Politics and Film GOVT 432 10/15

Professor Eric Langenbacher
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Summer 2017 First Session June 5-July 7
M,T,W,R 6:00-8:30
Office Hours: M, T 2:00-3:00 ICC 657 or by appointment

The important and long-standing interplay between politics and film is the focus of this course. Three general questions characterize this examination. First, what ideological, chronological, or cultural differences mark different films focusing on a common political object, such as the American Dream or war? What accounts for these differences? Second, how political is an individual movie? How expansive should the definition of political content be? Third, how effective is the specific genre in conveying the intended political message? Are propaganda films really more effective than the indirect messages found in mainstream blockbusters?

We begin with a general overview of the film-politics relationship and a brief discussion of the various perspectives and theories that illuminate the connection. Next, we look at the most obvious political films: the propaganda movies Triumph of the Will and Birth of a Nation. Next we look at the documentary genre through a contemporary production Paragraph 175 and a classic, Wiseman’s Titicut Follies. A discussion of political satire follows, focused on Chaplin’s Great Dictator and South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut. The next section delves into Hollywood’s image of America and American politics. The first two films revolve around the presentation of the American Dream, exemplified by Citizen Kane, and Forrest Gump, movies separated by 50 years. Then we look at the more focused theme of the image of Washington politics through Capra’s classic Mr. Smith Goes to Washington and Wag the Dog.

On a different note, we discuss one of the most unexpectedly political films, Dangerous Liaisons, a study in political personality, power maximization and unadulterated competition. The last section thematizes war and genocide. In contrast to typical heroic representations of WWII, we look at a Japanese animated feature, Grave of the Fireflies, which reveals a substantially different cultural and political sensibility, as well as the Oscar-winning glimpse of Hitler’s last days, Downfall. For the Cold War we will analyze The Manchurian Candidate and From Russia with Love. Next comes The Deer Hunter, a masterpiece that best captures the pervasive malaise of the Vietnam War period, both at home and at the front. The final films delve into an historical theme with great contemporary political and ethical relevance: the Holocaust as depicted in Spielberg’s Schindler’s List and Holland’s Europa, Europa.

Requirements

For All Students

Participation 5%
Comparative Film Critiques 3x15%=45%
In the film critiques, you will compare and contrast two films. One is a film we viewed in class and the other must be a topical film that you will screen independently. Each should be 5-7 pages in length.

For Undergraduate Students
Final Examination 50%

The Final Exam will consist of several short essay questions and one long essay.

For Graduate Students
Research Paper 50%

The 20-page paper should have a broad comparative focus, be based on external research and have a theoretical dimension. Please approve your topics with me in advance.

Textbooks

There are two required texts for this course—available for purchase at the bookstore:


All other readings will be available on e-reserve at Lauinger library. Some additional handouts will be distributed in class.

*** Please note that all students are expected to abide by the code of student conduct as found in the Georgetown Honor System***

Course Schedule

I. Exploring Genre

1. June 4  
   **Introduction/The Propaganda Film**

Giglio, chs. 1, 2
Nichols, chs. 1, 2, 3, 4
Triumph of the Will (1935)

2. June 5

Propaganda?

Giglio, ch. 3
Nichols ch. 5

Birth of a Nation (1915)

3. June 6

Contemporary Documentary Film

Nichols, chs. 6,7,8

Paragraph 175 (2000)

4. June 7

Classic Documentary


Titicut Follies (1967)

5. June 11

Old School Political Satire


The Great Dictator (1940)

First Critique Due
6. June 12  **Contemporary Satire**


*South Park: Bigger, Longer, Uncut* (1999)

II. Images of America and American Politics

7. June 13  **The American Dream and its Discontents**


*Citizen Kane* (1941)

8. June 14  **The American Dream Reaffirmed**


Lavery, David, “‘No Box of Chocolates’: The Adaptation of Forrest Gump,” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 25, 1 (1997), pp. 18-22.


*Forrest Gump* (1994)


Giglio, ch.6.


*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939)
10. June 19  Cynicism and Manipulation

Giglio, Ch. 11.

Wag the Dog (1997)

III. The Ultimate Political Film

11. June 20  Power and the Political Personality


*Dangerous Liaisons* (1988)

IV. Images of War and Genocide

12. June 21  Civilian Suffering in World War II

Giglio, ch. 8.

*Grave of the Fireflies* (1988)

13. June 25  The End of Nazism


*Downfall* (2004)

Second Critique Due

14. June 26  Cold War Paranoia

The Manchurian Candidate (1962)

15. June 27  The Cold War Order


From Russia with Love (1963)

16. June 28  Vietnam

Giglio, ch. 9.

The Deer Hunter (1978)

17. July 2  Hollywood’s Holocaust

Rosenbaum, “Missing the Target,” pp. 98-104.

Schindler’s List (1993)

18. July 3  Europe’s Holocaust


Europa, Europa (1991)

Third Critique Due

19. July 5  FINAL EXAMINATION