FILM S247/AMST S483/HIST S187: Film, Video, & American History
Summer 2023

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Office hours TBD

Mondays & Wednesdays, 1:00-4:15pm
Mondays screenings: 7pm-10pm
Room TBD

Course Description
This course will take a hard, imaginative, speculative, and poetic look at U.S. history of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries through the lens of film and video. In a time where we are awash with moving images in our environments on a daily, if not minute-by-minute basis, this course will be a space to meditate upon the sights, sounds, and texts around us. We will interrogate how we have been trained to read a moving image. We will place the image historically, aesthetically, politically. We will learn how to see history as a series of discontinuities, yet with unconscious repetitions, thematic overlaps, and eternal returns — not simply as a single thread of greatest hits and milestones moments.

Topics will include: Empire, Language, Love (viz. the Screwball Comedy), Class, War, Politics, Communism, Ideology, Youth, Revolt, Postmodernity, the Network, and Memory. Periods and events covered include: The Black Freedom Struggle, The Jazz Age, the Great Depression, World War II, the Long 1960s, the U.S. failure in Vietnam, the Dot Com Boom and Silicon Valley, and contemporary activist/revolutionary movements. We will not consider the U.S. in isolation: films and discussions will inevitably take us to Latin America, to France, to Senegal, to Iran, and to the Soviet Union.
We will have mandatory (oh yeah!!!) Monday night screenings as well; these will include moving-image work by Julie Dash, Charlie Chaplin, Frank Tashlin, Douglas Sirk, Barbara Loden, Jane Schoenbrun, Anthony Banua-Simon, Kevin Jerome Everson, Don Hertzfeldt, Vincente Minnelli, Chuck Jones, Michelangelo Antonioni, Abbas Kiarostami, Frédéric Da, Spike Lee, Walt Disney, Warren Beatty, Brian De Palma, Richard Lester, and Eric André, among a host of others.

This course seeks to expand students' knowledge of the history of film, of U.S. culture, and the society in which they exist. 1 Credit. Session B: July 3 – August 4.

Expected Workload

For each class, you can expect about four hours of preparation time (reading, watching the assigned screenings, getting notes and questions together, and attending to course business). Plan to allocate an additional two to three hours per week to work on assignments before deadlines. Our time together in class will be broken into lecture, small discussion groups, and skill workshops or group work.

Required Texts & Instructional Tools

There will be only one texts required for purchase: THE POLITICS OF HISTORY by Howard Zinn. We will read it throughout the course of the seminar. You can purchase it at the Yale bookstoir.

All other readings will be posted to Canvas and must be completed by the date they are listed on the syllabus.

There is a small handful of films you may wish to rent via YouTube or Amazon for convenience when you’re writing your papers (BUT NOT WHEN YOU’RE WATCHING THEM FOR THE FIRST TIME! See note below on MANDATORY screenings 😊).

We will use Canvas and Google Drive for storing class materials, uploading assignments, and posting grades. We will use Zoom for office hours and, as needed, for class meetings.

Assignment Breakdown

Participation & Class Work 15%

This area of assessment will be ongoing and is reflective of active engagement in course materials and your personal growth. You will receive informal feedback on your performance in this area from myself or Alana via email in week 3.

Primary Source Group Project 25%

In groups of three, students will be assigned a film to watch and research together. This will not be one of the films on the syllabus. They will explore its reception by audiences and/or critics at the time of its release. Using Yale’s online resources, students are
expected to find at least three primary sources per group (we will devote class time to group work). Each individual will annotate a source and write a one-page analysis that discusses what it tells us about the film’s historical context. Groups will then present their findings to the class.

- **Annotated Dossier**: 10% - Due 12pm, July 17 (an hour before Session 5)
- **Film Review**: 15% - To be presented July 17 in class

**Film review 25%**

Due July 12.

