

SYLLABUS
HTS 2803

REEL HISTORY: UNITED STATES HISTORY THROUGH FILM

Fall Semester 2008

Dr. Eleanor Alexander

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Class Meets: Tuesday & Thursday 1:05-2:30 pm

Classroom: 207 D. M. Smith Building

Office: 216 D. M. Smith Building

Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 2:30=3:30 p. m.
and by appointment

COURSE STATEMENT

What is history? It is a body of facts that have been accepted by historians as valid and significant. History is seeing the past through the eyes of today. The main task of the historian is not to record facts, but to interpret and evaluate them. History is the selection, arrangement, and interpretation of facts for the purpose of telling "how it really was."

Like written history, contemporary Hollywood feature films are an interpretation of their society. They too may be considered historical evidence, for they share some properties with written history. Like traditional historical materials such as diaries and newspapers, contemporary films reflect the society that produced them. Twentieth-century films are a record of that time period. Both the filmmaker and historian share a common methodology. They study appropriate sources, then select and arrange facts to tell their story. But neither a single movie, nor a single article or book can be considered the absolute authority on a topic, for both present biased interpretations. Therefore, film evidence, as well as books and articles must be evaluated in conjunction with other information on the subject, if a more balanced and truthful interpretation of history is sought.

Many argue that film evidence is invalid because filmmakers are not historians. Their primary goal is to entertain and make money, rather than presenting the truth about the past. These elements are most obvious in historical dramas. However, it is the historian's task to separate fantasy from fact. A major goal of this course is determining what is valid in contemporary films and historical dramas.

Therefore, this course examines Hollywood feature films and historical dramas as historical evidence. Students view movies on various

topics and write essays comparing that film evidence to information in more traditional sources, such as articles and book chapters. The course is based around six broad questions:

1. Is film a legitimate historical source?
2. To what extent is film evidence legitimate?
3. What determines the legitimacy of film evidence?
4. What determines the illegitimacy of film evidence?
5. Is film evidence ever better than traditional historical sources?
6. Can Hollywood films be used to teach history?

ELEMENTS OF U. S. HISTORY THAT WILL BE STUDIED

1. The Declaration of Independence
2. Slave Rebellion
3. Civil War and Reconstruction
4. The Great Depression
5. Prohibition
6. The Chain Gang as a Means of Incarceration
7. World War II Propaganda
8. McCarthyism

COURSE GOALS

1. To give students practical experience in critical analysis by evaluating full length feature films as historical evidence
2. To motivate students in the interrogation of traditional historical sources by exposing them to relevant written material on past events
3. To use film as a means of motivating students to study selected topics in United States history
4. To improve students' research and writing skills through the assignment of critical essays on selected subjects that use film and traditional sources as evidence
5. To impart some knowledge of U. S. history

COURSE TEXTS

1. Rampolla, Mary Lynn. A Pocket Guide to Writing in History. Third Edition. Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2001
2. Students will receive loose leaf binders of reading material relevant to each film's topic. There are TWO VOLUMES of reading matter. **DO NOT WRITE IN, UNDERLINE, OR HIGHLIGHT PASSAGES! EACH BINDER MUST BE RETURNED IN PRISTINE CONDITION, OR THE STUDENT LOSES TEN POINTS FROM**

**HIS/HER FINAL GRADE! IF THE BINDER IS NOT RETURNED,
STUDENTS RECEIVE THE GRADE OF "INCOMPLETE."**

COURSE FORMAT

Students view the films during class time. I shall show a movie only once. It is the student's responsibility to view those missed because of class absences. I do not lend films to students. Discussion of the film and assigned readings concludes each unit.

CLASS ROOM COURTESY

The class begins at 1:05. At 1:06 you are late and may not enter the room. Lateness is penalized as an absence. Also, students may not hold private conversations during lectures, discussions, or the viewing of films. There is no eating or drinking in the class room; and please turn off cell phones.

CLASS ATTENDANCE AND LATENESS

Students are required to attend class and to be on time. There are penalties for coming to class late and/or being absent without a valid excuse more than three times. You may enter class late and/or be absent three times without penalty. **PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS APPLIES TO A COMBINATION OF LATE ENTRIES AND ABSENCES, OR ONE OR THE OTHER. ON THE FOURTH ABSENCE AND/OR LATE ENTRY, YOUR SEMESTER GRADE IS DROPPED BY TEN POINTS.**

At 1:36 p.m., I will circulate a sign-in sheet. If you are not in the room at that time, you are absent. **IF YOU CANNOT GET TO CLASS ON TIME, I SUGGEST THAT YOU DROP THIS CLASS. LATENESS WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.**

HONOR CODE

Students at Georgia Tech adopted the honor system. Therefore, cheating in any form is prohibited. When this is detected, a "ZERO" grade is given for the assignment.

GRADING

The final grade is an average of scores accrued during the semester.
A+=95 A=90 A-=89 B+=85 B=80 B-=79 C+=75 C=70 C-=69
D+=65 D=60 D-=59 F=50

ASSIGNMENTS

Students will write nine (9) five (5) page essays evaluating selected films as historical evidence. Please note, four and one-half pages or four and three-quarters pages **are not** a five page essay! Papers of less than the required pages are penalized. **No late papers will be accepted; not even those brought to class by late-comers.** Also, I do not give make-up work.

