

Politics & Film

Government 432

Georgetown University

Summer 2021

Professor R. Boyd

Office Hours: ICC 674, Wednesdays 9:30-10:45 and by appt

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Course Description:

This course explores foundational questions of life in a political community through a discussion of classic 20th century films. We will be mainly concerned with the role of ethics in politics, especially what these films can tell us about dilemmas of leadership, citizenship, the requirements of civil order, political obligation, justice, humanitarian duties, pluralism, and the good life—that is, some of the classic themes of political philosophy. We will also use these films to interrogate the strengths and weaknesses of leading political ideologies such as liberalism, nationalism, fascism, communism, capitalism, and cosmopolitanism. The final section of the course will explore issues of race, gender, and cultural identity in the contemporary US and a globalizing world order.

Our way of proceeding will be to pair each film with short excerpts from classic works of social and political thought that will help identify and illuminate key themes. Students are expected to do the accompanying readings in advance of our screenings (+/- 75 pages a week), submit three critical essays (2-3 pages, double-spaced) in response to assigned prompts, and participate actively in the class discussions.

Important: please note that some of the movies we will be watching this summer include graphic violence, highly offensive language, and themes of sexuality, gender, race, identity, and cross-cultural conflict that some people may find disturbing to view, let alone to discuss in class. If you are in doubt, or anticipate that any of this material may be triggering, then please take this into consideration before registering for the course. Scripts for most of the films we will be viewing are available online through multiple search portals. If you have any concerns whatsoever please discuss them with the Professor in advance of registration or screening, and we will try whenever possible to make reasonable accommodations.

Required Texts, available for purchase in inexpensive paperback editions at the Georgetown University Bookstore

Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Chicago)

* **Films, Additional Short Documents, and Excerpts**, uploaded and accessible via GU Canvas page.

Course Schedule

June 6: Introduction, overview of course format, policies, etc.

Section I: Politics and Ethics

June 7 and 8: *The Godfather* (1972)

Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 17, 18.

June 9 and 13: *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962)

*Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapters 13-18.

June 14 and 15: *Battle of Algiers* (1966)

*Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, "On Violence"

Section II: War, Totalitarianism, and Citizenship

June 16 and 21: *Triumph of the Will* (1935)

*Frankfurt School, *Authoritarian Personality*, selections.

June 22 and 23: *Casablanca* (1942)

*Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Ch. 5

*Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, selections.

June 27 and 28: *Schindler's List* (1993)

*Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, selections.

Section III: Capitalism, Communism and the Cold War Order

June 29 and 30: *Modern Times* (1936)

*Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, selections

*Antonio Gramsci, "Fordism and Taylorism"

July 5 and 6: *Wall Street* (1987)

*Milton Friedman, "Social Responsibility of Business"

Section IV: Race, Identity, and Resistance

July 7: *Bamboozled* (2000)

*Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, "The Racial Preference Licensing Act"

*Barack Obama, "A More Perfect Union," March 18, 2008 speech on race.

Course Requirements:

There are two formal course requirements for Gov 432, Politics & Film:

- 1) Each weekend you will receive through Canvas a list of 5-6 “Study Questions.” These are intended to do three things. First, these questions should prompt you to think about how the required readings for each session relate to the films we’ll be screening in class. In some cases, the connections between the readings and the films should be obvious; in other cases, the levels of interconnection may require some reflection on your part. It’s my hope that the study questions will give us common things to be watching for as we view the movies. Second, these questions will guide (though not exhaust, I hope!) our in-class discussions of the films. Finally, and most importantly, **during the semester you will choose three of these questions and respond with short (2-3 double-spaced pages) papers.** These papers may of course draw upon our in-class conversations. But they should also involve original analysis, thinking, and criticism on your part, moving beyond the examples and arguments from class or my lectures. They’ll be graded based on their originality, clarity of thought and expression, and success in shedding light on the themes featured in the movies.

There will be five sets of prompts (one for each full week of the summer course), and you must submit a short paper in response to three of these prompts. Papers are due on Sunday of the following weekend at 11:59PM (For example, you get the Study Questions on Sunday, June 5th, and the paper for that week is due the following Sunday, June 12 at 11:59PM).

Each of these three essays is worth 25% of your final grade, for a total of 75%.

- 2) Prepared attendance and class participation—25%. As noted above, most of the time we’ll have two classes to discuss each film. I’ll usually lead things off with a half hour or so of “interactive lecture,” but the remainder of the class time is your opportunity to ask questions, offer your own interpretations, and for us to discuss together. In addition to viewing each film on your own before the relevant class session, you are expected to have done accompanying readings and be prepared to discuss in relation to the film.

Attendance in the Summer Session is especially important given the accelerated pace at which we’ll be moving. Missing even a few days can put you behind and be difficult if not impossible to make up. If you know that you will have to miss more than 3 classes during the Summer Session, you should not register for this course.

Final Grade Calculation:

3 papers @ 25% each=75 points
Attendance & Participation @25%=25 points
=Maximum of 100 points

Attendance & Participation Policies:

Students should come to class having done the readings for each session and be prepared to answer questions about the material if called on. Regular attendance as well as engaged and productive contributions to our class discussions is not only necessary for a student to meet our learning

objectives. It is also a graded component of the course. Students might take the following as a very rough guideline for how A&P will be assessed:

- Absent in three or more sessions without medical documentation: 0-10/25 points
- Present in most or all sessions but no significant contributions: 20 points
- Regularly present; occasional/ unproductive contributor: 21-22 points
- Regular, active, productive participant: 23-24 points
- Class leader: 25 points

GRADING SCALE FOR GOV 080

A=100-93

A-=92.99-90

B+=89.99-87

B=86.99-83

B-=82.99-80

C+=79.99-77

C=76.99-73

C-=72.99-70

Mathematical cut-offs are absolute; I do not round grades up except under extraordinary circumstances. Students should familiarize themselves with the Department of Government's guidelines on academic evaluation (<https://government.georgetown.edu/undergraduate>):

“Grades in the Department of Government reflect high standards and university norms. For the four introductory courses, no more than 40 percent of the grades will be A-minus or higher. For other undergraduate level courses, the expectation is that no more than 50 percent of grades will be A-minus or higher. Classes with substantially higher percentage of A-minus and higher grades will be reviewed by the Department. In certain cases, such as Honors courses or courses with demonstrated high levels of effort and learning, grading percentages may go higher, but the basis for these higher grades will need to be documented.”

While I don't impose a formal “curve” with the intention of hitting these targets, and actual grade distributions may deviate significantly higher (or lower) depending on the actual quality of work submitted, this statement may serve as a rough indication of the high academic standards to be applied in evaluating academic work.