Each student will write a film review of one of the following films we will have seen for the class by July 12: *Mr. Freedom, Ruggles of Red Gap, Imitation of Life, His Girl Friday, or Illusions*. If you want to challenge yourself, there will be a separate list of 10 films that I will give you (and that I can about 99.99% guarantee you’ll love/be obsessed with), but you can choose one of the films we have seen. Pretend you are a film critic at the time that the film has just come out. You must make a solid case/argument for why I, the reader who knows nothing of this film, should care about this film. You must evoke the film using language to a reader that has not seen it. You must make an argument for what the film is doing. **This is not an exercise in judgment; I don't care if you like it or dislike it (though this position should come out in your review regardless), what matters is what the film is doing or not.** We will practice what great film criticism looks like — we can look at examples from my own work, or from the work of others like Andrew Sarris, Manny Farber, Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, A.S. Hamrah, Pauline Kael, Molly Haskell, and others. Again: do NOT use the words “I liked x” or “I hated y.” That’s bad criticism. And boring. I couldn’t care less. What matters is how YOU see the film.

**Final Research Paper 35%**

**Research proposal due Sunday, July 16 at 9pm: 5%.**

Identify a moving-image text or phenomenon (preferably film or video-related, but we can work with episodes of television, etc.) you would like to research for the purposes of historical analysis. In no more than a small 1 double-spaced page, describe this text/experience and offer reasoning for why it warrants our consideration. Answer the following questions with a proposal: (1) What makes this media text interesting? (2) What does this text suggest about the context in which it was produced? (3) What does it tell us about the people who made it?

**Completed First Draft: 5%: Due Sunday, July 23 at 9pm on Canvas**

A first draft of the paper, totaling 1500-2000 words, will be graded on a credit/no credit basis and will receive thorough feedback for the student to consider and incorporate in the project’s final submission.
Feedback Meetings: 5%: Friday, Saturday, Sunday in the day: July 28, 29, 30

Each student will meet with Carlos and Alana for a one-on-one meeting to discuss draft feedback and determine priorities for revisions ahead of final submission. This meeting should last about 10 minutes.

Final Submission: 20%: Due August 3 (The day after our final session) at 9pm on Canvas

The final research paper should be 1750-2250 words. It can and should make use of the information provided in previous project deliverables, but, ultimately, must offer a synthesis of research materials and provide further insight into the chosen media text/experience. Successful papers will have both a strong set of clearly defined research questions and a unique thesis statement. It is also highly encouraged to make use of relevant assigned readings from across the course. A full assignment description and rubric can be found on Canvas.

Assignment Guidelines

Submissions must be proofread for grammatical and spelling errors—I suggest you both get a work partner and read your own work out loud to yourself.

- Submissions must be typed, double-spaced in 12-point serif font (Times, Georgia, Garamond, Helvetica, and Alegreya are all fine) with one-inch margins and page numbers.
- Submissions must meet the minimum word/page requirement and not exceed the limit by more than 25%.
- Submissions must be cleverly titled (a title page is not necessary).
- All papers must have a Works Cited page in either MLA or Chicago format. Refer to the OWL Purdue Writing Lab for guidance.

Grade Scale

A = Excellent (95-100%); A- (90-94.9%);
B+ (87-89.9%); B = Good (83-86.9%); B- (80-82.9%);
C+ (77-79.9%); C = Adequate (73-76.9%); C- (70-72.9%);
D+ (67-69.9%); D = Unsatisfactory (63-66.9%); D- (60-62.9%);
F = Failed (I don’t expect this at all, but ya never know….)

Late Submissions

Strive to maintain an open line of communication. The sooner I know you are having difficulties meeting deadlines, the easier it will be to make sure late submissions do not
affect your grade. Send me an email so we can keep a written record of extension requests. Late submissions without a pre-approved extension will be docked 1/3 of a letter grade for each day after the deadline.

**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 seminar fatigue, so we will never go past 4:15p and there will be two breaks per session.

1:00p Reminders, announcements, questions about assignments  
1:10-2pm Lecture  
2pm - 2.10pm BREAK  
2.10 – 3.10pm Discussion groups  
3.10-3.20 BREAK  
3.30-4.15 work on whatever you have to do in class: group projects, research for group projects, readings, etc. We can also do freeform discussion of what we talk about.

**A Word on Screenings**

Screenings are mandatory.

Yes, mandatory.

Please. You must attend each one of the five viewing sessions. Our primary sources for the next five weeks will be the films themselves. Screening room TBD, but I’m hoping we can all congregate.

