

Cambridge University Press
052138978X - Another Frank Capra
Leland Poague
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

ANOTHER FRANK CAPRA

Cambridge University Press
052138978X - Another Frank Capra
Leland Poague
Frontmatter
[More information](#)



CAMBRIDGE
STUDIES
IN FILM

GENERAL EDITORS

Henry Breitrose, *Stanford University*
William Rothman, *University of Miami*

ADVISORY BOARD

Dudley Andrew, *University of Iowa*
Anthony Smith, *Magdalen College, Oxford*
Colin Young, *National Film School*

RECENT BOOKS IN THE SERIES

Film at the Intersection of High and Mass Culture, by Paul Coates
Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies, by Gregory Black
Inside Soviet Film Satire: Laughter with a Lash, Andrew Horton, editor
Melodrama and Asian Cinema, by Wimal Dissanayake
Russian Critics on the Cinema of Glasnost, Michael Brashinsky & Andrew Horton,
editors

Cambridge University Press
052138978X - Another Frank Capra
Leland Poague
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

ANOTHER FRANK CAPRA

LELAND POAGUE

Iowa State University



Cambridge University Press
 052138978X - Another Frank Capra
 Leland Poague
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

*Once again,
 for Susan*

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521380669

© Cambridge University Press 1994

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1994
 This digitally printed first paperback version 2005

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

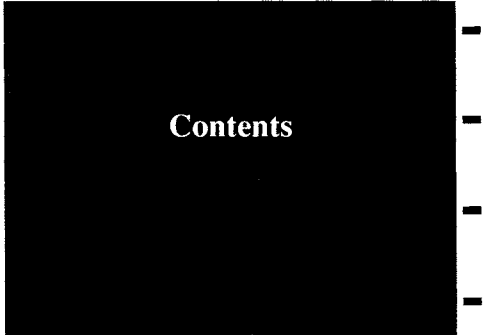
Poague, Leland A., 1948–
 Another Frank Capra / Leland Poague.
 p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in film)
 Includes bibliographical references (p.).
 ISBN 0-521-38066-9 (hardback). – ISBN 0-521-38978-X (paperback)
 1. Capra, Frank, 1897–91 – Criticism and interpretation.
 I. Title. II. Series.
 PN1998.3.C36P63 1994
 791.43'0233'092 – dc20 94-9603
 CIP

ISBN-13 978-0-521-38066-9 hardback
 ISBN-10 0-521-38066-9 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-38978-5 paperback
 ISBN-10 0-521-38978-X paperback

Excerpts from *Lost Horizon* are from the screenplay by Robert Riskin, from the novel by James Hilton. Printed by permission of Columbia Pictures. Copyright © 1937, renewed 1965, Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. All rights reserved.

Excerpts from *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* are from the screenplay by Sidney Buchman, story by Lewis R. Foster. Printed by permission of Columbia Pictures. Copyright © 1939, renewed 1967, Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. All rights reserved.



<i>List of Illustrations</i>	page vi
<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
1. Picturing Capra	1
Meet Frank Capra	2
Critical Concepts	21
<i>You Can't Take It with You</i>	49
2. Melodrama and the Unknown Woman: <i>Forbidden</i>	64
3. Questions of Difference: <i>Mr. Deeds Goes to Town</i>	94
4. Glimpsing the Eternal: <i>Lost Horizon</i>	125
5. "This Is a Man's World": <i>Mr. Smith Goes to Washington</i>	154
6. "To Be or Not to Be": <i>It's a Wonderful Life</i>	186
Postscript: The Catastrophe of Success	223
<i>Notes</i>	245
<i>Selected Bibliography</i>	261
<i>Selected Filmography</i>	275
<i>Index</i>	280



