

Name: _____

Film and Animation

It's A Wonderful Life (1946), Dir. Frank Capra

Consider the film's opening moments. How does the "conversation in heaven" legitimate the narrative to come? What values does it privilege?

Consider the "life history" of George Bailey. What are his dreams and goals? How do travel and "building something big" signal desires the film will eventually quash?

Focus your analysis on the manner in which the *urban/small town dichotomy* is created by the film. Trace the characters and qualities of Bedford Falls in detail. Follow through the transformation of each personal and social quality as it is perverted in the "unborn sequence" of Pottersville.

The film presents an interesting critique of capitalism in the person of Mr. Potter. In this most radical strain of the picture, a caution about greed and power emerges. Discuss this theme.

Trace the *film techniques* used to create Pottersville as an urban nightmare. How are light, setting, camera, dialog, character, and soundtrack used to craft this result?

What are the *racial dynamics* of this scene? How do they work at a predominantly "unconscious" level? How do the characters in this scene compare with the only person of color found in Bedford Falls, Annie the Bailey's maid? How is the role of race and people of color imagined in the "ideal community" of Bedford Falls? In comparison, what happens in the racialized world of Pottersville? How is Bedford Falls a "white utopia?"

How does the *film noir* section of Capra's picture morph into a psychological drama? How is George Bailey typical of *film noir protagonists*? Describe the turmoil of his character. How does this troubled psyche clash with the harmonious world of ideal America as found in Bedford Falls? How does the sentimental resolution of the film remedy this dangerous subtext?

Discuss the women in Bedford Falls and Pottersville. How does the urban/small town opposition present *gender ideals*? What is the nightmare fate of Mary, Violet Bick, and "Ma" Bailey in the ugly urban world of Pottersville? How does the film reinscribe traditional gender roles?

Some have argued that *It's A Wonderful Life* contains two warring styles of Hollywood film: the domestic romance and the film noir. How are these tensions presented in the film? How are they resolved and in favor of which style? What is the social message of this resolution?

Day 1 Observations/ Notes

Day 2 Observations/ Notes

Day 3 Observations/ Notes