

Film & Politics Syllabus

Dr. Stuart Shulman • Fall 2004 • University of Pittsburgh

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 1-4 pm & Fridays 9-11 am

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Overview: Film plays an uncertain yet undeniably prominent role shaping the contours of the American political landscape and our collective understanding of political history. In this class, we read about American politics and history as we watch a mix of documentaries and feature films. The class is organized around various themes, including: Atomic Weapons, Cold War Anti-Communism, Racism, American Exceptionalism, Violence, and Gender. Students will gain an appreciation of the complex relationship between art and politics. History and mythology take shape, in part, in darkened rooms where groups of strangers collectively laugh, cry and groan through cinema efforts like *Dr. Strangelove*, *The Ugly American*, and now *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Equally important are traditional documentaries shown in schools and universities or on PBS that explicitly seek to provide direct access to audio and visual history. Films like *The World at War*, *Atomic Café*, *Rosie the Riveter*, and *Blood in the Face* exemplify some of the many varied approaches employed by documentary film makers. In Film & Politics, we survey critical twentieth century issues that led to the creation of these and other important films.

Reading: Complete the reading prior to the class meeting. Some readings are found in a course packet (see attached bibliography) or in the Hillman library reserve area. The required books are:

Paul Boyer, *Fallout: A Historian Reflects on America's Half-Century Encounter with Nuclear Weapons*

Michael P. Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie: And Other Episodes of Political Demonology*

Ernest Giglio, *Here's Looking at You: Hollywood, Film, and Politics*

Required Assignments: There are four graded assignments. In-class and online participation will be graded and constitutes 20% of the final grade. Students will write take home mid-term and final exams, counting for 20% and 30% respectively and a 20-page research paper, which counts for the final 30%. Detailed guidelines and grading rubrics for the paper, exams, and participation grades will be distributed separately in class and posted on my web site. In general, I expect students to be fluent with the required readings and able to link them analytically to the films we are viewing. You will need to be able to draw on theory and evidence from all the class materials (readings, films, lectures, and in class or online discussions) to make coherent, original arguments about the relationship between film and politics. Given the time constraints presented by the film viewing, the asynchronous online "Blackboard" discussions will be particularly important opportunities.

Letters to the Editor: Anyone who publishes a letter to the editor in the *New York Times* during the semester specifically dealing with film and politics will get a 5% bonus. One remarkable semester not long ago, seven Drake undergraduates had their letters printed on this very competitive page. So, while it is challenging, it certainly can be done. There is no time like the present to start a letter.

Film Viewing and Reading Schedule

(Chapter numbers from the books in parentheses and readings with titles are in the packet)

Week One: Introduction to Film and Politics: From Griffiths to Stone and Beyond

Reading: Rogin (7)

Excerpts: *Birth of a Nation*, *JFK*, *Wag the Dog*

Feature: *World at War, v. 24: The Bomb* (52 minutes; 1982)

Week Two: Documenting Atomic History

Reading: Boyer (1-5, 9, 11), Giglio (1)

Excerpt: *Operation Tumbler/Snapper*

Feature: *Atomic Café* (92 minutes; 1982)

Week Three: Feature Film and Atomic History

Reading: Boyer (6-8, 10-12, 14-16), Giglio (10)

Excerpts: *Cloak and Dagger*, *Them*, *Failsafe*

Feature: *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (93 minutes; 1964)

Week Four: Fighting the Good Fight

Reading: Rogin (1 & 2), Giglio (2 & 8)

Excerpts: *Triumph of the Will*, *The Fog of War*

Feature: *World War II: The Propaganda Battle* (55 minutes; 1985)

Week Five: Living with Communists and Other Demons

Reading: Rogin (8 & 9), Giglio (5), Zinn, "The Politics of History in the Era of the Cold War"

Excerpt: *Panama Deception*

Feature: *The Ugly American* (120 minutes; 1963)

Week Six: The Facts & Myth Behind Rosie the Riveter

Reading: Evans, "Women at War" and "The Cold War and the Feminine Mystique"

Excerpt: *Norma Rae*

Feature: *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (65 minutes; 1980)

Week Seven: Race & Racism

Reading: Orfield, "Race and the Liberal Agenda," Rogin (5)

Excerpts: *Do the Right Thing*, *Eyes on the Prize*

Feature: *Blood in the Face* (75 minutes; 1991)

Week Eight: The Fourth Estate

Reading: (Ed. Gottesman) *Perspectives on Citizen Kane* (selected essays)

Excerpts: *Network*, *Magic Town*, *Battle Over Citizen Kane*

Feature: *Citizen Kane* (119 minutes; 1941)

Week Nine: Violence Against Women

Reading: Horeck, "They Did Worse than Nothing," Cuklanz, "Popular Re-Presentations"

Excerpts: *Dead Man Walking*, *Rob Roy*

Feature: *The Accused* (111 minutes; 1988)

Week Ten: Sci-Fi Visions

Reading: Wood, "Papering the Cracks: Fantasy and Ideology in the Reagan Era," and Rogin (3)

Excerpts: *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Return of the Jedi*

Feature: *Blade Runner* (117, 1982)

Week Eleven: Justice Delayed

Reading: Wright, *The Death of Ramone Gonzalez* (Chapters 1-3)

Excerpts: *Harvest of Shame*, *Hungry for Profit*

Feature: *Witness to the Future* (50 minutes; 1996)

Week Twelve: The Life and Times of Michael Moore

Reading: Giglio (3), collected reviews and responses (handout)

Excerpts: *Roger & Me*, *The Big One*, *Bowling for Columbine*

Feature: *Fahrenheit 9/11* (154 minutes; 2004)

Week Thirteen: American Electoral Politics

Required Reading: Giglio (6), Scott, "Film, Ideology and American Politics"

Excerpts: *Primary Colors*, *Manchurian Candidate*

Feature: *Manchurian Candidate* (130 minutes; 2004)

Week Fourteen: Is America Exceptional?

Reading: Steinmo, "American Exceptionalism Reconsidered: Culture or Institutions," Giglio (11)

Excerpts: *The South Park Movie*, *Berkeley in the Sixties*

Feature: *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (129 minutes; 1939)

Reading Packet Bibliography

Howard Zinn, "The Politics of History in the Era of the Cold War," in (Ed. Schiffrin) *The Cold War and the University* (New York: New York Press, 1997), 35-72.

Sarah M. Evans, "Women at War" and "The Cold War and the Feminine Mystique" *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 219-262.

Gary Orfield, "Race and the Liberal Agenda: The Loss of the Integrationist Dream, 1965-1974," in (Eds. Weir, Orloff & Skocpol) *The Politics of Social Policy in the United States* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1988), 313-355.

Selected Essays in (Ed. Gottesman) *Perspectives on Citizen Kane* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996) 23-25, 30-59.

Tanya Horeck, "They Did Worse than Nothing," in *Public Rape: Representing Violation in Fiction and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 91-115.

Lisa M. Cuklanz, "Popular Re-Presentations" in *Rape on Trial: How the Mass Media Construct Legal Reform and Social Change* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 85-113.

Robin Wood, "Papering the Cracks: Fantasy and Ideology in the Reagan Era," in *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan...and Beyond* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003), 144-167.

Angus Wright, *The Death of Ramón González: The Modern Agricultural Dilemma* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 1-86.

Ian Scott, "Film, Ideology and American Politics," in *American Politics in Hollywood Film* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborne Publishers, 2000), 5-25.

Sven H. Steinmo, "American Exceptionalism Reconsidered: Culture or Institutions," in (Eds. Dodd and Jillson) *The Dynamics of American Politics: Approaches & Interpretations* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 106-131.