List of Illustrations

1. His picture on the cover: <i>Meet John Doe</i>	page 5
2. Taking credit, a doubled-self	11
3. Screening identities in <i>Meet John Doe</i>	13
4. <i>Mise-en-abîme</i> : Honest Abe Lincoln and Long John Willoughby	16
5. “. . . it isn’t dead, or they wouldn’t be here.”	17
6. Capra’s Pietà	19
7. Shot/reverse-shot in <i>Meet John Doe</i>	37
8. Jump-cut editing in <i>It’s a Wonderful Life</i>	43
9. Crossing the “axis of action” in <i>Ladies of Leisure</i>	45
10. Impromptu gallantries in <i>Forbidden</i> and <i>It’s a Wonderful Life</i>	71
11. The erotic gaze in <i>Forbidden</i>	85
12. The aviary scene in <i>Lost Horizon</i>	133
13. “Please, God, let me live again.”	187
14. “Baring” the cinematic “device” in <i>It’s a Wonderful Life</i>	189
15. “The chance of a lifetime.”	195
16. The “Pottersville” montage	203
17. “I thought sure you’d remember me.”	205
18. Awaiting deliverance: the universe as embryo in <i>It’s a Wonderful Life</i>	219
19. “Signing” the text	221
20. On the political sidelines: Adolph Menjou and Angela Lansbury in <i>State of the Union</i>	237
21. The erotic gaze in <i>State of the Union</i>	239
22. The contest of authorships: Mary Matthews (Katharine Hepburn) vs. Kay Thorndyke (Angela Lansbury) in <i>State of the Union</i>	241



Preface

In many ways Frank Capra is the most familiar of American filmmakers, the most familiarly *American* of the generation of Hollywood directors who got started in the silent era and came of artistic age in the heyday of the 1930s, Hollywood's Golden Age. On the basis of his autobiography, we can say that Capra's love affair with America began even before he emigrated to America from Sicily in May of 1903; the first chapter of *The Name above the Title* opens "It all began with a letter. A letter from America – when I was a big-eyed child of five."¹ Some would say that Capra never ceased to be that big-eyed child, for whom America never ceased to be a source of almost other-worldly hope and fascination; others would claim that Capra's status as a social outsider – as a rough-and-tumble immigrant street tough in turn-of-the-century Los Angeles, as a well-educated (B.S. Throop College) but unemployable chemical engineer bumming around the American Southwest after World War I, as the ace go-it-alone director of a Poverty Row film production company known as Columbia Pictures – gave him an imaginative fulcrum from which to thematically and stylistically lever apart the "pattern of sameness" of the standard Hollywood story.² We will have occasion to ponder these and other pictures of Capra at greater length in the chapters that follow.

"America's Love Affair with Frank Capra" is a different though obviously related story.³ On most accounts *that* story begins with the release of *It Happened One Night* in February of 1934. The film received positive notices, though typically as an unexpectedly deft example of the "bus talkie" cycle that was already in its waning stages. Strikingly, many among the more enthusiastic reviewers neglected to mention Capra by name; others were caught more than slightly off guard by the film's box-office staying power. Otis Ferguson's *New Republic* column of May 9 admits that "it is a little late in the day for mention of *It Happened One Night*" but does so

vii

anyway because “the picture is still floating around the little houses.”⁴ Moreover, even *after* Capra’s “bus picture” captured a fistful of awards – including five major Oscars – William Troy was moved to ponder the gratifyingly grass-roots aspect of *It Happened One Night*’s success:

There had been a whole succession of pictures based on the picaresque aspects of the cross-country bus; neither Claudette Colbert nor Clark Gable was a reigning favorite with the great popular public; and Frank Capra was merely one of several better than average Hollywood directors. In brief, the wholly spontaneous response with which the picture was received could be traced to no novelty or originality in its component elements.

Only “something of a miracle – in the least sentimental sense of that word” – could explain “the particular quality which separates this film from the dozen or more substantially like it.”⁵

After the success of *It Happened One Night*, of course, things changed, not always for the better. Capra’s was “The Name above the Title”; “Capra film” soon became a freestanding generic category – and a tempting critical target. Contemporary reviewers were quick to condemn the political sermonizing of Capra’s immensely successful “populist” trilogy, and hence condemn those very same audiences who had saved *It Happened One Night* from bus-picture obscurity. The “America” of Capra’s industry peers was a little slower in its faultfinding, to judge by the fact that Capra received best directing Oscars for *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* and *You Can’t Take It with You*. However, Capra’s failure to garner major Oscars for *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* or *Meet John Doe* or *It’s a Wonderful Life* is often taken as evidence of a career decline, especially so given the pressure Capra was under, as an independent producer-director, to score big or go broke with the latter two films.

