

# Politics and Film GOVT 432 10/15

Professor Eric Langenbacher

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Summer 2019 First Session June 3-July 5

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:

Giglio, Ernest. *Here's Looking at You: Hollywood, Film and Politics*, fourth edition (New York: Peter Lang, 2014)

Nichols, Bill. *Introduction to Documentary*, second edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010)

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 3 Introduction/The Propaganda Film**

Giglio, chs. 1, 2

Nichols, chs. 1, 2, 3, 4

Abercrombie, Nicholas and Longhurst, Brian (1998). *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination*, "Changing Audiences, Changing Paradigms of Research," pp. 3-37.

Sontag, Susan. "Fascinating Fascism," in Bill Nichols, ed. *Movies and Methods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 31-43

*Triumph of the Will* (1935)

2. June 4      **Propaganda?**

Giglio, ch. 3

Nichols ch. 5

Sklar, Robert (1994). *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, “D.W. Griffith and the Forging of Motion-Picture Art,” pp.48-64

Combs, James E. and Combs, Sara T. (1994). *Film Propaganda and American Politics: An Analysis and Filmography*, “Introduction,” “War-Time Documentary Films,” pp. 3-11, 38-80.

*Birth of a Nation* (1915)

3. June 5      **Contemporary Documentary Film**

Nichols, chs. 6,7,8

Godmillow, Jill and Shapiro, Anne-Louise. “How Real is the Reality in Documentary Film?” *History and Theory* 36, 4 (1997), pp. 80-101.

Guynn, William (1990). *A Cinema of Nonfiction*, “The Non-Fiction Film and its Spectator,” pp. 215-231.

*Paragraph 175* (2000)

4. June 6      **Classic Documentary**

“Let the Viewer Decide,” Interview with Frederick Wiseman, *Reason*, December 2007.

*Titicut Follies* (1967)

5. June 10     **Old School Political Satire**

McCaffrey, Donald W (1992). *Assault on Society: Satirical Literature to Film*, “Introduction,” “War and Holocaust for Some Painful Laughter,” pp. ix-xiii, 36-46.

Christensen, Terry (1987). *Reel Politics: American Political Movies from Birth of a Nation to Platoon*, “You Provide the Prose Poems,” “Power Is Not a Toy,” pp. 55-62, 111-24.

*The Great Dictator* (1940)

**First Critique Due**

6. June 11      **Contemporary Satire**

Scott, Ian (2000). *American Politics in Hollywood Film*, “Hollywood on the Campaign Trail,” pp. 84-95

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

**II. Images of America and American Politics**

7. June 12      **The American Dream and its Discontents**

Gianos, Phillip L (1998). *Politics and Politicians in American Films*, “Aspiration, Disillusionment and Ambivalence,” pp. 169-184.

Kelly, Beverly Merrill (1998). *Reelpolitik: Political Ideologies in '30s and '40s Films*, “Antifascism, in Citizen Kane,” pp. 61-76.

Bordwell, David, “Citizen Kane,” in Nichols, *Movies and Methods*, pp. 273-289.

*Citizen Kane* (1941)

8. June 13      **The American Dream Reaffirmed**

Scott, “Hollywood and politics in the 1990s,” pp. 153-175.

Rosenbaum, Jonathan (1997). *Movies as Politics*, “Entertainment as Oppression,” pp. 166-170.

Leitch, Thomas M. “Know-Nothing Entertainment: What to Say to your Friends on the Right, and Why it Won't Do Any Good,” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 25, 1 (1997), pp. 7-17.

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

Yacowar, Maurice, “Forrest Gump: Rejecting Ideology,” *Queen's Quarterly* 101, 3 (1994), pp. 669-682.

*Forrest Gump* (1994)

9. June 17      **Hollywood's Image of American Politics: The Populist Promise**

Giglio, ch.6.

Gianos, “Movies and the Great Depression,” pp. 93-103.

Sklar, “Movies in the Age of Mass Culture,” pp. 205-214,

Richards, Jeffrey, “Frank Capra and the Cinema of Populism,” in Nichols, *Movies and Methods*, pp. 65-77.

*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939)

10. June 18    **Cynicism and Manipulation**

Giglio, Ch. 11.

*Wag the Dog* (1997)

**III. The Ultimate Political Film**

11. June 19    **Power and the Political Personality**

Lasswell, Harold D (1962). *Power and Personality*, "Introduction," "The Political Personality," pp. 7-58.

Carson, Kathryn, "*Les liaisons dangereuses* on Stage and Film," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 19, 1 (1991), pp. 35-40.

Hall, Carol, "Valmont Redux: The Fortunes and Filmed Adaptations of *Les liaisons dangereuses*," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 19, 1 (1991), 41-50.

*Dangerous Liaisons* (1988)

**IV. Images of War and Genocide**

12. June 20    **Civilian Suffering in World War II**

Giglio, ch. 8.

Pilling, Jayne, ed. *A Reader in Animation Studies*. Sydney: John Libbey, 1997, "Disney, Warner Brothers and Japanese Animation," pp. 124-136.

*Grave of the Fireflies* (1988)

13. June 24    **The End of Nazism**

John Bendix, "Facing Hitler: German Responses to Downfall," *German Politics and Society*, 25, 1 (2007): 70-89.

Jürgen Pelzer, "The Facts Behind the Guilt? Background and Implicit Intentions in Downfall," *German Politics and Society*, 25, 1 (2007): 90-101.

*Downfall* (2004)

**Second Critique Due**

14. June 25    **Cold War Paranoia**

Gianos, "The Cold War and Vietnam in Films," pp. 158-167.  
 Scott, "Action Adventure and Conspiracy," pp. 102-119, 124-132

*The Manchurian Candidate* (1962)

15. June 26 **The Cold War Order**

Chapman, James. *Licence to Thrill: A Cultural History of the James Bond Films* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Ch. 2, Postscript pp. 19-100, 268-275

*From Russia with Love* (1963)

16. June 27 **Vietnam**

Giglio, ch. 9.

Gianos, "The Cold War and Vietnam in Films," pp. 158-167.

Ryan, Michael and Keller, Douglas (1988). *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*, "Vietnam and the New Militarism," pp. 194-216

*The Deer Hunter* (1978)

17. July 1 **Hollywood's Holocaust**

Loshitzky, Yosefa (1997). *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List*, "Introduction," "Spielberg's Oskar: Hollywood Tries Evil," pp. 1-59.

Sklar, "From Myth to Memory," pp. 357-372.

Rosenbaum, "Missing the Target," pp. 98-104.

*Schindler's List* (1993)

18. July 2 **Europe's Holocaust**

Ginsburg, Terri and Thompson, Kristen Moana, eds. *Perspectives on German Cinema* (New York: G.K. Hall and Co., 1996), pp. 231-250.

*Europa, Europa* (1991)

**Third Critique Due**

19. July 3 **FINAL EXAMINATION**