

**Syllabus: Politics in Film (PSC 400F / FIS 409)**  
**Spring 2008**  
**University of Nevada, Las Vegas**



**Course Description**

This three (3) credit course analyzes political aspects of film in a variety of national cinemas (Hollywood, European, African, Asian), across different decades (from the silent era to the twenty-first century), genres (cinéma vérité, documentary, period epic, martial art, western, melodrama, musical), and through a range of themes (colonialism, the ideologies of fascism and Marxism, race, gender, sexuality, and the nuclear family).

**Instructor**

Instructor: Dr. Jeffrey Crouse

E-mail: [Jeffrey.Crouse@unlv.edu](mailto:Jeffrey.Crouse@unlv.edu)

Office: Wright Hall (WRI) A223

Phone: (702) 895-5247

Office Hours: Friday 2:30 to 4:00p.m.

PSC 400F-001 / FIS 409-001 Politics in Film Friday 11:30am-2:20pm WRI C237

**Classroom Etiquette**

Students must arrive to class prepared and on time. Cell phones must be turned off and stored out of sight. The use of laptops during class is solely limited to note taking and information the instructor may invite you to look up during a discussion; otherwise their use for music listening, game playing, web browsing, or Internet chats is prohibited. No one should talk while another person is speaking, nor should there be any remarks meant for a classmate rather than the group. Classroom behavior should be courteous, respectful of others, and consistent with the expectations set forth by the university.

## Attendance Policy

Attendance is mandatory and roll will be taken. Students will be allowed to miss two (2) classes (whether lectures or screenings) before one's grade is affected. For every absence afterward, the student's *entire semester grade* will drop by 10% for every class missed.

## Reading

There are no course textbooks. Instead students are expected to follow the readings listed below (*see* Course Schedule and Assignments), downloading them on-line via the UNLV e-reserve library.

## Course Schedule and Assignments

*Disclaimer:* It is expected that the following schedule will be observed. Should a change arise, I reserve the right to make any alteration as long as it is made clear to the students.

### Introduction (25 Jan.)

#### Unit 1: Film and Colonialism (1 and 8 Feb.)

A terrorist or a freedom fighter: what's the difference? The Algerian War of Independence from 1954 -1962 against French occupation will be our case study.

Screening: *The Battle of Algiers* (Gillo Pontecorvo, Italy/Algeria, 1966) 121 min. This film will be shown with the documentary listed below.

Screening: *Remembering History* (2004), this documentary on the Algerian War will be shown on 1 Feb. with *The Battle of Algiers*.

→ Lecture / Discussion: 8 Feb.

§ Reading: Your in-class notes while watching *Remembering History*.

#### Unit 2: Film and Fascism (15 and 22 Feb.)

Why do societies fall under the spell of fascism? Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany (1933-45), and Qin Shi Huang (the "King of Qin") and early China (221 BCE-210 BCE) are our case studies.

Screening: *Triumph of the Will* (Leni Riefenstahl, Germany, 1934). 120 min.

Note: Only the first 65 min. of this film will be viewed (15 Feb). Also: the Commentary track by historian Dr. Anthony Santoro will be heard during film.

Screening: *Hero* (Zhang Yimou, People's Republic of China/Hong Kong, 2002) 98 min. This film will also be shown on 15 Feb.

→ Lecture / Discussion: 22 Feb.

§ Reading: Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," *New York Review of Books*,

February 6, 1975 (later reprinted in *Under the Sign of Saturn*, 1980). Download: Goggle this essay on the Internet.

Evans Chan, "Zhang Yimou's *Hero* and the Temptations of Fascism," *Film International*, No. 8, 2002.

### **Unit 3: Film and Marxism** (29 Feb.)

What made 1920s Soviet cinema feel so new and exciting? Are films of that time examples of totalitarian cinema, or are they something different? The Kino-Eye group's *Man With the Movie Camera*, made during the period of the NEP, will be the main case study.

Screening: *The Man with the Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, Russia, 1929) 68 min. This film will be viewed on 29 Feb.

→ Lecture / Discussion: 29 Feb.

§ Reading: Lecture notes taken during lecture / discussion.

### **Unit 4: Film and Race** (7 and 14 March)

It has been claimed that the western, Hollywood's genre contribution to world film, is a cinema of racial genocide. Is that true? To what degree, over time, do masters of the western such as director John Ford, recognize the extermination of the Native American / aboriginal people in their work?