America’s “love affair” with Frank Capra is certainly far from over. Despite its initially disappointing box-office performance, *It’s a Wonderful Life* has become over time such an intimate and intricate part of American culture that both Christmas and Frank Capra are unthinkable without it. This latter fact alone is worth dwelling on because it establishes what I take to be an insurmountable barrier between the experience we can and should have of Capra’s films *now* and any experience that his original audiences might have had. Films that Capra took a lifetime to create – and contemporary viewers a lifetime to experience, and largely in the order of their initial release – are now simultaneously available for concerted viewing thanks (largely) to the preservation efforts of Kit Parker Films and to

the rise of video (cable, VCR) technology. Few members of *It's a Wonderful Life's* original audience were likely to have seen *any* other Capra film very recently save his *Why We Fight* documentaries; their sense of Capra would probably have been far too weak to inform very deeply their viewing of his latest effort. However, it is the rare film student these days whose first viewing of an early Capra film is not already deeply influenced by previous and repeated viewings of *It's a Wonderful Life* on television, an experience obviously unavailable to any member of Capra's audience prior to 1947.

Indeed, academic film study is largely a product of the last thirty years, though that brief span has proven time enough for scholarship to institutionalize a range of viewing strategies undreamt of during Capra's film-making lifetime. Beside me as I write is a long shelf of books devoted in whole or part to Capra's career – many of which are required reading in college seminars on Capra – yet it is a curious fact of that scholarly tradition that it persists in thinking of its task in deeply paradoxical terms, as the story of Capra's purported decline, repeated despite all the contrary evidence just cited, makes clear. Indeed, of the fourteen feature films Capra made between 1934 and 1961, only two – *Broadway Bill* and its remake, *Riding High* – fail to appear on various standard lists of top grossing films for the years in question.⁶ So box office is less an issue than some would make it, even if, as Charles Maland reports, three times as many people saw *Mr. Smith* as saw *State of the Union*.⁷ Rather, what people like Maland seem to have most clearly in mind is less Capra's commercial fate or his artistic capacity than a decline in his status as a cultural weathervane; Capra stopped winning Oscars for his theatrical films after 1938, and his postwar films are far less readily described as at the vanguard edge of cultural change or renewal – at which point the interest of historically minded film scholars is likely to wane.

On some accountings, that is, Capra's importance follows from the “pastness” of his films, from the cultural effects they *had* at the time of their original production and release. Thus Charles Maland can urge that Capra's films “portray an image of ideal American middle-class values” and can use the claim to describe both “the cultural power and significance” of Capra's films between 1932 and 1948 and the subsequent decline of that power:

Though middle-class values, particularly those of individualism and the success ethic, were under siege in the darkest years of the Depression, the country emerged without significant redistribution of wealth and power in part because images like

Preface

x

Capra's portrayals of America helped recreate a faith in the system. After that faith had solidified, and Americans – anxious about the Soviet threat after World War II – began to take a much darker, more realistic, and more materialistic approach to human affairs, it is no surprise that Capra's fortunes as a filmmaker should decline.⁸