Do not watch them at home (unless, obviously, you’re writing about them for a paper or presentation). The grand majority of the moving-image texts being shown, with the exception of the TV episodes of the Eric Andre show and other late 2010s and 2020s surprises, were conceived to be seen in a movie theater, with little to no distraction of smaller screens.

That means no cell phones or technology out during screenings. I’ll sit in the back for each screening, which I will attend alongside with you, and I will have eyes like a hawk on the people who are on their phones.

I’m not a harsh person at all, so allow me this one crucial mandate 😊

I have only your best interests in mind. And it will allow you to enjoy the movies more. 😊

If you’re not going to come, let me know well in advance. And unless for special needs or health purposes, I expect everyone there, always.
Despite the fact that the majority of films we watch will be in English, I will still turn on subtitles. This is both for accessibility purposes for the deaf and hard-of-hearing and because I like to read while watching. Subtitles help solidify the words that are being uttered, establishing a more immediate relation between the spoken and the written. It will help you remember what is being said.

Links to most of the assigned films are available on Canvas. You will need to use a Yale login or use VPN to access most of our films. Find more information about the Yale VPN here. In some rare cases, you may have to use a trial subscription or rent a film for convenience (rental costs do not exceed $20 if you choose this route). All assigned screenings are held on course reserve in the film library and available to you at no additional cost. Contact me if you have difficulty accessing any of the films.

**Grading Philosophy**

When it comes to grading coursework, I value a student’s individual improvement most. As such, I hope you consider formal evaluation as preparation for the next assignment instead of a number that is up for negotiation or a firm indicator of what you bring to our experience as a group. Alana and I are far more vested in your own intellectual path. If you have any questions or concerns about how your work has been assessed, please wait 24 hours after receiving the grade before contacting me about it. If you would like to receive feedback before submission, I can review outlines and thesis statements in office hours or by appointment.

**Difficult Conversations with Developing Vocabularies**

*VERY IMPORTANT*

We are all coming into this class with different experiences, identities, and privileges. Since we will be spending our time discussing film and media, you can expect that we will be working through challenging depictions and concepts related to categories of social difference.

We are going to have many difficult conversations where language might, and should, and will, fail us. We should not expect each other to “know everything” or even to be at all secure in our knowledge, because this is a false and impossible ideal. This is a safe space to be wrong, and to have an open, honest, and understanding relation with our fellow students. We’re all teaching each other, and you all are teaching me. I expect we will always act as teachers for each other and I will consistently push us to consider the language we use to express our ideas while performing such labor.
Should you encounter a moment when you feel you would like to redress the way an idea has been expressed, please do so with the respect you would like for yourself. Meanwhile, I am open to direct feedback on how I can help us build equitable, accessible, and inclusive conversations. If you’re having personal conflicts with the discussion of any kind, always feel free to each out to me and/or Alana in a privacy that you’re comfortable with. Please feel free to offer that feedback in class, through email, or in office hours.

**Academic Integrity Statement**

A University, by its nature, strives to foster and recognize originality of thought. Originality can only be recognized, however, when people acknowledge the sources of ideas or works that are not their own. Therefore, students must maintain the highest standards with regards to honesty, effort and performance. In the pursuit of knowledge and personal development, it is imperative that students present their own ideas and insights for evaluation, critique and eventual reformulation. As part of this process, each student must acknowledge the intellectual contribution of others… Violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, falsification, unapproved collaboration, and destruction of library materials.

In short: when uncertain, ask; when in doubt, cite.

**Accessibility & Accommodations**

Yale values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. Our goal is to create learning environments that are usable, equitable, inclusive and welcoming. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion, accurate assessment, or achievement, please notify me and Alana as soon as possible.

Student requiring accommodations are also welcome to contact Student Accessibility Services to discuss a range of options to removing barriers in the course.