Screening: *The Searchers* (John Ford, USA, 1956) 119 min. This film will be seen on 7 March.

→ Lecture / Discussion: 14 March. Note: there will be no class next week (21 March) because of Spring Break.

§ Reading: Douglas Pye, "Double Vision: Miscegenation and Point of View in *The Searchers*" in *The Book of Westerns*, Ian Cameron, Douglas Pye (eds.), 1996.

### **Unit 5: Film and Gender** (28 March and 4 April)

Though the majority of filmmakers in movie history (including Hollywood) are men, is it possible for the position of women to be represented — whether by men or women — without a loss of integrity? If so, is it possible within the conventions of a mainstream film?

Screening: *Blonde Venus* (Josef von Sternberg, USA, 1932) 97 min.

Screening: *The Smell of Burning Ants* (Jay Rosenblatt, USA, 1994) 21 min.

These movies will be viewed on 28 March.

→ Lecture / Discussion: 4 April.

§ Reading: Florence Jacobowitz, "What Does a Man Know About Mother Love?"

*CineAction!*, No. 21/22, November 1990.

**Unit 6: Film and Sexuality** (11 and 18 April)

Sexuality in art is never a “given” but, like race, gender, class, nationality, and religion, is a construction whether conscious in the mind of the artist or not. And given that no mainstream Hollywood movie dared to tackle the subject of AIDS until *Philadelphia*, much rode on the way in which its filmmakers would address the impact of this disease upon the gay community yet still turn out a commercial product. What is its view of sexuality — gay *and* straight? What choices does it make to present homosexual love and identity to a largely heterosexual audience?

Screening: *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, USA, 1993) 125 min. This film will be viewed on 11 April.

→ Lecture / Discussion: 18 April (Tues.).

§ Reading: Richard Lippe, “For *Philadelphia*,” *CineAction!*, No. 35, August 1994.

**Unit 7: Film and the Family** (25 April and 1 May)

Since most political philosophies place, alongside the rights of the individual, the importance of the family as the foundation of society, the definition of family, though hardly static throughout history, remains highly contested. Is the nuclear model, for example, a site for competing neuroses or one of complementary satisfaction? Or both?

Screening: *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Vincente Minnelli, USA, 1944) 113 min. This film will be viewed on 25 April.

→ Lecture / Discussion: 1 May.

§ Reading: Stephanie Coontz, “‘My Mother Was a Saint’: Individualism, Gender Myths, and the Problem of Love” (Ch. 3) in *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, 1992.

**Course Summary and Feedback** (9 May)

**Course Grading**

Not counting class absences (*see* Attendance Policy above), grades are assessed based on performance in four (4) major areas. The breakdown is as follows:

Class Participation (10%)

1 5-Page Midterm Research Paper (25%)

1 Final Exam (Course Notebook) (25%)

8 1-Page (single-spaced) Critical Essays (40%)

The content and style of the Final Exam as well as the eight (8) small critical essays will be thoroughly explained in class. The five (5)-page Midterm Paper will be a film outside of the course of the student's choosing which he/she will analyze. (For the list of possible titles *see* ADDENDUM.) More information about the Midterm will be discussed in class.

The standard breakdown will be observed (59% or below = F; 60-69% = D; 70-79 = C; 80-89% = B; 90-100 = A). Note: absolutely no extra credit will be offered in class, so do not ask. Late work will be accepted, but with a 10% reduction *per day (not class) late*.

Finally, never send me your assignments via e-mail attachments (hard copy only), and no correspondence from parents or guardians — even if they foot the bill.

### **Academic Integrity**

For this course, any attempt to cheat on an examination or to present someone else's work (including material copied from the Internet) as your own for a written assignment will be subject to the most severe penalty the University allows.

“Academic integrity is a legitimate concern for every member of the campus community; all share in upholding the fundamental values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility and professionalism. By choosing to join the UNLV community, students accept the expectations of the Academic Misconduct Policy and are encouraged when faced with ethical choices to always take the ethical path. Students enrolling in UNLV assume the obligation to conduct themselves in a way compatible with UNLV's function as an educational institution.” — *Student Academic Misconduct Policy*

### **Religious Holidays**

If the date of any of the examinations conflicts with a religious holiday that you observe, the instructor must be notified at least two (2) weeks prior to the examination so that alternative arrangements can be made.

