

Eng/Com 364—Film History to 1940  
Film History Research Assignment  
Due to Moodle Site by 8:00 a.m. on Thursday 9/25

Dr. Marsha Gordon  
Paper--20% of final grade  
4-5 Pages, double-spaced

Until very recently, if you wanted to conduct film history research in the pages of periodicals from the period you would have had to make a trip to an archive such as the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. Doing this kind of research is wonderful, but not very practical for a class of undergraduate film history students living in Raleigh, NC.

The good news is that now many issues from key trade publications are available in full-text, searchable (by key word) form online: <http://mediahistoryproject.org/collections/> The collections digitized here represent many of the American motion picture industry's leading trade magazines from the early part of the twentieth century, holding important information about early films (many of which are no longer extant), filmmaking personnel, and the evolving motion picture industry.

This assignment asks you to be a film historian doing research about the early motion picture industry in the pages of any of the following periodicals digitized at the Media History Project site: 1) *Moving Picture World* (1907-1919), 2) *Motography* (1911-1918), 3) *Motion Picture News* (1914-1930), 4) *The Nickelodeon* (1909-1911), 5) *The Photoplayers Weekly* (1914-1917), 6) *The Photo-Play Journal* (1916-1921). You may choose to limit your research to one periodical, or to selections from any combination of those listed here.

What you are looking for is up to you. If there is a film we've seen or a person/company we've studied or a technology we've discussed or an exhibition practice or a court case that is of interest to you, these are all ways to identify your research aim for this assignment. You should pick what has piqued your curiosity (or browse the pages of one of these issues for inspiration) and then you can research the topic by searching for key words or simply by browsing.

One of the pleasures of doing this kind of research involves discovering things accidentally, sometimes tucked away in advertisements, short columns, reviews, or even captions for photographs. For this reason, you should keep an open mind (and eye) while going through these issues—you never know what you might find!

**The paper:** write 4-5 pages about what you have discovered about your topic and why it matters. You need to have a *thesis statement* of some sort, which makes a case for what you have learned about your research subject. For example, perhaps you find a few articles about how Thomas Edison was not a genius inventor but rather someone who was exploiting other people's inventions for profit. You might argue that doing this kind of primary research in the pages of the magazine facilitates a better understanding of how Edison was perceived in his time, and you would then spend the next few pages quoting from and analyzing how Edison is represented in the trades in a given time window.

The goals of this assignment are to get you to:

- 1) conduct primary research in an early film history periodical to provide you a sense of pertinent issues involving the film industry at this time,
- 2) think about and reflect upon how this kind of research helps you think about some specific aspect of film history,
- 3) develop and use analytical skills to discuss the nature of your find(s).

Please limit your searches to the pre-1920 era, and please cite around three articles/ads in the course of your paper. Although you should reference multiple articles/ads/etc. in your paper, avoid spreading yourself too thinly. You should engage closely and carefully with whatever you chose to focus on, offering *your* ideas about what you discover. In other words—don't just summarize your findings (though you will need to do *some* of this); you also want to *analyze* your discoveries. You are the film historian making sense of these findings, so use the knowledge you have gained in the course (and feel free to quote from or reference any of the reading we've done) to make some assertions about the value of your discovery.

**A Few Additional Details:** Please begin your paper at the top of page one and end somewhere on pages 4-5 with a regular 12-point font, one-inch margins, double-spaced, etc. A smart title always helps! I'm happy to email or to meet with you to discuss your papers and/or theses (please email me if you want to make an appointment).

You need to include a full bibliographic entry at the end of the assignment indicating the date(s) and page number(s) you are working with so that I can look at what you are writing about. For example:

John Doe, "Thomas Edison Does it Again," *Motion Picture World* (January 1911): 12.

Note: When you quote from the pages of the magazine, please use a parenthetical citation after the quote, for example: John Doe begins his article by stating that, "Thomas Edison is a genius" (*MPW* August 1907, p. 4).

You may also embed the text/image you are working with on a separate page that is uploaded as part of your paper (this would, of course, not count in your page count).

Happy hunting!