**Attendance**

Please limit yourself to only one excused absence during the summer session. The bulk of our meetings is composed of class discussion and group work, so it is important that a) you are punctual and in attendance, b) you have read/written/watched what you were assigned to read/write/view, and c) you participate in class conversation and activities. In the event that you do miss a class, be sure to check with your classmates and review the syllabus to find out what you missed and what is due.
Academic Tutoring & Support

The Poorvu Undergraduate Writing Center is offering summer tutoring and writing help. I strongly suggest setting up an appointment if you think you would benefit from extra help with any assignments for this course. We are lucky to have Alana on board as a co-teacher, for she has extensive experience as a Lead Writing Partner at the Poorvu Center. Contact her (alana.felton@yale.edu) for information on how to set up an appointment.

The Syllabus

WEEK 0

Before class begins, make sure you have watched the following films, which present two wildly different takes on the concept of “The United States of America.”

- *Ruggles of Red Gap* (1935), directed by Leo McCarey, starring Charles Laughton, financed by Paramount Studios in the United States.


A good print of *Ruggles* can be rented on Apple TV or Amazon for $3.99, or can be seen (with potato-quality visuals) on Ok.ru — your source for rare films! — for free, if money is a concern.

*Mr Freedom* can be streamed on the Criterion Channel (a wise investment, especially if you are a budding movie-lover) or on YouTube (ditto on the potato).

After watching McCarey’s and Klein’s films, read the following for context, all in the folder:

1. Robin Wood on Leo McCarey (pdf)
2. Jean O’Reilly on RUGGLES OF RED GAP (pdf)
WEEK 1

Screenings: Monday July 3

- Each week, I will play a short film by Kevin Jerome Everson. This week: *Rams 23, Blue Bears 21* (2017, dir. Kevin Jerome Everson, 7 minutes)
- Three films by the Lumiere Brothers, FRANCE: *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1895), *Baby’s Meal* (1895), *Cours en Sac* (1896), total 3 minutes
- Three early films from the United States: *Boxing Cats, Annie Oakley, and Something Good—Negro Kiss*
- *Now!* (1965, dir. Santiago Alvarez, CUBA, 5 minutes)
- *The Colors* (1977, dir. Abbas Kiarostami, IRAN, 15 minutes)
- *Duck Amuck* (1953, dir. Chuck Jones, 7 minutes)
- *Imitation of Life* (1959, dir. Douglas Sirk, 121 minutes)

Session 1: Monday, July 3
What is Film? What is Video? What is the USA?
Readings:
- Chs. 1 and 2 of Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States*
- Fassbinder on Douglas Sirk
- Armond White on Douglas Sirk
- Carlos Valladares’s piece on Kevin Jerome Everson in Gagosian Quarterly

Clips:
- *Mr Freedom* (Klein, 1969)
- *Ruggles of Red Gap* (McCready, 1935)
- *Tony Williams in Africa* (1973, dir. Willie Ruff)
- *Nashville* (dir. Robert Altman, 1975)
- *Lime Kiln Field Day* (1913, produced by the Biograph company)
- *Birth of a Nation* (1915, dir. D.W. Griffith, produced by the Biograph company)

Session 2: Wednesday, July 5
What is Class? What is Memory? What is History?
Readings: “The Propaganda of History” in WEB Du Bois’s BLACK RECONSTRUCTION; Zinn, opening three essays in *THE POLITICS OF HISTORY*
WEEK 2

Screenings: Monday July 10

- **His Girl Friday** (1940, dir. Howard Hawks, 90 minutes)
- **Red Hot Riding Hood** (1943, dir. Tex Avery, 7 minutes)
- **Illusions** (1982, dir. Julie Dash, 34 minutes)
- **Betty Tells Her Story** (1972, dir. Liane Brandon, 20 minutes)
- **Round Seven** (2017, dir. Kevin Jerome Everson, 17 minutes)

Session 3: Monday, July 10

**What is Love? What are Dreams? What is Language?**

**Readings:** Stanley Cavell on HIS GIRL FRIDAY in PURSUITS OF HAPPINESS: THE AMERICAN COMEDY OF REMARRIAGE; Manny Farber on Howard Hawks; “The Forms of Love” by George Oppen; selections from Roland Barthes’s *A Lover’s Discourse*.

