

Recommended videos

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A number of factors account for the current popularity of Titanic and similar films, including problems bound up with a crisis of social and political perspective. But the general unfamiliarity of the moviegoing public with the wealth of extraordinary films that have been made in the past also plays a role.

Hollywood today stands, by and large, for intellectual and moral degradation. Certainly the American film industry has always been driven by profit, not art. Nonetheless, for more than half a century film artists—both US-born and emigrés and refugees from Europe and elsewhere—produced a substantial body of serious work in the Hollywood studios, work that still merits viewing.

The list offered below includes a selection of valuable films available on video. Many of these are unassuming genre works—crime dramas, Westerns, melodramas, horror films. They have not been chosen primarily because of their progressive social views, but because they say or suggest something insightful about an aspect of the human condition.

If social outlook were the sole criterion by which one judged the products of American cinema one would end up with a fairly short list, not necessarily composed of the most provocative or illuminating films. Nor is the claim being made that these are all works of genius; but each does have at least an element, or elements, of artistry.

Pickup on South Street (Samuel Fuller), for example, has an absurd Cold War plot. The film is redeemed, in this writer's view, by the somewhat crude, but anarchic intensity of the direction and performances. It hints at something beneath the complacent surface of American life in the 1950s. To take another example, John Ford's *The Long Gray Line* is a sentimental celebration of a reactionary institution, the US Military Academy at West Point. But it is difficult to forget the extraordinarily moving performance of Maureen O'Hara, in particular.

Note (March 23): In response to a number of readers who have asked why this or that film was left off the list, let me explain what I obviously failed to explain originally. The following is not an exhaustive list of American, much less world cinema. It was intended to contrast the 'classical age' of the American film industry with its present condition. It consists of films made in the US, or by US directors overseas. The works fall primarily into the period 1930 to 1960, with certain obvious exceptions (Griffith, Chaplin and Keaton, figures impossible to exclude, in the silent era; Blake Edwards, Stanley Kubrick and Arthur Penn, all of whose careers began in the 1950s, in the more recent period). Also, of course, the list only includes films that are available, to my knowledge, on video.

Robert Aldrich - *Apache* (1954), *Vera Cruz* (1954), *Kiss Me*

Deadly (1955)

Budd Boetticher - *The Bullfighter and the Lady* (1951), *The Tall T* (1957), *The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond* (1960)

Frank Borzage - *A Farewell to Arms* (1932), *History is Made at Night* (1937), *The Mortal Storm* (1940)

Charles Chaplin - *The Gold Rush* (1925), *City Lights* (1931), *Modern Times* (1936), *The Great Dictator* (1940), *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947), *Limelight* (1952)

Jack Conway - *Red Headed Woman* (1932), *Libeled Lady* (1936)

George Cukor - *Little Women* (1933), *Sylvia Scarlett* (1935), *Camille* (1937), *The Women* (1939), *Adam's Rib* (1949), *Heller in Pink Tights* (1960)

Michael Curtiz - *Cabin in the Cotton* (1932), *Black Fury* (1935), *Kid Galahad* (1937), *Casablanca* (1942), *Mildred Pierce* (1945), *Flamingo Road* (1949)

Andre De Toth - *Pitfall* (1948), *Springfield Rifle* (1952), *The Indian Fighter* (1955)

Allan Dwan - *The Iron Mask* (1929), *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949)

Blake Edwards - *The Pink Panther* (1964), *Shot in the Dark* (1964), *What Did You Do in the War, Daddy?* (1966), *S.O.B.* (1981)

Robert Flaherty - *Nanook of the North* (1922), *Tabu* (1931), *Louisiana Story* (1948)

John Ford - *The Long Voyage Home* (1940), *How Green Was My Valley* (1941), *They Were Expendable* (1945), *My Darling Clementine* (1946), *Three Godfathers* (1949), *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949), *Rio Grande* (1950), *The Quiet Man* (1952), *The Long Gray Line* (1955), *The Searchers* (1956), *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962)

Samuel Fuller - *I Shot Jesse James* (1949), *Pickup on South Street* (1953), *The Crimson Kimono* (1959)

Tay Garnett - *Stand-In* (1937), *Seven Sinners* (1940), *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946)

D.W. Griffith - *Broken Blossoms* (1919), *True Heart Susie* (1919), *Way Down East* (1920), *Orphans of the Storm* (1921)

Byron Haskin - *The Naked Jungle* (1954), *Armored Command* (1961)

Henry Hathaway - *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935), *Kiss of Death* (1947), *Call Northside 777* (1948)

Howard Hawks - *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939), *His Girl Friday* (1940), *To Have and Have Not* (1944), *Red River* (1948), *I Was a Male War Bride* (1949), *The Big Sky* (1952), *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), *Rio Bravo* (1959), *Man's Favorite Sport?* (1964), *El Dorado* (1967)

Alfred Hitchcock - *Saboteur* (1942), *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *Notorious* (1946), *Under Capricorn* (1949), *Stage Fright* (1950), *Strangers on a Train* (1951), *Rear Window* (1954), *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), *Vertigo* (1958), *Psycho* (1960), *The Birds* (1963)

John Huston - *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Across the Pacific* (1942), *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950), *The Red Badge of Courage* (1951), *Moulin Rouge* (1952), *The Dead* (1987)

Garson Kanin - *Bachelor Mother* (1939)

