

**Political Science/Cinema Studies 312  
Popular Culture and American Politics**

**Spring 2010**

**Tuesday: 5:05-8:25pm**

**Hodges Library Viewing Room #253**

**Will Jennings**

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**Office Phone: 974-7053 (checked rarely)**

**Office Hours (also by appointment):**

**McClung Tower 1008E**

**Tuesday/Thursday: 4:30-4:55 and**

**M/W: By Appointment**

**Purpose**

This class is designed to give you a wide-ranging introduction to the portrayal of American Politics in cinema from the silent film age to the present. At the end of the semester you should have a deeper ability to analyze political issues in film, and because the course has both historical and thematic foci, you will have tracked the changes in American film across the twentieth century to the present. This course will not just utilize films with overt political messages like *The Candidate* or *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*; it will also include films with more covert political messages that allow us to analyze American culture, society, and politics, such as *The Searchers* and *Do the Right Thing*.

American films offer us a lens through which to view conflict from the Great War to the Vietnam War; women from suffrage to *Roe v. Wade* and the present, and African-Americans from Jim Crow to the Civil Rights era to President Obama. They allow us to track political change as women move from vivacious eye candy to powerful protagonists and leaders and as soldiers move from docile cannon-fodder to rebellious counter-revolutionaries. Some American films show a deep level of reverence for our political institutions, while others show the unseemly side of government corruption and cronyism. Our films reflect who we are as Americans and the astonishing diversity of our ideological and social underpinnings as a people.

**Expectations**

**Active participation in this class is a crucial component to overall success and a good grade. Students will be expected to regularly participate in class discussion and to keep up with the readings for that week's class session. Attendance is required, and more than two unexcused absences may result in a lowered class grade. Attendance will be taken at almost every class, and therefore coming to class late may result in your not being considered "present."**

**Required Textbooks**

Christensen, Terry and Peter J. Haas. *Projecting Politics: Political Messages in American Films*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 2005. (CH)

Giglio, Ernest. *Here's Looking at You: Hollywood, Film, and Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2007. (G)

**Supplementary Websites**

[www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)

(actor lists, plot summaries, etc.)

[www.mrqe.com/lookup](http://www.mrqe.com/lookup)

(database of movie reviews)

[www.brightlightsfilm.com/index.html](http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/index.html)

(history, plots, summaries)

[www.variety.com](http://www.variety.com)

(Hollywood gossip and news)

## Graded Assignments and Course Requirements

Students will be expected to complete all readings by the date assigned. In addition to the textbooks, *Projecting Politics: Political Messages in American Film* and *Here's Looking at You: Hollywood Film and Politics* there will be articles posted on Blackboard and required web research. In addition to a Midterm (March 16<sup>th</sup>) and Final (May 6<sup>th</sup>) you will have a participation/attendance grade, four pop quizzes, a Thematic Comparison Project (March 23<sup>rd</sup>), and a Short Journal Project (May 6<sup>th</sup>).

### Reading-Based Pop Quizzes (top 3 of 4 at 3.33% each=10% total)

During the course of the semester you will be given four pop quizzes on the assigned reading for that day. These quizzes will consist of 5-10 questions covering that day's readings. Of the four quizzes, only your three highest grades will be counted. If you miss a quiz for any reason, that will count as the grade to be dropped. Further absences will result in zeros for additional missed quiz grades.

### Midterm Exam (17.5% of your grade—March 16<sup>th</sup>)

The midterm exam will cover information covered in class from the beginning of the semester to the end of class on March 2<sup>nd</sup>. The midterm will be primarily short essay with a few multiple choice and short answer based on class readings and terms/concepts from lecture.

### Thematic Comparison Project (25% of your grade—March 23<sup>rd</sup>)

For this project you are to choose one of the following four film thematic groupings and compare three or more of the films on their depictions of women, lawyers, presidents, or fighters for social justice. Gauge how each film depicts the protagonist's interactions with the political and social environments around them. If you chose films from different eras, think about how the affected group's depiction and power, or lack thereof, change over time?

<b>Feminism:</b>	<i>The Women</i> (1939), <i>Norma Rae</i> (1979), <i>The Color Purple</i> (1985), <i>Thelma and Louise</i> (1991), <i>Erin Brockovich</i> (2000)
<b>Law and Justice:</b>	<i>Young Mr. Lincoln</i> (1939), <i>Inherit the Wind</i> (1960), <i>The Firm</i> (1993), <i>The Insider</i> (1999), <i>Michael Clayton</i> (2007)
<b>Presidency and Oliver Stone:</b>	<i>JFK</i> (1991), <i>Nixon</i> (1995), <i>W.</i> (2008)
<b>Social Justice:</b>	<i>Sophie's Choice</i> (1982), <i>Matewan</i> (1987), <i>Mississippi Burning</i> (1988), <i>Philadelphia</i> (1993), <i>American History X</i> (1998)

Your comparison project will be 4-5 pages, double-spaced, with 12 point *Times New Roman* font and 1" margins. Please include a title page and page numbers. You are to watch the films on your own—all of the older films are available at Hodges Library, and newer films are available at local video stores. Please keep your use of outside sources to a minimum; this is to be your reaction. However, if you do use outside sources you must document them using APSA or MLA citations.

