

MADAME FALBEAUX'S



CINÉMA MYSTIQUE

THE SWEET SMELL OF DITTOS IN THE MORNING

Welcome class. I'm your substitute host, Mr. Good Colonel. This month's history lesson is all about the 1980s and how lovable classroom cut-ups, speaking with a barely comprehensible Californian patois, influenced our society. In other words: Party on, dudes, huh, huh, huh, huuuh.

But, before our study of golden state education begins, we'll be travelling off the California coast to look in on the *Manhunt of Mystery Island*. This month's episode finds ace scientific investigator Lance Reardon (the wussiest serial hero ever) trying to foil Captain Mephisto's quest to corner the market of radiatomic power.

For those of you concerned that this power source is only good for transforming normal people into 18th-century pirates and

has no practical application in the promotion of "green" technologies in today's market place: I'd say you've got a point.

Next stop in our program is to the outdoor classroom where the loquacious rooster, Foghorn Leghorn is about to commence his series on life lessons. *Feather Dusted* has our southern-fried chicken teaching Widow Hen's "egghead" little son the finer points of leisure time.

The Little Rascals (or "Our Gang" as they were known in films) take us to an indoor classroom in *Teacher's Beau*. In this installment, the impending marriage of the

continued on back

This *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* scene demonstrates the "high" in high school before Xerox machines became affordable. The chemicals used to make "ditto" copies gave students quite a buzz (see box on next page).

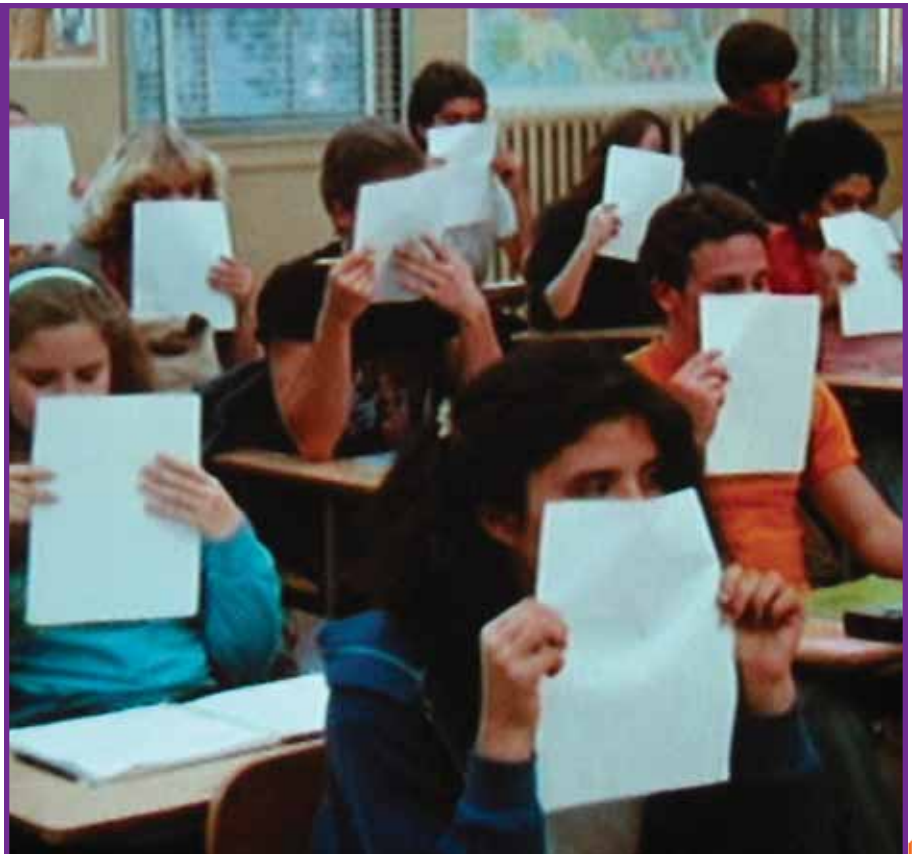
HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

May You Stay Forever Young Edition

JACKIE COOPER (9/15/1922) - Successfully made the transition from child star to adult actor. Director Norman Taurog (directed 9 Elvis films) was Cooper's uncle and while filming a scene with his nephew, threatened to shoot his dog if Jackie didn't emote.

TOMMY BOND (9/16/1926) - Played the schoolyard bully, Butch, nemesis to Carl Switzer's "Alfalfa" in the *Our Gang* comedies. In real life, Switzer and Bond were good friends. Spent his adult years as a behind-the-scenes prop manager.

FRANKIE AVALON (9/18/1939) - RN: Frances Thomas Avallone. The perennial beach boy grew up near the beaches of Philadelphia. Along with Annette Funicello was A.I.P.'s all-purpose clean-cut teenager.



QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"What Jefferson was saying was, Hey! You know, we left this England place 'cause it was bogus; so if we don't get some cool rules ourselves - pronto - we'll just be bogus too!"

— Jeff Spicoli (Sean Penn) condensing the founding of the United States into one long, incoherent sentence in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*.



The OSCAR wasn't the only award Sean Penn was proud to accept. He accepts this surfing award in this fantasy sequence from *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. Righteous, dude!

TEEN SCHOOL FILMS 101

☞ Near the beginning of *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, a teacher passes out a schedule of quizzes. As soon as the paper is received, students put the page up to their noses and deeply inhale. This was a popular school ritual of the '60s, '70s and early '80s as copying was done on spirit duplicators. These duplicators or "ditto" machines used a colored wax as the "ink" and a 50/50 mix of iso-propanol and methanol as a transfer agent. Freshly produced copies gave students a short-term "high."

☞ *Fast Times* has three actors who later won Oscars for Best Actor: Sean Penn (Spicoli), Forest Whitaker (Charles Jefferson), and Nicolas Cage (Brad's Bud).

☞ Not only do the characters of Genghis Khan and Abraham Lincoln appear together in *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*, but also in the *Star Trek: TOS* episode "The Savage Curtain" (1969) and *Clone High* (2002).

gang's teacher, Miss Jones, has the students worried that she might be replaced by a teacher who is, shall we discreetly say, less amenable. Or more "mean," if you will.

This short features a coming and going. It was the final regular appearance for Matthew "Stymie" Beard. (He made a cameo appearance in a later short.) Coming in was Dorothy Dandridge making her screen debut. She can be seen standing behind Stymie, near Pete the Pup, packing up her things to leave with the other kids after Miss Jones introduces the class to her fiancée.

Fast Times at Ridgemont High is

based on screenwriter Cameron Crowe's book where he posed as a high school student to see how things had changed since he was a student. The lead characters in the film's plot are Judge Reinhold and Jennifer Jason Leigh who play brother and sister. Most of the episodes within the film concern Brad's (Reinhold) crummy job and desire to get laid and Stacy's (Leigh) crummy job and desire to get laid.

However, it's first-billed Sean Penn who takes the limited role of stoned surfer teen, Jeff Spicoli, and dominates the film. Penn immersed himself into surfer culture and brought it's attitude and jargon-filled language to the screen. It should be remembered that Frank Zappa's "Valley Girl" song brought "Valspeak" (aka "Dudespeak" for boys) to national attention at the same year (1982) *Fast Times* was released. Both film and song helped fuel a craze for that jargon. And it eventually lead to...

Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure takes Sean Penn's Spicoli character, multiplies it by two, subtracts the drug references, and adds some sanitized juvenile humor to create a model for all Disney films and cable TV shows in the future. Part of the surprising appeal of this film (the studio had little faith in the product and started it out in limited release) is the dopey (I mean blissfully unawares, not drugs) exuberance of the two lead characters. This was a big break for both veteran actors. (Winter was 23 and Reeves 24 at the time of filming.) Comparisons are there for this film and the hit that Reeves had 10 years later with the super-serious *Matrix* trilogy. And you have to give him credit for overcoming the "Ted" character and developing the "Neo" one. Winter wasn't as lucky career-wise, but he works more behind the camera these days, directing commercials as well as features.

Col. Tom

SERIAL

1. **Manhunt of Mystery Island** (1945) - *Chapter 4* - "The Lethal Chamber" Captain Mephisto is none too pleased that Prof. Forrest has detonated the Radiatomic Power Transmitter's control unit. The Cap'n and first mate Brand decide to pull a "sting" operation to make the Prof's daughter, Claire, believe that there's an opportunity to rescue her dad. GAS

CARTOON

2. **Feather Dusted** (1955) - Foghorn Leghorn takes Widow Hen's "egghead" son to the barnyard school to teach him all about recess.

FEATURETTES

3. **Teacher's Beau** (1935) - Spanky, Alfalfa, Scotty, and Buckwheat try to convince their teacher, Miss Jones, not to leave the classroom to get married.

FEATURES

4. **Fast Times at Ridgemont High** (1982) - Sean Penn is not the lead character in this film, but he's certainly the most memorable as he plays a thick-headed California surfer dude in this episodic study of a golden state high school. Other future stars on their way up include Forest Whitaker, Judge Reinhold, Jennifer Jason Leigh, and Nicolas Cage (as Nicolas Coppola). Oooh, the hallways smell of Oscar! (See the Teen School Films 101 box at left.)
5. **Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure** (1989) - Keanu Reeves and Alex Winter take Sean Penn's surfer character and lexicon of "dudespeak" jargon to the next (lower) level when George Carlin sends them on a trip through time. It seems the boys need to complete a school history report and who better to help them than actual historic figures. The Matrix was never like this.