Since its inception, cinema has represented, recorded, reimagined, and changed history. Films and videos can be seen as historical documents that allow us to understand the cultural values, beliefs, and anxieties of the moment they were made. They also actively take part in the production of history by engaging consciously with current and past events. This course examines American history of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries through the lens of motion pictures.

In this seminar course, students will learn to closely analyze films and videos in relation to the historical moments in which they were made, paying attention to the relationship between a text’s narrative and style and the cultural context from which it emerged. Through film screenings, scholarly texts, group discussion, and engagement with primary sources, students will gain a deeper understanding of both film analysis and American history. Time periods discussed with include the Progressive Era, the Jazz Age, the Great Depression, World War II, the Civil Rights era, the Vietnam War, and 9/11.

Policies:

Attendance: Because this course is an accelerated seminar, your presence at each meeting is very important. Please contact me in advance if you will be unable to attend a class. Unexcused absences will result in a lower grade.

Screenings: Students are required to attend in-class screenings. Please silence and put away phones (and any other electronics) during screenings. If you want to use a laptop or tablet to take notes during the screening, please sit in the back row and dim your screen as much as possible (and if you think you will be tempted to use your computer for any other non-note-taking activities, please use a pen and paper instead. I will have extras).

If you are unable to attend class, you are required to view the week’s film on your own. DVDs of the films shown in our course will be available at the Film Study Center, which is located in the basement of the Whitney Humanities Center (53 Wall St). Some films are also available through streaming services online.

Participation: The success of this seminar depends on your engaged and generous participation during each session. Please come to class prepared (having seen the week’s film and done the assigned reading) and ready to contribute to the conversation.
Academic Integrity:
Yale has a strict code of academic honesty. Violations of this code will be reported to the administration and will have serious consequences. Please read over the following policies and adhere to them when completing assignments for this class:
http://catalog.yale.edu/undergraduate-regulations/policies/definitions-plagiarism-cheating/

We will be relying upon a variety of primary and secondary sources in our assignments. Using reputable sources and citing them appropriately will be key to succeeding in this course. If you have any questions about what constitutes a reputable source, or how to properly cite sources, please see this guide (https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/writing-using-sources) or speak to me.

Readings:
We will use two main textbooks in this course, which are both available for purchase or rent through the Yale bookstore. They can also be ordered online:


All other readings will be available in PDF form on Canvas.

Assignments:

1. Weekly Screening Responses: Students will be required to submit a short response (3-5 sentences) to each film screened in class, which will help guide our group discussion during the next session. Your response can address any aspect of the film you find important, compelling, confusing, problematic, and so forth. You may pose questions about the film or connect the film to the week’s readings or previous topics addressed in class (though this is not required). Responses should be submitted on Canvas by midnight the evening before the next class session.

2. Reception Assignment (3-4 pages, double-spaced): You will submit a short report on one of the films screened in class, focusing on its reception by audiences and/or critics at the time it was made. You will rely upon several (at least three) primary sources (newspapers, magazines, posters, trade journals, etc.) published at the time the film was first released. You may also use secondary sources, though doing so is not required. I will introduce the class to the use of primary sources related to film, many of which are available through online databases. Due Wednesday 7/15 by the beginning of class.

3. Final Paper (8-10 pages, double-spaced): The final assignment for this class will ask you to look closely at a topic discussed in class, using one of the films we have screened (or two films, including at least one screened in class). A list of general prompts will be distributed early in the semester, but you are encouraged to choose a topic that interests you. Due Wednesday 7/29 by the beginning of class.
Grading:
Participation and Attendance: 15%
Screening Responses: 15%
Reception Assignment: 30%
Final Paper: 40%

Please submit your assignment on the day it is due. Late assignments will result in a reduction of one half-letter grade (A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) for each day they are not turned in.

Schedule:
(Note: Screenings go with the topic of the following class)

**Week 1**
**Monday, June 29th**
**Introduction and Early American Cinema**


**Wednesday, July 1st**
**The Progressive Era: Film as a Social Force**

Screening: *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (FW Murnau, 1927),

**Week 2**
**Monday, July 6th**
**The Jazz Age: Fantasies of Prosperity and Mobility**
Reading: Ross, Chapter 3; Mintz Chapters 2&3

*There will be a brief presentation on using Yale’s libraries, databases, and other resources to find primary sources before today’s screening.*
Screening: *Scarface* (Howard Hawks, 1932)

**Wednesday, July 8th**  
**The Great Depression: Realism and Escapism at the Movies**  
Reading: Mintz, Chapter 5 & 6; Sheri Chinen Biesen, “Reforming Hollywood Gangsters: Crime and Morality from Populism to Patriotism,” (on Canvas)  

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Screening: *Why We Fight: Prelude to War* (Frank Capra, 1942) and *Foreign Correspondent* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940)

**Week 3**  
**Monday, July 13th**  
**World War II: Hollywood and the “Prelude to War”**  
Readings: Mintz, Chapters 10, 11 & 12.  
Clips: *The Great Dictator* (Chaplin, 1940), *Casablanca* (Curtiz, 1942), *Mrs. Miniver* (Wyler, 1942), *To Be or Not to Be* (Lubitsch, 1942), *They Were Expendable* (Ford, 1945), *The Best Years of Our Lives* (Wyler, 1946)

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Screening: *The Hitch-Hiker* (Ida Lupino, 1953) and *Singin’ in the Rain* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952)

**Wednesday, July 15th**  
**The Postwar Era: Anxiety and Optimism**  
*Reception Assignment due at the beginning of class today*  
Readings: Ross, Chapter 8; Mintz, Chapter 15  

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**Week 4**  
**Monday, July 20th**  
**Fear and/or Change: The Cold War and Civil Rights**  
Clips: The Manchurian Candidate (Condon, 1959), Dr. Strangelove (Kubrick, 1964), Fail Safe (Lumet, 1964), Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner (Kramer, 1967), In the Heat of the Night (Jewison, 1967), Sweet Sweetback’s Badasssss Song (Van Peebles, 1971)

Screening: Bonnie and Clyde (Arthur Penn, 1967)

Wednesday, July 22nd
Vietnam, Counterculture Movements, and the “New” Hollywood
Reading: Mintz, Chapter 21 & 22

Screening: The Hurt Locker (Katherine Bigelow, 2008)

Week 5
Monday, July 27th
Nostalgia, Fear, and Aggression from the Reagan Era to Today

Screening: Selma (Ava DuVernay, 2014)

Wednesday, July 29th
Contemporary Hollywood and the Remaking of History
Readings: Mintz, Chapter 32; Melvyn Stokes, “Remembering the 60s: Mississippi Burning and JFK,” in American History Through Hollywood Film (On Canvas)
Clips: Pocahontas (Goldberg and Gabriel, 1995), Mississippi Burning (Parker, 1988), JFK (Stone, 2002), Daughters of the Dust (Dash, 1991), Glory (Zwick, 1989), Hidden Figures (Melfi, 2016), 12 Years a Slave (McQueen, 2013), Saving Private Ryan (Spielberg, 1998), Inglourious Basterds (Tarantino, 2009), Far From Heaven (Haynes, 2002),

*Final Paper due July 29th at the beginning of class