Elia Kazan - *Panic in the Streets* (1950), *On the Waterfront* (1954), *Wild River* (1960)

Buster Keaton - *The Navigator* (1924), *Sherlock Jr.* (1924), *Battling Butler* (1926), *The General* (1927)

Henry King - *In Old Chicago* (1938), *Jesse James* (1939)

Alexander Korda - *Lady Hamilton* (1941)

Zoltan Korda - *Sahara* (1943)

Stanley Kubrick - *Lolita* (1962), *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), *Barry Lyndon* (1975)

Gregory La Cava - *My Man Godfrey* (1936), *Stage Door* (1937), *Unfinished Business* (1941)

Fritz Lang - *Fury* (1936), *You Only Live Once* (1937), *The Woman in the Window* (1944), *Scarlet Street* (1945), *Rancho Notorious* (1952), *The Big Heat* (1953)

Charles Laughton - *The Night of the Hunter* (1955)

Mervyn Le Roy - *Little Caesar* (1930), *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932)

Jerry Lewis - *The Nutty Professor* (1963)

Joseph H. Lewis - *Gun Crazy* (1949), *The Big Combo* (1955)

Ernst Lubitsch - *The Marriage Circle* (1924), *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1925), *The Merry Widow* (1934), *The Shop Around the Corner* (1940), *To Be or Not To Be* (1942), *Heaven Can Wait* (1943)

Alexander Mackendrick - *Sweet Smell of Success* (1957)

Anthony Mann - *T-Men* (1947), *Raw Deal* (1948), *Winchester '73* (1950), *Bend of the River* (1952), *The Naked Spur* (1953), *The Far Country* (1955), *The Man from Laramie* (1955), *Man of the West* (1958)

Leo McCarey - *The Awful Truth* (1937)

Vincente Minnelli - *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944), *The Clock* (1945), *Madame Bovary* (1949), *Father of the Bride* (1950), *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952), *Some Came Running* (1958), *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1962)

F.W. Murnau - *Sunrise* (1927)

Jean Negulesco - *The Mask of Dimitrios* (1944), *Humoresque* (1946), *Johnny Belinda* (1948), *Road House* (1948)

Max Ophuls - *Letter From an Unknown Woman* (1948), *Caught* (1949)

Robert Parrish - *Cry Danger* (1951)

Arthur Penn - *The Lefthanded Gun* (1958), *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *Night Moves* (1975)

Abe Polonsky - *Force of Evil* (1948)

Otto Preminger - *Laura* (1944), *River of No Return* (1954), *Bonjour Tristesse* (1957)

Richard Quine - *Strangers When We Meet* (1960)

Nicholas Ray - *They Live by Night* (1948), *Johnny Guitar* (1954), *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955)

Jean Renoir - *The Southerner* (1945), *Diary of a Chambermaid* (1946)

Arthur Ripley - *Thunder Road* (1958)

Robert Rossen - *Body and Soul* (1947)

Donald Siegel - *Riot in Cell Block 11* (1954), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), *Hell is for Heroes* (1962)

Robert Siodmak - *The Killers* (1946), *Criss Cross* (1948)

Douglas Sirk - *All That Heaven Allows* (1956), *Written on the Wind* (1956), *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* (1958), *Imitation of Life* (1959)

John M. Stahl - *Letter of Introduction* (1938), *Immortal Sergeant* (1943), *Leave Her to Heaven* (1945)

George Stevens - *Alice Adams* (1935), *Woman of the Year* (1942), *The More the Merrier* (1943), *A Place in the Sun* (1951)

Andrew L. Stone - *The Last Voyage* (1960)

Preston Sturges - *Christmas in July* (1940), *The Lady Eve* (1941), *Sullivan's Travels* (1941), *The Palm Beach Story* (1942), *Hail the Conquering Hero* (1944), *The Miracle at Morgan's Creek* (1944)

Frank Tashlin - *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* (1957)

Jacques Tourneur - *Cat People* (1942), *Out of the Past* (1947)

Edgar G. Ulmer - *The Black Cat* (1934), *Bluebeard* (1944), *Detour* (1945)

W.S. Van Dyke - *The Thin Man* (1934), *Marie Antoinette* (1938)

King Vidor - *The Champ* (1931), *The Citadel* (1938), *Duel in the Sun* (1947), *Man Without a Star* (1954), *War and Peace* (1956)

Josef von Sternberg - *The Docks of New York* (1928), *Blue Angel* (1930), *Shanghai Express* (1932), *Blonde Venus* (1932), *The Devil is a Woman* (1935)

Raoul Walsh - *The Roaring Twenties* (1939), *They Drive by Night* (1940), *High Sierra* (1941), *They Died with Their Boots On* (1941), *Desperate Journey* (1942), *Pursued* (1947), *White Heat* (1949), *A Lion Is in the Streets* (1953), *Band of Angels* (1957)

Orson Welles - *Citizen Kane* (1941), *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948), *Macbeth* (1948), *Othello* (1952), *Mr. Arkadin* (1955), *Touch of Evil* (1958), *The Trial* (1962)

James Whale - *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935)

Billy Wilder - *Double Indemnity* (1944), *The Apartment* (1960), *Kiss Me, Stupid* (1964)

William Wyler - *Wuthering Heights* (1939), *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946)

Fred Zinnemann - *The Men* (1950)



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