### Journal/Responses Project (15% of your grade—May 6<sup>th</sup>)

You are to choose three of the eleven films that we watch in their entirety in class after February 3<sup>rd</sup> (meaning not *Intolerance*, *Crash*, *Maude*) and write a two-page reaction on the political themes and issues in the film. These three 2-page reaction essays are to build off of and complement what was discussed in class. They are not meant to summarize the film or restate what we went over in class discussion, but rather give your personal opinion about how the film broadened your understanding of American Politics or society.

This assignment is to be approximately 6-7 pages total, double-spaced, with 12 point *Times New Roman* font and 1" margins. You are to bring your responses with you to class on the day of the final exam.

## Final Exam

(20% of your grade—May 6<sup>th</sup>)

The final exam on Thursday, May 6<sup>th</sup>, at 7:15pm will be cumulative but will focus largely on the information covered after the mid-term. The final will be primarily short essay with a few multiple choice and short answer based on class readings and terms/concepts from lecture

## Attendance/Participation

(12.5% of your grade)

Keeping up with the assigned reading, attending class, answering questions during class lecture, and participating in discussion about the films will result in a good participation grade. I have almost never failed a student who has attended more than 90% of class sessions. ***However, students who miss more than four unexcused class sessions (one month of class) will fail the course automatically.***

That being said, if you are deathly ill, or have just been informed of the death of a close relative, don't come to class. Bring a copy of your medical paperwork (with any personal information crossed out) or the obituary of your departed loved one (with the dates you missed class written on the paperwork) and the absence will be excused. Getting excuses to me is your responsibility, and they must be turned in by the last class session on April 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Use of your laptop for non-note taking purposes, listening to an MP3 player, reading a non-Political Science 312 book or the *Daily Beacon*, or texting on/playing with your phone during class time will result in the forfeiture of 20% of your participation grade (equal to 3 points off your final grade) for each infraction.**

## Extra Credit

(+3.33% each up to a maximum of 10% added to your Participation Grade)

Since awareness of American Politics and Film is an important part of understanding and enjoying this class and being a scholar of Cinema Studies and Political Science, you can benefit from attending university or community-sponsored events that relate to the course. These could include everything from scholarly lectures to foreign or domestic films. Applicable events will be announced in class, and you should be able to fit one, two, or a maximum of three into your semester. After attending the event you will need to write a 1.5-2 page description (double spaced with 1" margins, 12 point Times New Roman font) of both what you saw and how it influenced your thinking about American politics or society. This will not substitute for missing a large number of classes, but will help if you are not speaking up much in class.

## Blackboard

By checking the grades posted on Blackboard, you will be able to keep up-to-date on your progress in the class. Grades will usually be posted on Blackboard about 1-2 days before being handed back in class. You will also be informed of class schedule changes via Blackboard or email, as well as of pertinent announcements that will be posted on Blackboard.

## My Grading Scale

93.00-99.99	A	In response to the Fall 2008 Grading Changes, my scale now reflects (-) grades. It can be an Honor Code violation to divulge your scholarship status when emailing a professor about final grades. Don't beg for a higher grade; accept what you get. Unless you believe there has been a mathematical error, I generally don't respond to emails about grades. The key to grades is hard work, participation, and taking advantage of office hours if you are struggling with the material.
90.00-92.99	A-	
87.00-89.99	B+	
83.00-86.99	B	
80.00-82.99	B-	
77.00-79.99	C+	
73.00-76.99	C	
70.00-72.99	C-	
67.00-69.99	D+	
63.00-66.99	D	
60.00-62.99	D-	

### **Policy on Plagiarism and Other Forms of Academic Dishonesty**

As defined in *Hilltopics*, “plagiarism is using the intellectual property or product of someone else without giving proper credit.” I expect every student to live up to the UT Honor Code as amended in 1995 and to document all papers using either MLA, APA, or APSA parenthetical documentation. I have caught and successfully prosecuted instances of plagiarism, and I am good at detecting it. Don’t risk your college career in order to save a few minutes.

The use of studyblue.com for anything other than sharing notes or blank study guides will be treated as plagiarism. If a completed study guide is put online, the class will not have a study guide for the final exam, and the poster will be referred to the Dean of Students for suspension or expulsion.

### **Disability Assistance**

Any student who feels that they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Requests for the use of the Testing Center must be made at least one week prior to the midterm or final exam. Please contact the Office of Disability Services at 865-974-6087 in 2227 Dunford Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

### **Notice on School-Sponsored Absences**

If you miss class because of a school-sponsored academic or athletic event, your absence is considered excused if you give me prior notification. However, all assignments are due before you depart or at the start of class on the date due.