Actually, there are two kinds of pastness at work in Maland's approach to Capra's cultural value. One of these I would call "explanatory," or "deterministic." In his study's concluding chapter Maland cites the editors of *Cahiers du cinéma* to the effect that "every film is political, inasmuch as it is determined by the ideology which produces it," from which they (and he) conclude that it is the work of film criticism, by specifying how different filmmakers fit (differently) into the "very clear picture" that is ideology, to "help change the ideology which conditions them."⁹ The goal here is evident and admirable: positive social change. The method, however, is problematically analogical and (as film criticism) self-defeating. The "unknown" factor in this formulation is the film at hand; the known, which both determines and explains the film, is "ideology." Implied is a distant hope that a sure enough grasp of the machinery of culture will allow us to shift the gears and change the product. The more pragmatic consequence of placing "the known" at some point external or anterior to a given film is to empower the critic-as-knower over and against the film and its (putatively) passive viewers/consumers. In a classroom situation this means that a context students are required effectively to take on faith, as a product of scholarly or textbook authority, always subsumes the experience of film viewing. The film-critical catch here is obvious, especially in cases where films are unabashedly taken as symptoms of some larger historical circumstance or dilemma – why bother with the films at all? More specifically or pertinently, why bother with the kind of close textual analysis that keys on features consumerist audiences are unlikely to register much less reflect upon?¹⁰

A second sense of pastness is at work in such a view of film criticism that follows from but also undermines the first. Despite the repeated claim that Capra's cultural influence went on the decline after 1948, Maland frequently shifts into a present tense mode, as if Capra were still very much with us, were nowhere near "past" enough. "When Capra most closely identifies sacred values with the symbols of America," writes Maland, "he is centrally within the American grain – and he tends to inhibit social change."¹¹ The unavoidable implication of the latter phrase, at least for those committed to the

necessity of social progress, is that we need to get *past* Capra, to put his cultural “mass” so far behind us that the ideological force of his gravity can no longer delay or retard our progress. However, the way to this gravityless “utopia” too often involves a mode of historical accounting that is rhetorically explanatory but (as history) self-contradicting.

An exemplary case in point is Nick Browne’s recent analysis of *Meet John Doe*. Despite Browne’s laudable ambition to advance “a fully cogent paradigm of the film/society relationship” as “a condition of interpreting changes in the evolution and function of film forms,” he does so in order to “(re-)construct the historical dimension of Capra’s work in the late thirties,” which requires him “to demonstrate the premises of the audience’s place” in the cultural and textual economy of *Meet John Doe*.¹² Moreover, by audience Browne clearly means “the audience that Capra sought,” “the film’s intended audience,” the audience “inscribed” in and by the “dialogue” sustained between the overt rhetoric of the film and the more covert “socio-historical subtext” that, though read off of the film, finally “links” up with “the historical record.”¹³ Though Browne is explicitly committed to modeling shifts in text-context relations, his reconstruction of context always moves *backward* in time, from the 1941 moment of *Meet John Doe*’s initial theatrical release to the anterior conditions and events that made the release of *Meet John Doe* possible and interpretable.

A happy result of this procedure is to demonstrate, once again, the complexity and contingency of cultural relations and representations. Browne’s picture of *Meet John Doe* shows it to be deeply related to a particular cultural moment, a sense of connectedness that many find grievously lacking in our postmodern metaera; that moment, moreover, is clearly rife with institutional conflicts and oppositions that might have resulted in a different film and that we can take as figuring our own hopes for remaking or redirecting the story of our culture. Barely acknowledged, however, is the implication that *Meet John Doe* can be fully grasped only against the causal context of its genetic circumstances, the latter understood quite exclusively as the social and institutional events leading up to the film’s initial distribution, which comes near to saying that people disinclined to follow Browne into the Warner Bros. corporate archive would be better off to defer to Browne’s authority. Or worse, that we cannot see and think intelligently about a film until its production history is excavated and placed in the public domain. The promise of “explanation” here effectively threatens the endless deferral of experience, keeps most films buried in a past that

will never likely be made present. What gets lost or elided in the process is any sense of subsequent “reconfigurations” of *Meet John Doe*, as if interpretation itself had no history, as if the fifty years between our present and *Meet John Doe*’s past hardly mattered, as if the shift of “exhibition” from cinema palaces to university lecture halls to living-room VCRs has made no appreciable difference. There is considerably more to the notion of context than is known in Browne’s philosophy. No doubt Browne would counter by suggesting that his model of social formations could readily be extended to include subsequent construals of the film – his own, for instance. However, Browne’s apparently contingent decision to limit his consideration of *Meet John Doe*’s reception chiefly to that of its initial theatrical run is certainly compatible with the hope that Capra’s ongoing and explicitly baleful cultural influence can be cut back or eliminated. Moreover, that hope directly contradicts the notion that social context determines (hence explains) cultural function, unless one assumes that in nearly all relevant respects the context in which we understand *Meet John Doe* today is identical to that of the film’s first audience.

