

proposal for OLLI main campus (SSU) class:

Screwball: Hollywood's Madcap Romantic Comedies:

Screwball comedies were produced by Hollywood studios starting in 1934 with Frank Capra's *IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT* and lasted into the 1940s, but elements of them still endure. The genre is defined by its characters and plotlines: madcap heiresses, zany families, off-and-on marriages. These are comedies of class, rich vs. poor, but with reverse class snobbery; the central couple are opposite numbers; women are on an equal footing with men; there's sharp, witty dialogue with overlapping delivery. Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant traipse around Connecticut after a leopard in *BRINGING UP BABY*. Con-artist extraordinaire Barbara Stanwyck manipulates rich schlub Henry Fonda into marriage in *THE LADY EVE*.

These tales of love masquerading as hostility dominated film comedy and provided the most significant and engaging social commentary of their time. The films reassured Depression audiences that the "filthy rich" were just folks, that money may not buy happiness but does generate interesting social and sexual situations. The homespun populism that Capra injected into the decadent world of the wealthy was refined over the decade into a battle of the sexes that treats sexual courtship through the socioeconomic conflicts of the Depression and World War II. In this course, we'll examine screwball comedies through a 21st century lens. Economically, wealth is concentrated even more narrowly now than in the 1930s and 1940s. While the films we view in class will doubtless give us much laughter, they will also show us a society redefining itself in a time of cultural expansion and change.

outline for course:

week #1: Birth of the Genre:

Romantic Comedy Meets Social Convention:
Frank Capra & the Runaway Bride:
screening: *IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT* (1934)

week #2: Screwball & Class Difference:

screening: *MY MAN GODFREY* (1936)

week #3: The Dizzy Heiress Variation:

screening: *BRINGING UP BABY* (1938)

week #4: The Divorce-Remarriage Variation:

screening: *THE AWFUL TRUTH* (1937) or
THE PHILADELPHIA STORY (1940)

week #5: Undercutting the Genre: Preston Sturges:

screening: *THE LADY EVE* (1941)

week #6: Screwball Winds Down post-WWII but Lives On in Contemporary Films:

screening: *THE WEDDING BANQUET* (1993)