

Films and Society

Orson Welles

Citizen Kane

Orson Welles, Citizen Kane 1941

- One of the most controversial movies in Hollywood history
- How does Kane become a millionaire?
- How does Charles Foster Kane embody the American Dream?
- What are the limits of power and money?

Orson Welles vs. William Randolph Hearst

- Orson Welles (1915-1985)
- child prodigy, theatre and radio actor
- He is invited to Hollywood and gets a contract of full creative control for a movie
- William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951)
- Son of a self-made millionaire & US senator
- Newspaper magnate
- Failed mayoral, gubernatorial, presidential candidate
- Builder/owner of Hearst Castle in San Simeon



Rosebud

- Film starts with his death and then we are told the whole story of Kane as a newsreel
 - Stock footages and some footages shot for the film
- The rest is the reconstruction of the life of Charles Foster Kane,
 - by a virtually anonymous reporter
 - in search of the meaning of his last word “Rosebud”
 - The fragments are told by various people who knew him

Visual language of Citizen Kane

- Innovative visual effects (cinematography by Gregg Toland)
 - “Deep focus”
 - Light and shadows – *chiaroscuro* (“sculpting with light”)
 - Size shift -- relative size of people and props
 - Innovative camera angles
 - Right bottom corner: ‘the witness position’
 - Special effects
 - Makeup – Welles goes from 25 to 70

Citizen Kane and the American Dream

- Kane's childhood is traded for money
- He rebels against his rich background
- and becomes rich again through this rebellion (his newspapers)
- Power, money and objects do not bring happiness
- Happiness is something more mysterious, intangible
 - For Kane it is linked to his lost childhood (the key to his bond to Suzanne Alexander)

Francis Ford Coppola's Godfather II (1974)

- What do we learn about the immigrant experience from this movie?
- To what extent does the mafia embody basic American values and the American Dream?
- What do Vito and Michael Corleone stand for?