### **Official Extracurricular Activity**

If the date of any of the examinations conflicts with an official extracurricular activity, the instructor must be notified at least two (2) weeks prior to the examination and provide official written notification no less than one (1) week prior to the examination so that alternative arrangements can be made.

### **Disabilities**

UNLV complies with the provisions set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, offering reasonable accommodations to qualified students with documented disabilities. If you have a documented disability that may require accommodations, you will need to contact the DRC for the co-

ordination of services. The DRC is located in the Student Services Complex (SSC), Rm. 137, and the contact numbers are: VOICE (702) 895-0866, TTY (702) 895-0652, FAX (702) 895-0651. For more information, visit: <http://studentlife.unlv.edu/disability/>.

## **ADDENDUM**

Though this list of fifty (50) films is *far* from exhaustive in recognizing all of the notable achievements regarding political cinema (or movies disclosing vital ideological content), it provides the student with a wide range nonetheless. Select one of the following movies for the five (5)-page Midterm Essay. Due: 9 March (Thurs.).

### Recent Films

*Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, USA, 2005)  
*The Constant Gardener* (Fernando Meirelles, Germany/UK, 2005)  
*The Corporation* (Mark Achbar/Jennifer Abbott, Canada, 2004)  
*Fahrenheit 9/11* (Michael Moore, USA, 2004)  
*Good Night, and Good Luck* (George Clooney, USA, 2005)  
*The Lives of Others* (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, Germany, 2006)  
*Munich* (Steven Spielberg, USA, 2005)  
*Pan's Labyrinth* (Guillermo del Toro, Mexico, 2006)  
*Super Size Me* (Morgan Spurlock, USA, 2004)  
*Syriana* (Stephen Gaghan, USA, 2005)  
*V for Vendetta* (James McTeigue, USA/UK/Germany, 2005)

### Cinema Classics

*All That Heaven Allows* (Douglas Sirk, USA, 1955)  
*All the President's Men* (Alan J. Paluka, 1976)  
*The Battleship Potemkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, Russia, 1925)  
*The Birth of a Nation* (DW Griffith, USA, 1915)  
*Black Narcissus* (Michael Powell/Emeric Pressberger, UK, 1947)  
*Boys Don't Cry* (Kimberly Peirce, USA, 1999)  
*Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, USA, 1974)  
*Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, USA, 1941)  
*Dead Man Walking* (Tim Robbins, USA, 1995)  
*The Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino, USA, 1978)  
*Dr. Strangelove: Or, How I Stopped Worrying and Love the Bomb* (Stanley Kubrick, USA, 1964)  
*Do the Right Thing* (Spike Lee, USA, 1989)  
*Earth* (Alexandr Dovzhenko, Russia, 1930)  
*Forrest Gump* (Robert Zemeckis, USA, 1994)  
*The Fountainhead* (King Vidor, USA, 1949)  
*Gandhi* (Richard Attenborough, UK, 1982)  
*I am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang* (Mervyn LeRoy, USA, 1932)  
*It's a Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, USA, 1946)

*JFK* (Oliver Stone, USA, 1991)  
*Los Olividados* (Luis Bunuel, Mexico, 1950)  
*Malcolm X* (Spike Lee, USA, 1992)  
*Marked Woman* (Lloyd Bacon, USA, 1937)  
*Matewan* (John Sayles, USA, 1987)  
*Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, Germany, 1926)  
*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (Frank Capra, USA, 1939)  
*Night and Fog* (Alain Resnais, France, 1955)  
*Night of the Living Dead* (George A. Romero, USA, 1968)  
*Raise the Red Lantern* (Zhang Yimou, Hong Kong, 1991)  
*Roger & Me* (Michael Moore, USA, 1989)  
*Salt of the Earth* (Herbert J. Biberman, USA, 1953)  
*The Scarlet Empress* (Josef von Sternberg, USA, 1934)  
*Shock Corridor* (Samuel Fuller, USA, 1963)  
*Storm Over Asia* (Vsevolod Pudovkin, Russia, 1928)  
*Strike* (Sergei Eisenstein, Russia, 1924)  
*Three Kings* (David O. Russell, USA/Australia, 1999)  
*Tout va bien* (Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1972)  
*Ugetsu* (Kenji Mizoguchi, Japan, 1953)  
*The Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl* (Ray Muller, Germany, 1993)  
*Young Mr. Lincoln* (John Ford, USA, 1939)