The background question at issue here is finally the relation of history to interpretation and to interpretive authority; the kind of answer I give to that question goes a long way toward explaining the shape of the book that follows. What I find most objectionable about the familiar picture of Capra is its retrospective denial of the power of retrospection. That Capra’s films are culturally powerful is usually taken as a given. Too often, however, purportedly explanatory appeals to history are (more or less) disguised attempts to deny that power by substituting historical reconstruction for interpretive analysis and by limiting history to “the past.” An elementary version of this denial is that which seeks to domesticate Capra’s strangeness by reference to his life story; this is clearly a favorite tactic of Capra’s autobiography, in which the story of his rise and fall is told as if it were something out of Horatio Alger or Charles Dickens – or Frank Capra. However, that only repeats the problem; Capra’s life was no less strange than his movies. A related tactic for making Capra less strange is that which seeks (like Browne) to tie Capra and his films to a “determinant” historical moment. This tactic too has its limits. To claim that *Meet John Doe* is significant to us because of the significance it had for audiences or circumstances circa 1941 effectively puts the relevance issue on perpetual hold by begging the question of why that audience and its circumstances are relevant to viewers fifty years later.

Of course, history is hardly avoidable; in the following pages I too will make reference to Capra's autobiography and to social and production history. However, the authority I want to claim in so doing is less a matter of historical accuracy than of rhetorical aptness, a matter of the conviction I can solicit on behalf of the interpretive pertinence of the data I cite and the claims I advance. Put another way, I am chiefly interested in the relevance of Capra *now*. Indeed, the history that best helps us to answer the "relevance now" question is *not* the history of the film's making but that of its subsequent reception through time, a tradition in which the present book will eventually take its place and be historicized in turn.

I want to be as clear as possible about my own interests in these matters. A revised version of my doctoral dissertation on Capra was published in 1975 as *The Cinema of Frank Capra: An Approach to Film Comedy*. My primary motive in writing the present volume has been to work out and put on record a view of Capra that seems (to me, at least) astonishingly different from the Capra I came to know in graduate school. A primary historical concern of the pages that follow is to specify how that change came about, a specification I take on philosophical and ethical grounds to be *internal* to the claim of any genuine film criticism. As will become plain, the chapters that follow are obviously indebted to the efforts of contemporary feminist film scholars; I am now convinced that an important element of Capra's ongoing claim to cultural attention is his status as a protofeminist director. Furthermore, *that* claim is deeply indebted, in turn, to a mode of close textual analysis that has only lately – thanks chiefly to the examples of David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson – become a standard practice among film critics.¹⁴ Crucial here is the extent to which previously neglected textual data can be seen to adhere into patterns that profoundly displace lately accepted understandings. Indeed, an important measure of the value of criticism is exactly its capacity to bring new data and patterns to light in ways that deeply change the views we hold. I hope I have done that here, and accordingly that the Capra encountered by at least some future viewers will lead to very different cultural consequences than those anxiously foreseen by Charles Maland and many others.

In order to render the familiar Capra somewhat less familiar I have organized the present study so as to avoid certain otherwise obligatory topics. I do not discuss *It Happened One Night* at great length, for example, though references to it are frequent and I hope suggestive. Nor have I felt obliged to discuss the whole populist trilogy as an unbreakable set. What I have to