### **Writing Assistance and Office Hours**

Sadly, only about one out of every four students takes advantage of professors’ office hours in order to discuss their academic progress. My regular office hours are from 4:30-4:55pm on Tuesday/Thursday, and if necessary I can also meet with students who contact me by email in the classroom after class or by appointment on MWF. Also, the Writing Center in HSS 211 is open for extended hours to help you with essays. They can be contacted at 974-2611 or at writingcenter@utk.edu. Their number also doubles as a Grammar Hotline.

### **Travel Advice**

While there are many areas of the developing world where civil or military strife is present, there are also many countries that are safe and fun to visit. I have traveled extensively in Africa, East Asia, the Middle East, Central America, the Caribbean, and Europe, encountering a few minor problems along the way, but never a serious incident. If you need any help planning a foreign vacation and are wondering whether a place might be interesting to visit, please ask me and I will be happy to help you plan out a trip. I also can not encourage you strongly enough to take advantage of the numerous study abroad opportunities available to UT students. I have traveled to Cameroon on a USC sponsored summer trip and to South Korea on a Fulbright delegation sponsored by the federal government, and I spent most of 2002 at the University of Stellenbosch outside Cape Town, whose website you can access at [www.sun.ac.za](http://www.sun.ac.za). The Political Science Department has a Mini-Term (May) session class in China that I strongly recommend, as well as a trip to Ghana in May through the Africana Studies program that has received rave reviews.

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## Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

- January 19            **Introduction: Analyzing Political Messages in Films**  
Giglio (G): Chapters 1 and 2 (pages 1-42)  
(Begin *Crash* (2004) from 6:45-7:45pm)
- January 26            **Political Message Formation in the Modern Era**  
Christensen and Haas (CH): Chapters 1 and 2 (pages vii to 58)  
and Appendix I (291-299)  
(Finish *Crash* (2004) from 5:05-6:05pm)
- February 2            **The Silent Movie Era: Racism and the Birth of Epic Films**  
CH: 62-72  
Web research on D.W. Griffith and *Birth of a Nation*  
(Excerpts from *Intolerance* (1916) from 6:15-7:45pm)
- February 9            **Depression, Idealism, Corruption, and Conflict: Films of the 1930s and 1940s**  
CH: 74-108  
Web research on Frank Capra and Jimmy Stewart  
(*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) from 5:50-8:00pm)
- February 16           **Desegregation and Social Change: Political Messages in Westerns**  
G: 109-124  
“Ideology Handout” (posted under Course Materials on Online@UT)  
Web Research on John Ford and John Wayne  
(*The Searchers* (1956) from 6:00-8:00pm)
- \*\*\*Optional Class Viewing: Readings, Notes, and Outside Viewing Required if You Can't Attend\*\*\*
- February 21           **Political Messages in Films with Sex and Violence**  
(Sunday)            G: 69-94  
(*Chicago* (2002) Time: TBA)
- February 23           **The Red Scare and Hollywood's Bipolar Response**  
G: 95-118  
CH: 125-142  
(*The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) from 5:50-8:00pm)
- March 2                **Hysteria and the Nuclear Holocaust**  
G: 221-242  
Web Research on Peter Sellers  
(*Dr. Strangelove* (1964) from 6:00-7:35pm)  
Midterm Exam Review—Bring Questions!!

- March 6-14           **No Class—Spring Break!!**
- March 16           **Midterm Exam** (from 5:05-6:20pm)
- Women’s Issues in Film and Popular Culture**  
                          CH: 249-276  
                          Viewing of “Maude” episodes (7:05-7:45)
- March 23           **Hollywood and War: From World War II to the Vietnam Era**  
                          G: 175-220  
                          (*Apocalypse Now* (1979) from 6:00-8:30pm)
- March 30           **Political Campaigns and Candidates in Film**  
                          G: 119-144  
                          CH: 143-170  
                          (*The Candidate* (1972) from 6:00-7:50pm)
- April 6             **Race and Film in the Modern Era**  
                          CH: 237-248  
                          CH: 171-198  
                          (*Do the Right Thing* (1989) from 6:00-8:00pm)
- April 13           **Hollywood’s Take on Bill Clinton and the 1990s**  
                          CH: 199-223  
                          (*Wag the Dog* (1997) from 6:05-7:45pm)
- April 20           **Political Documentaries from Propaganda to Cinematic Prose**  
                          CH: 228-236  
                          G: 43-68  
                          (*Bowling for Columbine* (2002) from 6:00-8:00pm)
- April 27           **Into the Future: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Film and the War on Terror**  
                          G: 243-253  
                          CH: 277-288  
                          (*Rendition* (2007) from 6:00-8:00pm)  
                          Final Exam Review—Bring Questions!!

**Our Final Exam will be in Hodges Library #253 on Thursday, May 6<sup>th</sup>, at 7:15pm!!**