

About the Project

“Humanities after Hollywood” is a collaborative project involving Mark Cooper, a film and media historian, John Marx, a scholar of modernist and contemporary fiction, and any interested parties they happen to encounter. We bridge disciplines to reappraise key arguments about higher education in light of media history. With remarkable consistency, arguments over the future of higher education in general, and the humanities in particular, now seem to entail the problems of how to study digital media and influence their audiences.

Similarly, American colleges and universities reconfigured themselves in the 1910s and 20s by responding to the problem of how to study Hollywood and influence its audiences. Recent scholarly work (*Inventing Film Studies*, edited by Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, monographs by Wasson, Dana Polan, and Peter Decherney) reveals a broad early-twentieth-century debate about mass media, education, and government involving museum administrators, policy wonks, public interest groups, and public intellectuals of all stripes. Our project discovers the extent to which this web of discussions shaped the humanities disciplines and determined their subsequent development. The oft-bemoaned “crisis” of the contemporary humanities reopens a century-old debate about how education and mass media relate to one another and to the governance of American populations. This is not bad news.

“Humanities after Hollywood” is taking shape as a blog, lectures, and a co-authored scholarly book, tentatively entitled “Mass Media U.”