say about *Meet John Doe*, for example, is said largely in the opening segment of Chapter 1, well in advance of more extended discussions of *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Indeed, discussion of the latter two films is interrupted by an extended analysis of *Lost Horizon*, a film generally considered extraneous to Capra's otherwise profoundly American cultural project. Despite the generally chronological progress of Chapters 2–6, Chapter 1 undertakes in various ways to examine the necessarily retrospective aspect of all film criticism, the sense in which every truly interesting reading of a film is a kind of rereading. The first part of Chapter 1 considers *Meet John Doe* as, in some ways, Capra's tendentious and troubled rereading of his own rise to national prominence, a view inspired in part by Capra's depiction of John Doe on the cover of *Time* magazine, a gesture any reader of *The Name above the Title* is likely to register as an explicit gesture of self-inscription in view of Capra's own appearance on *Time*'s cover in August of 1938. The second segment of "Picturing Capra," though intended primarily as an introduction of critical terms lately crucial to my own thinking about Capra, also provides a capsule summary of the main trends in Capra criticism over the last three decades. The last segment of "Picturing Capra" offers a retrospective analysis of *You Can't Take It with You*, a film oddly neglected by most Capra scholars in the populist rush to get from *Mr. Deeds* to *Mr. Smith*. Capra received his last theatrical Oscar for *You Can't Take It with You*; its production prompted *Time*'s decision to feature Capra on the cover. In view of their devotion to history, the general reluctance of contemporary Capra scholars to consider a film that by "cultural weathervane" standards was one of Capra's most successful and significant movies amounts to a form of cultural repression. Its very strangeness prompts returning to it. A similar strangeness, regarding Capra generally, prompts my entire project.



Acknowledgments

The first Capra film I explicitly remember seeing is *Pocketful of Miracles*, watched on a black and white television in the Sunnyvale, California, home of Robert and Leone Sanford while my wife and I were visiting over Christmas break in 1971. Later Susie and I saw *It Happened One Night* in one of William Cadbury's film classes at the University of Oregon, and then *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* in the University of Oregon Film Society series. Soon thereafter I ran into Bill Cadbury at the reserve desk in the University of Oregon library. I told Bill I had chanced upon my dissertation topic. It turned out to be the chance of a lifetime.

So it is no easy thing to write acknowledgments some twenty years later as my second Capra book is going to press. Everyone thanked in *The Cinema of Frank Capra* deserves my thanks yet again; in many cases, thanks are due as much for love and support and encouragement in the years intervening as for kindness shown while I was researching my dissertation. Jon and Carol Sanford, William Cadbury, William Rothman, and Frank Capra are especially in my thoughts as I ponder my indebtedness on these accounts.

I am also deeply grateful to Raymond Carney for writing *American Vision: The Films of Frank Capra* and to Stanley Cavell for writing *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*. My specific debts to both are thoroughly documented in the chapters that follow. I have always taken Capra seriously, which means attending as carefully as possible to the human qualities his films embody and celebrate. From Cavell I learned how shallow my engagements had been, especially on questions of gender; from Carney I learned how important it was always to keep one eye on the surface of the text, to avoid premature immersion in the fable at the expense of cinematic detail. It was only after I had taught Capra under the sustained influence of Carney and Cavell that I realized I had

Acknowledgments

xvi

something more to say, and found adequate terms for saying it. On these and other accounts I owe Ray Carney and Stanley Cavell more than a few words of thanks. I owe them a whole book's worth. Here is the book. (Special thanks are also due to Cambridge University Press for permission to quote at length from Carney's *American Vision* and Cavell's *Disowning Knowledge*, as well to Harvard University Press for allowing extensive quotation from Cavell's *Pursuits of Happiness*.)

A number of my Iowa State University colleagues offered crucial assistance when it came to securing support for my research efforts, among them Donald Benson, Carol Chapelle, and Frank Haggard. Most of this book was written while I was on Faculty Improvement Leave; thanks to Iowa State University for providing the time and the material assistance. (Thanks to Liz Beck of the ISU Honors College for helping to arrange screenings.) Colleagues who gave generously and helpfully of their time to read and comment upon portions of the manuscript included Joseph Kupfer, Dale Ross, Dan Green, Loring Silet, and Katherine Sotol. Many students contributed to the conversation of this book; in thanking Peter Koehn and Laura Lacasa I thank them all. I am profoundly grateful to Alan Lutkus, Richard Ness, and Arlene McMillen (not to mention Kit Parker) for helping me round up viewing prints of many of Capra's more obscure films. Without their efforts I would never have managed.

