

Film, Video & American History
FILM S247/ HIST S187/ AMST S483
Mondays and Wednesdays, 1-5:30pm

2018 Yale University Summer Session B
July 2-August 3

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Office hours: By appointment

Course Description

Since its invention in the 1890s, cinema has been closely linked to American history through its ability to reflect on and shape the course of current events. Films, as forms of mass entertainment, encapsulate the beliefs, values, struggles, and anxieties of both their audiences and creators. This course explores the ways in which films have critically engaged with the various cultural, social, technological, and economic issues that have defined the periods in history during which they were made.

Students will learn to closely analyze a film while being attentive to the cultural implications surrounding its production and reception. The readings, screenings, and assignments will not only train students to learn how to deconstruct the artistic aspects of cinema, but also broaden their understanding of American history. Periods and events to be discussed in class are Civil War Reconstruction, the Progressive Era, the Jazz Age, the Great Depression, the Second World War, Civil Rights, the Cold War, Vietnam, the Reagan era, 9/11, and the 2008 financial crisis.

Attendance

This is an accelerated course in a seminar setting, so attendance is mandatory. Any absences will need to be approved by me in advance. The classroom will be conducive to open discussion of the films and texts that we are analyzing, so you are expected to actively participate in seminar. Make sure that you are prepared for class by reading the assigned texts in advance.

Screenings

Most of the films and short clips on the syllabus will be screened in the classroom, but in some instances the materials will be made available online for individual viewing. For films that are not screened in class, it is essential that you watch them on your own before our next seminar meeting. Those that are screened in class will be discussed in the following meeting. They will also be available for viewing on DVD or Blu-Ray at the Yale Film Study Center (53 Wall Street).

Assignments

Film Response Journal: After watching each film that is screened at the end of class, you are required to write a 3-5 sentence journal entry and post it to the Canvas discussion forum. Your response should not simply evaluate the film, but rather address a particular aspect of a film that you found intriguing, an issue that it raises in relation to its historical context, or pose a question that we can discuss further in class. You are welcome to draw a connection between the film and the readings from that week, but this is not required. Your response should be posted by **midnight** on the night before our next class meeting.

Reception Paper (3-4 pages, double spaced): You will write a short report on one of the films on the syllabus and analyze how it was received by audiences at the time when it was made. Your paper should rely mostly on primary sources from newspapers, magazines, and journals that were published at the time when the film was first released to the public (many of these publications have been digitized and are easily searchable). You should incorporate at least (2) primary sources into your discussion. I will provide students with a tutorial on the various online databases that can be used to find primary sources. *The assignment is due on July 18th at the beginning of class.*

Final Paper (8-10 pages, double spaced): The final paper will require you to conduct a close analysis on a particular film (or set of films) that we screened in the class (excluding the title you discussed for your reception paper) and offer an interpretation of its underlying themes. Your argument should also explain how the film and its reception help us better understand the historical context in which it was made.

Grading

Participation and Attendance: 25%

Film Response Journal: 10%

Reception Paper: 25%

Final Paper: 40%

Papers will be graded according to a letter system (A, A-, B+, etc.). It is important that you submit all of your work on time. Late assignments will be deducted one portion of a letter grade (A to A-, etc.) for each day they are past due.

Academic Integrity

Yale stresses the importance of academic integrity and strictly penalizes those students who cheat or plagiarize. More information on Yale's academic policies and proper means of citing sources can be found at:

<<http://catalog.yale.edu/undergraduate-regulations/policies/definitions-plagiarism-cheating/>>

<<http://ctl.yale.edu/writing/using-sources/principles-citing-sources>>

Readings

Most of the essays and chapters are drawn from the following texts, which can be purchased or rented from the Yale bookstore (or ordered online):

Movies and American Society, 2nd Edition, ed. Steven J. Ross (Wiley-Blackwell, 2014)

Hollywood's America: Understanding History Through Film, 5th Edition, ed. Steven Mintz, Randy W. Roberts, David Welky (Wiley-Blackwell, 2016)

Schedule

Week 1

Monday, July 2: Introduction—Early Cinema and the Rise of Mass Spectacle

Clips: A series of short films, including *Battleship Maine* (1898), *Capture of Trenches at Candaba* (Edison, 1899), *Coney Island at Night* (Porter, 1905), and *A Trip Down Market Street Before the Fire* (1906)

Screening: *The Birth of a Nation* (Griffith, 1915)