**Clips:**

- City Lights (1931, dir. Charlie Chaplin)
- Angel (1937, dir. Ernst Lubitsch)
- Desert Hearts (1984, dir. Donna Deitch)
- Pariah (2011, dir. Dee Rees)
- Annette (2021, dir. Leos Carax)
- A Tale of Love (1996, dir. Trinh T Minh-ha)

Session 4: Wednesday, July 12

**What is Hollywood? What is The Gaze?**

**FILM REVIEW DUE!!!!**

**Readings:**

- Molly Haskell, opening chapter of FROM REVERENCE TO RAPE: THE TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN THE MOVIES
- Kevin Jerome Everson’s interview with Terri Francis

If we like where this is going….I can arrange an extra screening: Warren Beatty’s REDS (1981) for eager-beavers 😊

SUNDAY BEFORE WEEK 3: PROPOSALS FOR YOUR FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE JULY 16!!!

WEEK 3

Screenings: Monday July 17

- *Plane Daffy* (1944, dir. Frank Tashlin, 7 minutes)
- *Der Fuehrer’s Face* (1943, produced by Walt Disney, 7 minutes)
- *Let There Be Light* (1946, dir. John Huston, 58 min)
- *Child of Resistance* (1973, dir. Haile Gerima, 36 minutes)
- Three UVA history films by Kevin Jerome Everson and Claudrena Harold: *Fastest Man in the State, How Can I Ever Be Late, Black Arsenic* (around 2017, 20 minutes in total)
- *Cane Fire* (2020, dir. Anthony Banua-Simon, 80 minutes)

Session 5: Monday, July 17

What are the Politics of an Image? What is Communism? What is Ideology?

PRESENTATIONS DAY!!!!

Readings: Selections from George Jackson’s prison letters; selections from Fred Hampton’s speeches; “Jews and Negros in the Communist Party,” in *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* by Harold Cruse; chapters in Howard Zinn’s, *A People’s History of the United States*

Clips:

- *Big Jim McLain* (1952, dir. Edward Ludwig)
- *I Was a Communist for the FBI!* (1951, dir Gordan Douglas)
- *Hallelujah I’m a Bum!* (1933, dir Lewis Milestone)
- *Point of Order!* (1964, dir. Emilie de Antonio)

Session 6: Wednesday, July 19

What is Empire? What is War? What is Violence?

Readings: TBD

Clips: *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946, dir. William Wyler); *Targets* (1968, dir. Peter Bogdanovich); selections from Steven Spielberg’s War Films
WEEK 4

Screenings: Monday July 24:

- *Hi, Mom!* (1970, dir. Brian De Palma, 90 minutes)
- episodes of the ERIC ANDRE SHOW (2010s)
- TOO MANY COOKS (2014)
- *Teenage Emotions* (2021, dir. Frédéric Da, 70 minutes)
- *Rejected* by Don Hertzfeldt (2000)
- a KJ Everson picture

Session 7: Monday, July 24

**What is Youth / Revolt / Freedom?**

**Readings:** selections from Melinda Cooper’s *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism*.

**Clips:**

- *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (1973, dir. Ivan Dixon);
- *Wild Boys of the Road* (1933, dir. William Wellman)
- *Taking Off* (1971, dir. Milos Forman)
- *Sixth Side of the Pentagon* (1967, dir. Chris Marker)

Session 8: Wednesday, July 26

**What is Postmodernity? What is The Internet? What is A Connection ?**

**Readings:** Selections from *Palo Alto* by Malcolm Harris; a chapter from Hua Hsu’s *Stay True*; A.S. Hamrah on the films of Sofia Coppola

**Clips:** *We’re All Going to the World’s Fair* (2022, dir. Jane Schoenbrun); *The Social Network* (2010, dir. David Fincher); *The Bling Ring* (2013, dir. Sofia Coppola)
WEEK 5: Monday July 31
Screenings:

- *Petulia* (1968, dir. Richard Lester)
- *Night and Fog* (1955, dir. Alain Resnais)
- a KJ Everson picture

**Session 9: Monday, July 31**
What is Time? What is a Beginning? What is an End?

**Session 10: Wednesday, August 2**
Free for all! Choose your own adventure + reflections 😊

Final paper due on August 3 😊