

Film, Video, and American History
Yale Summer Session B
FILM S247/ HIST S187/ AMST S483
Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:00-4:15pm ET

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Office Hours: By appointment

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 Films and videos can be seen as historical documents that allow us to understand the cultural values, beliefs, and anxieties of the moment they were made.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 films and videos.

In this remote seminar, students will learn to analyze fiction and nonfiction moving pictures in the context of American social and cultural history. Emphasis will be placed on using films and videos as historical sources. Topics will include The Great Migration, the Great Depression, World War II, Civil Rights, the Vietnam War, the Reagan era, and contemporary activist movements.

Policies:

Attendance: Because this course is an accelerated seminar, your presence at each meeting is very important. Class will be interactive, so it is not possible to take this course asynchronously. I understand that you may have to miss class for reasons outside of your control, given the remote nature of the course and the ongoing global crisis. Please speak to me (ahead of time, if at all possible) and I will work with you to catch up on anything missed in class. Two or more “unexcused” absences may result in unenrollment from the course, per YSS policy.

Zoom Expectations: Please mute yourself whenever you are not speaking. Having cameras on can help produce a sense of community in our class (especially during group discussions). That being said, I understand that for many reasons this will not always be possible. Please feel free to turn off your camera as needed. I am aware that we are all spending many hours on Zoom, so I will build in breaks away from the screen, both in the form of full breaks away from class and as part of activities that allow us to turn cameras off and focus our attention away from the screen.

To speak, you may either just unmute yourself and speak or use the hand raise function. You can also use the chat function, although I am not always able to respond promptly to the chat while teaching.

Participation: The success of this seminar depends on your engaged and generous participation. Please come to class prepared (having seen the film and done the assigned reading). It is my hope that everyone in the class will feel comfortable contributing to in-class discussions.

However, I know that there are many reasons why speaking during class may be difficult or impossible. There will be many alternative ways to contribute to our conversation, including through the chat box, your Canvas posts, in small group discussions, partner work, and through surveys and jam boards. You can also email me directly or meet with me on Zoom.

Discussions: On the first day of class, we will collectively set expectations for class discussion. It is important that we treat each other with respect, which means both considering the impact our words might have on others and closely listening to and engaging with the ideas raised by others. You are always welcome to contribute to the conversation, but you will never be required to do so if you do not volunteer (in other words, no “cold calling”). I may occasionally ask you to expand upon ideas raised in a chat comment, discussion post, or assignment, but you may always decline to respond.

Screenings: Films must be viewed independently, **before the class for which they are assigned.** Links to all of the assigned films are available on Canvas. Contact me if you have difficulty accessing any of the films.

Readings: All required readings are uploaded to Canvas.

Email: I check my email regularly and will do my best to respond to your email within 24 hours. I may respond more slowly in the evenings and over the weekend.

Prerequisites: There are no prerequisites for this course. You will not be expected to have any background knowledge about film or American history. If anything is brought up in class that you are unfamiliar with or that you want to know more about, please do not hesitate to ask about it.

Accessibility and Accommodations: I want to ensure that this class is accessible for all students. If you have suggestions to make this course more accessible in general, or if you would benefit from specific accommodations, please let me know.

Student Accessibility Services (SAS) may also be a useful resource for students with disabilities. If you believe you would benefit from accommodations that SAS provides (including, but not limited to classroom and testing accommodations, visual materials in alternative formats, and loans of special equipment) visit the website and find contact information at <https://sas.yale.edu/>. Registration with SAS is confidential.

Diversity: Diversity, in terms of gender identity, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, ability, age, and other elements of identity, is celebrated in this class. My goal is to produce a space in which all voices are heard and valued and where no one is made to feel marginalized or unsafe. In this course, our focus will be how American history has been reflected and refracted through film and video. We will look at the histories of (and films made by) people who belong(ed) to marginalized groups. We will also consider how American film often reflected, produced, and perpetuated racist, sexist, homophobic, ableist, classist, and other harmful discourses. We will think about public reactions (especially resistance) to problematic films. Making sure everyone in our group feels included and safe is my top priority as we delve into what might be difficult

discussions this summer. I ask everyone in the class to take this seriously. You are always welcome to share anything that you would like, but you will never be asked to speak for an entire group of people. We will all be respectful of one another and consider how our words might affect others.

Academic Integrity:

Yale's guidelines for academic integrity and plagiarism will be strictly enforced in this course. Violations of this code will have serious consequences, including a failing grade and disciplinary action. 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. We will also go over this in class ahead of your first assignment.

Grading:

Screening Responses: 15%

Blog post: 15%

Reception Assignment: 25%

Final Project: 35%

Participation: 10%

Assignments:

1. **Screening Responses:** Students will be required to submit a short response (3-5 sentences) to each film we watch, 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 demonstrate critical engagement with the films we are viewing. Responses should be posted to the appropriate discussion on Canvas by *9am on the day we will discuss the film*.

