Course Description

Since its invention in the 1890s, cinema has been closely linked to American history through its ability to reflect on and influence 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. 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 meeting. The films we screen together will be discussed in the following session. 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 it 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 locate primary sources. The assignment is due on July 17th by 12:00pm.

Final Paper (8-10 pages, double spaced): The final paper will require you to a conduct close analysis on a particular film (or set of films) that we screened in the class 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. This assignment is due on July 31st by 12:00pm.

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):


Schedule

**Week 1**

**Monday, July 1: 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), and *Coney Island at Night* (Porter, 1905)

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

**Wednesday, July 3: The Birth of a Nation and Progressive Era Politics**

Read: Ross (Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2) and Mintz (1-14, 42-50, 68-71)

Clips: *Traffic in Souls* (Tucker, 1913), *The Italian* (Barker, 1915), and *Children Who Labor* (Miller, 1912)

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

**Week 2**

**Monday, July 8: The 1920s and Jazz Age Urban America**

Read: Ross (Chapter 3)

Lewis Mumford, “The Intolerable City: Must it Keep on Growing?” in *Harper’s* (Feb. 1926)

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

Screening: *Modern Times* (Chaplin, 1936)

**Wednesday, July 10: The Great Depression and the Age of Machines**

Read: Ross (chapter 5) and Mintz (75-94)

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 15: World War II: Trauma, Patriotism, and the Homefront**

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


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 17: Cold War Anxieties**

**Reception Papers Due at 12:00pm**

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


Screening: *In the Heat of the Night* (Jewison, 1967)
**Week 4**

**Monday, July 22: The Civil Rights Movement and the “New” Hollywood**

Read: Ross (chapter 9) and 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 24: The Vietnam War and 60s/70s Counterculture**

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

Saul Steier, "Make Friends with Horror and Terror: *Apocalypse Now,*" in *Social Text,* No. 3 (Autumn, 1980)

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

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

**Week 5**

**Monday, July 29: A Crisis of Confidence, Reaganism, and Women’s Liberation**

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

Jimmy Carter’s “Malaise” Speech

Clips: *Koyaanisqatsi* (Reggio, 1982), *Dawn of the Dead* (Romero, 1978), and *Wall Street* (Stone, 1987)

Screening: *United 93* (Greengrass, 2006)
Wednesday, July 31: The War on Terror and Crises of 21st Century America

Read: Ross (chapter 12)


Clips: The Hurt Locker (Bigelow, 2008), Citizenfour (Poitras, 2014), Capitalism: A Love Story (Moore, 2009)

Final Papers are due on July 31st before 12:00pm.