Ann Douglas Explores How Hollywood and the Cold War Affected Film Noir

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To her surprise, she found herself turning to Los Angeles—a city she finds alien—because “that’s where the media went.” Though Douglas has always included films in her books, twenty-seven years of teaching at Columbia, she had never written on the industry. Initially, she thought her current book would address how the Cold War had affected American culture in general, the effects of which she felt growing up during that time. But when she began searching old films, her thinking took another direction.

“I had the click, that feeling that ‘this is it,’ and knew this was the lens, so to speak, through which I’m going to see this entire period, the way I saw the 1920s through New York and jazz [in my second book] and the way I saw it through women reformers and Protestant clergymen in the first book,” Douglas recalled. “I always need to get a window onto this broader landscape and I realized it was Hollywood. That allowed me to write about L.A. without writing as intimately as I had about New York if only because the movies aren’t mainly consumed in L.A. They’re consumed all over the country and all over the world.”

Douglas also noticed that few books had been written comparing Los Angeles to New York from a perspective of cultural history. “Hollywood is the only major city in the world that is the product of two cities, and was from the beginning,” Douglas said. “It didn’t start just here [in New York] and then move to Hollywood because the West Coast had a better climate here [in New York] and then move to Hollywood because the West Coast had a better climate and was a more reliable place make movies. There’s been a rivalry and collaboration between the two cities; you can look at the two cities; you can look at the structural flaws of the system, by definition it’s less susceptible to individual resolution. Because Americans traditionally love happy endings, Douglas said—the myth that individuals will do the right thing and so everything will work out—noir has produced few mega-hits at the box office. Still, its importance is clear largely because “noir was intertwined with the Cold War and its origins, challenging American cheerleading. It was staffed by more intellectual artists, and admitted left-wingers than any other genre,” Douglas said. “The reason people have questioned its legitimacy as a genre is because it has also infiltrated other genres; there are noir musicals, noir westerns.” Noir offered the country a subversive, not by its direct politics, but by creating a different space for alternative responses.”

—Professor Ann Douglas

New Journalism Prizes to Honor Overseas Reporting

By IBRAHIM CHINO STERN

The Kurt Schork Awards in International Journalism, recognizing exceptional reporting that sheds new light on controversial issues, including conflict, human-rights concerns or cross-border issues in a particular country or region, have been established by the Graduate School of Journalism, the prizes honor Kurt Schork, an American freelance journalist who was killed in a military ambush while on assignment for Reuters on May 24, 2000, in Sierra Leone. Though Schork reported from many of the world’s hot spots—northern Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, East Timor, Kosovo and, finally, Sierra Leone—he was best known for his hard-hitting reports from Bosnia during the siege of Sarajevo. He was also known for his appreciation and respect for the journalists who worked beside him. Entries must be postmarked by June 1, 2002. The first recipients of the prizes will be announced in Aug. 2002 and honored at an awards ceremony in New York in Oct. 2002.

Comparative Literature professor, Ann Douglas, is working on her third book.

In the Sunday New York Times, Christopher Gray described the history and ongoing changes of Low Library. Finished in 1897, Low Memorial Library was “set on a high terrace above the city, facing the administrative volumes, with a central, domed reading room flanked by book stacks and waterworks,” wrote Gray. Mark Burstein, vice president for facilities, said in the spring that when the renovations, the university will try to make some changes to the grand central space, which is one of the sights of New York—and generally open to the public.

Lisa Anderson, dean of the School of International and Public Affairs, and Peter J. Awn, dean of the School of General Studies, were quoted in a New York Times Metro piece that describes Columbia’s partnership with Hostos Community College in the South Bronx. The cooperative effort encourages Hispanic and other minority-group students to pursue university vocations. “We think this [program] will give us a pipeline of talented, well-prepared students,” Anderson said. Awn said, “Many [nontraditional students] do extraordinarily well.”

As the City watches Mayor Michael Bloomberg build and rebuild Lower Manhattan, William B. Eimicke, director of the School of International and Public Affairs, said in a New York Times Metro article, “This could be a signature for him. If you really want to be poetic, this could be him picking up the torch from Rudy. Much of what Bloomberg does through the crisis, and Bloomberg does the revitalization. Comes up with the grand plan.” And that’s his signature.

“Chinese security forces have been very effective in rolling up all organized political dissident movements,” said New Nathan, professor of political science, in a Christian Science Monitor article on religious freedom in China. Nathan further confirmed that, “The recent revelation of how coordinated and widespread has been the crackdown on all kinds of religious groups in the past couple of years certainly offers an opportunity for an administration that believes in freedom of religion to say something.”

“More words have been written about Abraham Lincoln than any historical personage except Jesus Christ,” wrote Eric Foner, DeWitt Clinton professor of history in a New York Times Book Review article on Reconstruction. In Lee Miller’s new book, “Lincoln’s Virtues: An Ethical Biography,” Foner concludes. “Miller’s book is a surprising new contribution to the literature on Lincoln, though not to the last word. ‘Accounts of Lincoln always seem to require some kind of autobiography to set his greatness in sharper relief,’ Foner wrote.