

University of Tennessee
Political Science Department
Popular Culture and American Politics (POS 312)
Mondays, 5:05-7:45 pm
Hodges Library 213
Spring 2010

Instructor: Dr. Nikki Mitchell

Office Number: 1010 McClung Tower

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:00- 3:30 pm. Students may also be seen by appointment.

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Course Description/Introduction: Popular culture and politics intersect at many points. Some of these intersections include movies, books, music, television, and various kinds of Internet content. While only a small portion of the US population is considered to be the “attentive public” (individuals who keep themselves informed about current events, especially in terms of the government), most Americans are in some way informed by pop culture. Even people who care little about “hard news” go to movies, watch TV, surf YouTube, use Facebook, etc. These pop culture outlets are, in fact, powerful tools of *political socialization*. In other words, they help to shape an individual’s beliefs about politics and government. At the same time, these outlets induce changes in the way politics itself operates.

This course provides an examination of the interplay between pop culture and politics in terms of a single medium- movies. While movies are a source of entertainment, they are also a form of art. Movies can influence peoples' beliefs and experiences. They can be the propaganda of government or other organization. They are one of the most powerful political elements in the lives of US citizens. Unlike “sound bites”, films are captivating for almost two hours. They reveal the character of a nation and its culture. They serve as a significant means of socialization in society outside family and school. The films selected for this class are able to depict a multi-dimensional orientation to politics from the personal, social, ethnic, national and international levels.

Probably the most valuable contribution films can make to the study of politics is in heuristic value. Films, unlike studying politics in newspapers or journals, are narrative and have a story line in which the observer can see how events are related and understand the cause-effect relationships. Of course films only show one or a few aspects of politics, but they do so with "real" people responding to problems or pursuing a course of action. In our analysis we will address the director’s and writers’ motivations and message in making the film. Discussions will include the elements of bias and political orientation of the director and to what extent is the film an accurate account of political reality.

A Word of Warning: Many of the films we that we will be viewing contain images and language that some people may find offensive. You must watch each of these films with the class. Alternate films will not be available. Please check the list of films below and be certain that you are able and willing to view these.

Text and Materials: One required book: Gigilio, Ernest (2007). *Here’s Looking at You: Hollywood, Film & Politics*, 2nd ed. New York: Peter Lang.
Additional required reading will be posted online.

All students must have access to Blackboard (Online@UT) and UT email for communication, assignments, readings, and other class information. We will also be discussing current events as they relate to class, so you should have regular access to news sources (newspaper, TV, or Internet) in order to participate effectively. Here are a few useful news sources:

NPR News	http://www.npr.org/
The Washington Post	www.washingtonpost.com
The New York Times	www.nytimes.com
The Economist	www.economist.com
BBC News	www.bbcnews.com

In addition, the following links are a wealth of information about films:

Internet Movie Database	www.imdb.com
All Movie	www.allmovie.com
Rotten Tomatoes	www.rottentomatoes.com
Film Site	www.filmsite.org
American Film Institute	www.afi.com

Grading Scale: A = 93-100; A- = 90-92; B+ = 87-89; B = 83-86; B- = 80-82; C+ = 77-79; C = 73-76; C- = 70-72; D+ = 67-69; D = 63-66; D- = 60-62; F = 0-59
 (*Please note the university's new grading scale, which includes minuses.)

Grading Policy: The total number of possible points that may be earned is 600. The following is a breakdown of this total.

3 exams, 100 pts. each	300
paper	200
<u>attendance</u>	<u>100</u>
Total	600

Exams will consist of multiple choice and short answer/short essay questions. Students are expected to take exams during scheduled class times. **Make-ups will be permitted only in cases of pre-arranged school related activities (athletes), documented illness, or other documented extenuating circumstances.** There will be only one make-up exam session for those who qualify. This session will be immediately following this class's scheduled final exam.

This course is designated as a "writing emphasis" course in the UT catalog. Information regarding the writing component is included at the end of this syllabus.

Attendance Policy: Attendance is mandatory for this class, and makes-up 1/6 of the final grade (see above). Attendance will be recorded each day class meets. Students may miss up to 1 day (equivalent to one week of class) without penalty. Each absence above 1 will result in a 20 point deduction from the beginning attendance grade of 100%. For example, a student who misses 3 days of class will have a grade of 60%.

If you miss more than 30 minutes of class, either because you are tardy or leave early, you will be marked absent for the day.

Readings: Weekly reading assignments will be specified in class. A general schedule of topics/readings is provided below. This course schedule is designed to be flexible in order to accommodate discussion and debate. Reading in addition to the text will also be assigned. LECTURES WILL OVERLAP AS

WELL AS SUPPLEMENT THE TEXT. STUDENTS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL LECTURE NOTES AS WELL AS ASSIGNED READINGS.

*******Schedule subject to change at the instructor's discretion.*******

*******Film selections subject to change at instructor's discretion.*******

PLEASE NOTE THAT ADDITIONAL READINGS MAY BE ADDED TO THE COURSE BLACKBOARD SITE AT ANY TIME.

Schedule of Topics:

I. Weeks 1-5

A. 1/18: NO CLASS. MLK, Jr. Holiday

B. 1/25: Course introduction; The intersection of celebrity and politics; Defining the political film. Giglio, Chapters 1-2. Film: *Casablanca*

C. 2/1: Is nonfiction film really nonfiction? Giglio, Chapter 3. Film: *The War Room*.

D. 2/8: America's Favorite Film Subjects: Sex and violence; Do we need movie ratings? Giglio, Chapter 4. Film: *American Psycho*

E. 2/15: Hysteria in American Politics. Giglio, Chapter 5. Film: *The Front*.

*******Exam #1: Monday, Feb. 22 (Also notice below. There will be a film today.)**

II. Weeks 6-10

A. 2/22: Film: *The US v. John Lennon*

B. 3/1: Elections and Media; Reel Politicians versus Real Politicians; Readings: Giglio, Chapter 6, and see Blackboard. Film: *Wag the Dog*.