2. **Blog Post:** Students will write one in-depth blog post (500-750 words) for our class site on a topic related to one of the periods or films covered over the course of the semester. A list of suggested topics will be provided on the first day of class, or you may choose your own (in consultation with instructor). These posts will be made available to the class and will provide extra context for the topics that we cover in the course. Your post will be due two days after we cover the topic/ film in class (so, due on Wednesday for a Monday film or on Friday for a Wednesday film). You will sign up for a topic (and deadline) after the first class.

3. **Reception Assignment:** In groups of three, students will explore the reception of a film by audiences and/or critics at the time of its release. Using Yale's online resources, which we will go over in class, students are expected to find three primary sources per group (we will devote class time to group work). Each group will write a 2-3 page (double-spaced) reflection on what these sources tell us about the historical period during which the film was released. Primary sources should be submitted alongside your reflection. Examples will be given in class. A full assignment and rubric can be found on Canvas. *Due Sunday, July 25th, by midnight.*
4. **Final Project:** Students have the option to produce either a traditional paper or a creative final project that closely analyzes one of the films on our syllabus in the historical context of period in which it was made. Creative projects could include, but are not limited to, a video essay, a film pitch, a research dossier, a museum exhibit, or a film series program. Projects can be done individually or in pairs. A full assignment and a grading rubric can be found on Canvas. *Due Friday, August 13th by 5pm.*

Class Format:

(This is an approximate schedule and will change slightly session-to-session based on what we have to cover. I value your time and am mindful of “Zoom fatigue,” so we will never go past 4:15pm EDT and I will build in two long breaks each session)

1:00pm EDT: Log-in to Zoom. Check-in briefly, reminders about upcoming work, time to ask questions about assignments, technical issues, etc.

1:10-2:10pm EDT: Introduction to the day’s historical period and main theme, comments about the film we screened.

2:10pm-2:25 EDT: BREAK

2:25-3:15 EDT: Small-group discussion

3:15-3:30 BREAK

3:30- 4:15: Flex time: This time will be used differently each session. In the beginning of the semester, we will use it to go over library resources and to meet with small groups to work on the reception assignment. In the last two weeks, we will use it to discuss the final projects, for peer-editing, and to give you independent time to work on your assignments.

Weekly Schedule:

Monday, July 12th: Introduction to Film and/as History

No Reading or Outside Screening for today

Films and Film Clips (screened in class): *Blacksmith Scene* (William KL Dickson, 1893), *Carmencita* (William KL Dickson, 1894), *Boxing Cats* (William KL Dickson and William Heise, 1895), *Anabelle Serpentine Dance* (William KL Dickson and William Heise, 1895), *The May Irwin Kiss* (William Heise, 1896), *Something Good* (William Selig, 1898), *The Great Train Robbery* (Edwin S. Porter, 1903), *What Happened in the Tunnel* (Edwin S. Porter, 1903), *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* (James Stuart Blackton, 1906), *The Love Microbes* (Wallace McCutcheon, 1907), *Laughing Gas* (Edwin S. Porter, 1907).

Wednesday, July 14: Film as a Social Force in the Progressive Era

Film: *Shoes* (Lois Weber, 1916)

Reading: Shelley Stamp, "Lois Weber, Progressive Cinema, and the Fate of the 'Work-a-Day Girls' in *Shoes*," *Camera Obscura* 19.2 (2004), 140-169.

Film Clips (screened in class): *The Lonely Villa* (D.W. Griffith, 1909), *Making an American Citizen* (Alice Guy-Blaché, 1912), *Suspense* (Lois Weber and Phillips Smalley, 1913), *A Traffic in Souls* (George Loane Tucker, 1913), *The Tramp* (Charlie Chaplin, 1915), *Where Are My Children?* (Lois Weber and Phillips Smalley, 1916)

Monday, July 19th: Cinematic Narrative, Space, and the Great Migration

Film: *Within Our Gates* (Oscar Micheaux, 1920)

Reading: Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, "'We Were Never Immigrants:' Oscar Micheaux and the Reconstruction of Black American Identity," in *Migrating to the Movies* (University of California Press, 2005): read from page 227, starting at "A Circuitous Journey to Citizenship" to the end, page 244.

Anna Siomopoulos, "The Birth of a Black Cinema: Race, Reception, and Oscar Micheaux's 'Within Our Gates.'" *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 6.2 (Oct. 2006), 111-118.

Film Clips (screened in class): *The Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915), *The Symbol of the Unconquered* (Oscar Micheaux, 1920), *Body and Soul* (Oscar Micheaux, 1925), *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927)

Wednesday, July 21: Morality, Austerity, and the Great Depression

Film: *Baby Face* (Alfred E. Green, 1933)

Reading: Lea Jacobs, "Glamour and Gold Diggers," in *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942* (University of California Press, 1997), pages 52-84 (focus especially on pages 69-84).

