey Sconce ("Smart Cinema") proving indispensable. My only regret with these pieces is that I didn't read them years ago. This section also includes fine capsule essays by Hammond, Tasker, Linda Ruth Williams, and Mark Kermode, among others. In the earlier sections, I found the chapters by Michael O'Pray ("American Underground Cinema of the 1960s"), Steve Neale ("Revising the Hollywood Renaissance"), Eithne Quinn and Peter Krmer ("Blaxploitation"), Stephen Prince ("Hollywood in the Age of Reagan"), Jim Hillier ("US Independent Cinema since the 1980s"), Krmer ("Disney and Family Entertainment"), and Williams ("Women in Recent US Cinema") to be excellent. These sections also contain insightful capsule essays. Williams on auteurism and on *Taxi Driver*; Hammond on Richard Pryor; Kermode on Miramax and on *Heaven's Gate*; Helen Hanson on *Psycho*; Kim Newman on Roger Corman and on *Night of the Living Dead*; Christine Cornea on the Hollywood musical: the list is long and diverse. In sum, the editors of this book are to be congratulated on their selection of contributor material and on their creation of a structure that keeps readers moving along a fairly broad span of years. If you are a teacher of contemporary American cinema, you should assign this book, pronto. But even if you are in my position--which is to say in no position, harshly cut off from the strange and beautiful world of desk copies--you should get this book in paperback. It compresses a wealth of important recent scholarship into one readerly whole and thus represents an incredible value.

Contemporary American Cinema. McGraw-Hill Education/Open University Press. 2006. Editors: Linda Ruth Williams and Michael Hammond. Contributors: Michele Aaron, Christine Cornea, Sheldon Hall, Michael Hammond, Helen Hanson, Jim Hillier, Susan Jeffords, Jonathan Kahana, Mark Kermode, Geoff King, Barbara Klinger, Peter Krmer, Steve Neale,

Kim Newman, Michael O'Pray, Carl Plantinga, Stephen Prince, Eithne Quinn, James Russell, Jeffrey Sconce, Mark Shiel, Peter Stanfield, Yvonne Tasker, Linda Ruth Williams, Brian Winston, and Patricia Zimmerman.

The first complete study of mainstream and nontraditional film since 1960 *Indispensable* to film students and general readers interested in this art form, *Contemporary American Cinema* culls together the writings of the world's leading film scholars to provide the first comprehensive introduction to postclassical American film. Heavily illustrated with more than 50 color and black-and-white stills, it takes a close look at all aspects of the genre, including influential movies, directors, producers, and actors. This unique and accessible resource includes two Tables of Contents, allowing readers to research chronologically or thematically. In addition, it includes a glossary of important terms, suggestions for further reading, sample essay questions, and a filmography. Subjects include: Decline of the early studio system Rise of American new-wave cinema Parallel histories of independent and underground cinema Black cinema--from the "blaxploitation" era of the 1970s to the 1990s Full history of the American blockbuster Uses and effects of new film making technologies America's ever-changing audiences Key genres and industry statistics

About the Author Linda Ruth Williams and Michael Hammond are senior lecturers in film at the University of Southampton, United Kingdom.