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## Filmmaker John Sayles, Producer Maggie Renzi to Visit IWU

March 4, 2015

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Influential independent filmmaker, screenwriter and author John Sayles and his longtime collaborator Maggie Renzi will visit Illinois Wesleyan University March 25-26 to cap off a weeklong festival of their films. All events are free and open to the public.

Sayles has twice been nominated for Academy Awards for Best Original Screenplay (*Passion Fish* and *Lone Star*). His novel *Union Dues* (1977) was a finalist for a National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. Sayles also received an O. Henry Award for his first published short story, “I-80 Nebraska.”

The film *Amigo*, which was written and directed by Sayles and produced by Renzi, will be screened March 26 at 7 p.m. in the Hansen Student Center. Sayles and Renzi will lead a discussion following the film. *Amigo* (2011) is set in 1900 during the Philippine-American War and stars frequent Sayles’ collaborator Chris Cooper.



John Sayles



*New York Times* film critic A.O. Scott wrote: “*Amigo* is a well-carpentered narrative, fast-moving and empathetic, stepping nimbly from gravity to good humor. It has points to make, but Mr. Sayles frequently allows his ideas about how the world works to be overridden (or undermined) by his curiosity about how people behave...All in all, he is a pretty good history teacher, the kind who knows how to make even difficult lessons entertaining and relevant.”

Sayles will also read from his most recent novel, *A Moment in the Sun*, at 4 p.m. March 25 in The Ames Library’s Beckman Auditorium. A *New York Times* Notable Book of 2011, *A Moment in the Sun* begins in 1897 during the Yukon gold rush and takes the reader into the Spanish-American War, the

Filipino fight for independence, racial injustice and the plight of working people in the U.S. Lucia Silva of NRP’s “Morning Edition” said: “...Sayles has managed to create a work that is both cinematic and literary in its scope and style—a blend so entrancing that you could polish off its 955 pages in one long weekend...Short, powerful chapters follow four unconnected characters to create a mosaic of America as a nascent superpower, underscoring the personal and cultural consequences of its ambitions.”

Sayles and Renzi met in the early 1970s as students at Williams College in Massachusetts. Longtime collaborators and partners, Renzi has produced a number of films directed by Sayles including *Honeydripper* (2007); *Silver City* (2004); *Sunshine State* (2002); *Lone Star* (1996); and *Matewan* (1987).

*Lone Star*, set in a small-town Texas that was rigidly segregated until recently, deals with a sheriff’s investigation into the murder of one of his predecessors. It stars Cooper, Kris Kristofferson, Matthew McConaughey and Elizabeth Peña. *Lone Star* will be screened at IWU at 8 p.m. March 17 at Beckman Auditorium. In a 1997 review, the late Roger Ebert said the film “.....shows how Chicanos, blacks, whites and Indians shared a common history, and how they knew one another and dealt with one another in ways that were off the official map...this film is a wonder.”



Maggie Renzi

Taking as his source material an especially bitter 1920 confrontation between West Virginia coal miners and the company they worked for, Sayles wrote and directed *Matewan*. Starring Cooper and James Earl Jones, *Matewan* will be shown at IWU at 7 p.m. March 18, also in Beckman Auditorium. Writing in the *New York Times*, Vincent Candy said, “....Sayles has made a film with the sweetness and simplicity of an Appalachian ballad.”

The final film in anticipation of the Sayles/Renzi visit is *Casa de los Babys* (2003). The story follows six American women cooped up in a hotel in an unnamed Latin American country who pass the days longing for the phone call that will change their lives forever – each is waiting to adopt her first baby. The film will be screened at 4 p.m. March 19 in Beckman Auditorium. *New York Times* writer Stephen Holden said: “Despite its emotionally loaded

theme, the film is a scrupulously suds-free examination of motherhood as it is viewed in first- and third-world countries. ..[the film] is rooted in Mr. Sayles's profound awareness of the degree to which the personal is political in everyone's lives, and the ways in which money, class and ethnicity shape our points of view."

Sayles' long and eclectic career also has included screenwriting work, from genre classic *The Howling* to *Apollo 13* to *The Quick and the Dead*, to directing three music videos for Bruce Springsteen: *Born in the USA*, *I'm on Fire* and *Glory Days*. The videos were also produced by Renzi.

During their time at IWU, Sayles and Renzi will meet with student groups. Their visit is sponsored by the Center for Human Rights and Social Justice, the Chaplain's Office, the Department of History and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion's 3D series of programming.