Film Clips (screened in class): *Gold Diggers of 1933* (Mervyn LeRoy and Busby Berkeley, 1933), *Gold Diggers of 1935* (Busby Berkeley, 1935), *Blonde Venus* (Josef von Sternberg, 1932), *The Public Enemy* (William Wellman, 1931), *G-Men* (William Keighley, 1935), *Minnie the Moocher* (Dave Fleischer, 1932), *The New Deal Show* (Dave Fleischer, 1937)

Monday, July 26th: Hollywood Goes to War

Film: *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942)

Reading: Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War* (Columbia University Press, 1993), Chapters 1&4.

Film Clips (screened in class): *Triumph of the Will* (Leni Riefenstahl, 1935), *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (Anatole Litvak, 1939), *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939), *The Great Dictator* (Charlie Chaplin, 1940), *Mrs. Miniver* (William Wyler, 1942), *Foreign Correspondent* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940), *You Natzy Spy* (Jules White, 1940), *Why We Fight: Prelude to War* (Frank Capra, 1942) *Private Snafu vs. Malaria Mike* (Chuck Jones, 1944)

Wednesday, July 28th: Documenting Injustice, Imagining Equality

Films: *The World the Flesh and the Devil* (Ranald MacDougall, 1959) and *Integration Report #1* (Madeline Anderson, 1960)

Reading: Stéphanie Larrieux, "The World, the Flesh, and the Devil: The Politics of Race, Gender, and Power in Post-Apocalyptic Hollywood Cinema," Michael T. Martin, "Madeline Anderson in Conversation: Pioneering an African American Documentary Tradition," *Black Camera* 5.1 (Fall 2013), 72-93.

Film Clips (screened in class): *Pinky* (Kazan, 1949), *No Way Out* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950), *Nothing but a Man* (Michael Roemer, 1964), *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Stanley Kramer, 1967), *In the Heat of the Night* (Norman Jewison, 1967), *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One* (William Greaves, 1968), *Killer of Sheep* (Charles Burnett, 1978).

Monday, August 2nd: Cult, Camp, and Exploitation

Film: *Dawn of the Dead* (George Romero, 1978)

Reading: Robin Wood, "Normality and Monsters" in *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan...And Beyond*

Peter Biskind, "Introduction," *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*.

Film Clips (screened in class): *Scorpio Rising* (Anger, 1963), *Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* (Meyer, 1965), *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero, 1968), *Easy Rider* (Hopper, 1969), *Gimme Shelter* (The Maysles, 1970), *El Topo* (Jodorowsky, 1970), *Dirty Harry* (Siegel, 1971), *The Omega Man* (Sagal, 1971), *Pink Flamingos* (Waters, 1972), *Blacula* (Crain, 1972), *Deathdream* (Clark, 1974), *Jaws* (Spielberg, 1975), *Network* (Lumet, 1976), *Apocalypse Now* (Coppola, 1979)

Wednesday, August 4th: Power, Class, and Voice in 1980s and 90s Documentary

Film: *American Dream* (Barbara Kopple, 1990)

Reading: Miles Orvell, “Documentary Film and the Power of Interrogation: ‘American Dream’ & ‘Roger and Me,’” *Film Quarterly* 48.2 (Winter 1994-5), 10-18.

Film Clips (screened in class): *Harlan County, USA* (Barbara Kopple, 1976), *Roger and Me* (Michael Moore, 1989) *Wall Street* (Oliver Stone, 1987), *The Thin Blue Line* (Errol Morris, 1988), *Do the Right Thing* (Spike Lee, 1989)

Monday, August 9th: 9/11 and the Great Recession

Film: *Zero Dark Thirty* (Katherine Bigelow, 2012)

Reading: Caetlin Benson-Allott, “Undoing Violence: Politics, Genre, and Duration in Kathryn Bigelow’s Cinema,” *Film Quarterly* 64.2 (Winter 2010), 33-43.

Film Clips: *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Michael Moore, 2004), *United 93* (Paul Greengrass, 2006), *The Hurt Locker* (Katherine Bigelow, 2008), *Too Big to Fail* (Curtis Hanson, 2011), *The Big Short* (Adam McKay, 2015), *Nomadland* (Chloé Zhao, 2020)

Wednesday, August 11th: Screening the Present

Film: No assigned viewing for today- we will screen clips in class, a list of which we will generate collectively.

Reading: TBA- We will read short essays and pieces of criticism about recent films, television, and cultural phenomena.

Clips: we will generate a list of videos to watch this week as a group. Clips may include excerpts from *Tiger King* (Eric Goode, Rebecca Chaiklin, 2020), *Love in the Time of Corona* (Joanna Johnson, 2020), *Promising Young Woman* (Emerald Fennell, 2020), *Wonder Woman 1984* (Patty Jenkins, 2020), *Mank* (David Fincher, 2020), *Locked Down* (Doug Liman, 2021)