Wednesday, July 4: *The Birth of a Nation* and Progressive Era Politics

Read: Ross (Introduction: Why Movies Matter), Mintz (1-14, 42-50, 69-73)

Optional Reading: Marilyn Fabe, "The Beginnings of Film Narrative: D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*," in *Closely Watched Films: An Introduction to the Art of Narrative Film Technique* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014)

Clips: *Traffic in Souls* (Tucker, 1913) and *Children Who Labor* (Miller, 1912)

Screening: *Sunrise* (Murnau, 1927) and *The Crowd* (Vidor, 1928)

Week 2

Monday, July 9: The 1920s and Jazz Age Urban America

Read: Ross (Chapter 2-3)

Clips: *Within Our Gates* (Micheaux, 1920), *Manhatta* (Strand, 1921), and *The Jazz Singer* (Crosland, 1927)

Screening: *Modern Times* (Chaplin, 1936)

Wednesday, July 11: The Great Depression and the Age of Machines

Read: Ross (chapter 5), Mintz (75-94) and Lewis Mumford, "The Intolerable City: Must it Keep on Growing?" in *Harper's* (Feb. 1926)

Clips: *Gold Diggers of 1933* (LeRoy, 1933), *I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (LeRoy, 1932), *The Public Enemy* (Wellman, 1931), and *The Grapes of Wrath* (Ford, 1940)

Screening: *Why We Fight* (Capra, 1942-1945) and *Casablanca* (Curtiz, 1942)

Week 3

Monday, July 16: World War II: Trauma, Patriotism, and the Homefront

Read: Mintz (156-183, 200-206)

Thomas Doherty, "Government Work," in *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

Clips: *Sands of Iwo Jima* (Dwan, 1949), *Triumph of the Will* (Riefenstahl, 1935), *The Great Dictator* (Chaplin, 1940), and *The Best Years of Our Lives* (Wyler, 1946)

Screening: *Dr. Strangelove* (Kubrick, 1964)

Wednesday, July 18: Cold War Anxieties

Reception Papers Due at the Beginning of Class

Read: Ross (chapter 7), Mintz (229-255, 259-269)

Clips: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Siegel, 1956), *Fail Safe* (Lumet, 1964), *The Manchurian Candidate* (Condon, 1959), *Duck and Cover* (Rizzo, 1951), *Primary* (Drew, 1960), and *On the Waterfront* (Kazan, 1954)

Screening: *In the Heat of the Night* (Jewison, 1967)

Week 4

Monday, July 23: The Civil Rights Movement and the "New" Hollywood

Read: Ross (chapter 9), Mintz (270-287, 297-305)

Clips: *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (Van Peebles, 1971), *Easy Rider* (Hopper, 1969), and *Bonnie and Clyde* (Penn, 1976)

Screening: *Apocalypse Now* (Coppola, 1979)

Wednesday, July 25: The Vietnam War and 60s/70s Counterculture

Read: Ross (chapter 10), Mintz (306-323)

Clips: *Hearts and Minds* (Davis, 1974), *The Deer Hunter* (Cimino, 1978), and *Platoon* (Stone, 1986)

Screening: *Thelma & Louise* (Scott, 1991)

Week 5

Monday, July 30: A Crisis of Confidence, Reaganism, and Women's Liberation

Read: Ross (chapter 11) and Mintz (331-348)

Jimmy Carter's "Malaise" Speech

<<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/carter-crisis/>>

Clips: *Koyaanisqatsi* (Reggio, 1982), *Dawn of the Dead* (Romero, 1978), *All the President's Men* (Pakula, 1976), *Wall Street* (Stone, 1987)

Screening: *United 93* (Greengrass, 2006)

Wednesday, August 1: The War on Terror and Crises of 21st Century America

Read: Ross (chapter 12)

Ron Rosenbaum, "Hijacking the Hijacking: The Problem with the United 93 Films" in Slate (April 27, 2006) <<http://www.slate.com/id/2140676/>>

Conor Friedersdorf, "'What the War on Terror Actually Looks Like': Laura Poitras on Citizenfour," in *The Atlantic* (October 2014):

<<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/10/what-the-war-on-terror-actually-looks-like-laura-poitras-on-citizenfour/381749/>>

Clips: *The Hurt Locker* (Bigelow, 2008), *Zero Dark Thirty* (Bigelow, 2012), *Citizenfour* (Poitras, 2014), *Capitalism: A Love Story* (Moore, 2009)

Final Papers are due on August 1 before class.