Several people read the entire manuscript and kept me going when there seemed no place to go; Ray Carney, Dennis and Diana Swanson, Beatrice Rehl, and William Rothman are to be thanked for their support and suggestions. (It was Diana Swanson who, at a crucial moment, suggested I read Jessica Benjamin's *The Bonds of Love*.) My ISU colleague and fellow Oregon graduate Susan Carlson read a late-generation draft with extraordinary care and diligence. Readers familiar with Professor Carlson's *Women and Comedy* may well imagine how intricate our exchanges on questions of gender and genre have been over the years, and how enlivening – at least for me. Nearly every page of *Another Frank Capra* has benefited from Susan Carlson's meet and happy counsel. Her commitment to the process and project of this book – if not always to its more controversial particulars – exemplifies criticism at its collegial and conversational best. I am forever in her debt. Editors Michael Gnat and Ernestine Franco are also to be thanked for their timely and valuable suggestions. Such lacks as remain – of grace, foresight, or cogency – are entirely my own to regret.

Acknowledgments

xvii

Though they did not play a direct role in the process of drafting and revising *Another Frank Capra*, a number of colleagues and friends deserve my thanks for helping to sustain the larger conversation of my career over the last decade, often as readers of manuscripts that, in retrospect, were obviously preparatory to the current effort. On this account I gratefully acknowledge Neil Nakadate, Don Benson, Charie Thralls, Thomas Kent, William McCarthy, Marian Keane, Phil Gentile, Darryl Fox, Mary Beth Haralovich, and Marshall Deutelbaum. Thanks are due to Charles Wolfe and Barry Kroll for bibliographical assistance – and to the infinitely patient and understanding staff of the Interlibrary Loan Department of Iowa State’s Parks Library, especially Kathryn Patton. Thanks to Kathy Parsons of the Parks Library Reference Department are also long overdue. I am grateful to Patricia King Hanson and Alan Gevinson for providing a copy of *Meet Frank Capra: A Catalog of His Work*, which proved immensely helpful in thinking through the complexities of Capra’s filmography.

Frame enlargements from *State of the Union* appear courtesy of Universal Studios, thanks especially to the efforts of Jennifer Sebree. Linda Robertson and Genevieve Pyle helped immensely in producing the illustrations, as did the crew at the Iowa State University Photo Service. Extended passages of dialogue from *Lost Horizon* and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* are reproduced with the permission of Columbia Pictures. Also reproduced by permission are frame enlargements from *Ladies of Leisure*, *Forbidden*, and *Lost Horizon*. Readers puzzled by the general dearth of illustrations are entitled to know that the primary decision regarding the use of frame enlargements in this book belonged (quite literally) to Columbia Pictures.

I dedicated *The Cinema of Frank Capra* to my wife, Susan. Our life together in the years intervening has traced a curiously Capraesque path – from Oregon to upstate New York, where place-name references to Rochester and Elmira took on added resonance, not to mention a moment after the birth of our first child when a younger brother arrived in a Christmas Eve snowstorm to help us celebrate that most familial of holidays, and then to Ames, Iowa, where that same prodigal brother showed up unexpectedly to help us refurbish a somewhat run-down old house whose address, in years gone by, at least, was 109 Sycamore Street. That brother and his wife are now the parents of a newborn. Susan and I are now parenting teenagers. (To Amy and Melissa I owe a father’s abiding gratitude – for their patience, when they did not want to watch *It’s a Wonderful Life* just one more time,

Cambridge University Press
052138978X - Another Frank Capra
Leland Poague
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

xviii

and for their whole-hearted companionship when watching it again was exactly what the moment called for.) For all these miracles I am immensely grateful – and not least for the chance provided by *Another Frank Capra* to rededicate my work to Susan, in token of a lifetime’s admiration and affection. Not all youth is wasted on the wrong people.