

# 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
  - Size shift
  - 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?