C. 3/8: NO CLASS. Spring Break. Work on policy paper.

D. 3/15: Lobbyists and Hollywood; Smoking and Film. Readings: See Blackboard. Film: *Thank You for Smoking*.

E. 3/22: Justice in America. Giglio, Chapter 7. Film: *To Kill a Mockingbird*

*******Exam #2: Monday, March 29 (Also notice below. There will be a film today.)**

III. Weeks 11-16

A. 3/29: Film: TBA

B. 4/5: Hollywood and the World Wars. Giglio, Chapter 8. Film: *Sergeant York*

C. 4/12: Hollywood and Vietnam. Giglio, Chapter 9. Film: *Full Metal Jacket*.

D. 4/19: Nuclear Weapons and Film: Confronting MAD. Giglio, Chapter 10. Film: *Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*

E. 4/26: The Future of the Political Film; Giglio, Chapter 11. African Americans and Film. Readings: See BlackBoard. Film: *Shaft* or *Do the Right Thing*

*******Final exam: Friday, May 7 @ 5:00 pm**

Standards of Conduct: Students are expected to abide by all *Hilltopics* standards of conduct. The guide may be accessed at <http://web.utk.edu/~homepage/hilltopics>

Students must be respectful toward one another and the instructor at all times. Debates and discussions should be based on reasoned analysis and course materials rather than emotion.

Please do not: allow cell phones to ring during class; text-message during class; arrive late or leave early; talk while the instructor is talking; read the newspaper during class; surf the Internet during class; use smokeless tobacco during class; or pack-up while the instructor is talking.

Misbehavior or disruption of the college classroom is totally unacceptable and therefore will not be tolerated. Any student who disrupts class may be asked to leave.

Statement of Plagiarism: Plagiarism (cheating) will not be tolerated. Plagiarism is the use of ideas, facts, opinions, illustrative material, data, direct or indirect wording of another scholar and/or writer—professional or student—without giving proper credit. Expulsion, suspension, or any lesser penalty may be imposed for plagiarism.

The university requires each student to commit to the following honor code, which can be found at <http://www.lib.utk.edu/instruction/plagairism/honor>

“As a student of the university, I pledge that I will neither knowingly give nor receive any inappropriate assistance in academic work, thus affirming my own personal commitment to honor and integrity.”

Email: Due to privacy concerns, students are required to communicate with their instructor using their official UT email address.

Withdrawal Policy: The deadline for withdrawing from a course with a “W” has been extended to the 63rd day of the semester (formerly 42nd day). Please note, however, that students may benefit from consulting their instructor prior to withdrawing from a course. Often the instructor can assist with challenges that arise during the semester so that withdrawal may be avoided. Students may be eligible for support services the university provides, including tutoring and other academic support, as well as assistance with personal problems.

Disability Statement: Students who have a disability that requires accommodation(s) should make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services (974-6087) to discuss their specific needs.

Public Policy Paper Assignment

DUE DATE:

Your paper will be an analysis of some policy issue as it is depicted in film. Select one of the policy topics listed below. Choose one film related to your selected issue to discuss. You can not use a film that we have seen or will see in class. Films must be US made.

What to include:

1. Background/definition of the issue: Why is this issue a public policy concern? Use statistics or other data here if applicable.
2. History of the policy issue in the US: How has this issue been dealt with by the US government (or is it a state/local issue)? When did the issue become a salient concern? Who are (or have been) the interested parties/stakeholders?
3. A brief summary of the film (include details such as historical setting)
4. A discussion of how the film depicts/presents the issue. What is the tone of the film’s treatment (serious, comedic, etc.)? Is it an accurate depiction of the issue?
5. Classification of the film according to Haas’ typology (also classify the type if it is a “nonfiction” film)
6. Motivation of the producer, director, or both
7. The US government’s position on the issue at the time the film was released
8. Effect of the film on audiences or the general public: Was the film controversial? Was it a box-office success? How did it fare internationally? Did it provoke any backlash from politicians?

The paper must conform to the following requirements:

1. You must use material from your textbook in the description of the movie as political film.
2. The format of the paper must be 8-10 pages double-spaced, 12-point font, with regular margins.
3. APSA style documentation (parenthetical) is required. No footnotes! Each paragraph must be documented when necessary.
4. You must use at least 7 references, not including your textbook. Two of these may be books. All must be academic sources. **DO NOT CITE WIKIPEDIA AS A SOURCE.**
5. The paper must be submitted via hardcopy and electronically as an email attachment to me. Submit as a doc file (.doc) or a rich text file (rtf) only (no .docx).

Policy Issues: (This is not an exhaustive list. You may create your own topic.)

- Teen pregnancy
- Crime
- Poverty
- Women's rights
- Gun control
- The environment
- Children's issues (select one: health, education, poverty)
- Worker's rights/labor
- Internet security/cyber security
- Gay/lesbian issues
- Race relations
- Immigration
- Free speech
- Religious freedom
- Freedom of the press
- Rights of the accused
- Death penalty
- Drug policy
- Disease prevention
- Gang violence
- Native American issues