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

1. **September 4:** Essay I: Required Readings I. Topic-- Declaration of Independence; film: 1776.
2. **September 18:** Essay II: Required Readings II. Topic-- Slave Rebellion; film: Amistad
3. **October 2:** Essay III: Required Readings III. Topic-- Civil War and Reconstruction; films: Birth of a Nation & Within Our Gates
4. **October 16:** Essay IV: Required Readings IV. Topic-- Great Depression; film: The Grapes of Wrath
5. **October 30:** Essay V: Required Reading IV. Topic-- Chain Gangs; films: I Am A Fugitive From the Chain Gang & Cool Hand Luke
6. **November 13:** Essay VI: Required Readings IV. Topic-- Prohibition; films: Little Caesar & Public Enemy.
7. **November 25:** Essay VII: Required Readings V. Topic-- World War II Propaganda; film: Casablanca
8. **December 4:** Essay VIII: Required Readings VI. Topic-- McCarthyism; films: Good Night and Good Luck & See It Now: Report on Senator Joseph McCarthy & Guilty By Suspicion
9. **Day of Final:** Essay IX: Required Readings VI. Topic-- McCarthyism; films: The Crucible & High Noon & Invasion of the Body Snatchers

HOW TO WRITE AN ANALYTICAL ESSAY

1. Essays must be five full pages of text, double spaced. Five full pages, not four and three-quarters. They must contain at least one quote from each assigned reading associated with the film. The quote must be as in this manner: "quote" (Last name of author who wrote the article, page number on which quote is located). Example: "How now brown cow" (Alexander, 13).
2. When referring to the titles of books, title of journals, or films in your essay, you must underline they must be underlined
3. Your essay must have title.
4. Do not write about the film's cinematography, camera shots, music score, or the ability of the actors. They have nothing to do with the historical validity of the film's text. Begin your essay with a thesis. This is a statement of what your essay is about. Place your thesis within an historical context. Your assigned readings will be relevant here.
5. A brief summary of the film follows the thesis. **BRIEF--NO MORE THAN TWO PARAGRAPHS.**
6. The remainder of the essay is a discussion that proves your thesis, or expounds on the opening statement.
7. You will be given a guide sheet of questions for your essays. **YOU MUST ADDRESS ALL OF THESE ISSUES IN YOUR ESSAY.**
8. Essays must contain a bibliography. This is a list of resources from which you cited your quotes. Use Mary Lynn Rampolla's book, A Pocket Guide to Writing in History for information on how to construct a bibliography.

FILM AND READING SCHEDULE

- WEEK 1 Beginning August 19—**TOPIC:** The Declaration of Independence
- FILM:** 1776
- Introduction to Class
- Lecture on film as historical evidence
- Rampolla, Mary Lynn, A Pocket Guide to Writing in History. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001. "Why Study History," 1-4; "Analyzing and Interpreting Sources," 6-7; "Reading Critically," pp. 13-14; "Evaluating Internet Sources," pp. 19-20; "Summaries." 20-21

READINGS I

FILM: 1776

McCullough, David. "True Blue." John Adams. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001

_____. "Colossus of Independence." John Adams. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001

WEEK II Beginning August 26—**TOPIC:** Slave Rebellion

FILM: Amistad

Lecture: Writing an Essay; Constructing a Bibliography

Rampolla. A Pocket Guide. "History Papers," 23-24; "Short Essays," 24-26; "Revising and Editing Your Paper," 28-29; "The Introduction and Thesis," 44-47; "The Body," 47-51; "Conventions for Using Quotations," 59-61; "Avoiding Plagiarism, 63-63;" "Bibliography," 65; "Models for Bibliography Entries," 84-85; 88

READINGS II

Alexander, Eleanor. "A Portrait of Cinque." Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin, 49:1 (1984) 31-51

Newman, Richard. "Not the Only Story in "Amistad" . . . Pennsylvania History, 67:2 (2000), 218-139

WEEK III Beginning September 2—**TOPIC:** Civil War & Reconstruction

FILMS: Birth of a Nation

Within Our Gates

Discussion: 1776

Continue Amistad

READINGS III

Chadwick, Bruce. "Birth: Titanic Box Office and Tattered Legacy." The Reel Civil War. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001

Cripps, Thomas. "The Year of Birth of a Nation," Slow Fade To Black. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993

Foner, Eric. Slavery, Civil War and Reconstruction. Washington, D. C.: American Historical Association, 1990

- WEEK IV Beginning September 9—**TOPIC** Civil War and Reconstruction (Continued)
FILMS: Birth of a Nation
Within Our Gates
- WEEK V Beginning September 16—**TOPIC:** The Great Depression
FILM: The Grapes of Wrath
 Lecture: The Great Depression
READINGS IV
 California Citizens Association. "California Citizens Association Report." Screening America. Ed. By James L. Lorence. New York: Pearson Longman, 2006
- Gerdes, Louise, ed. "Causes of the Great Depression." The 1930s. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2000
- _____. "Depression, Farming, Drought, Dust, and Displacement." The 1930s. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2000
- McDean, Harry C. "The 'Okie' Migration as a Socio-economic Necessity in Oklahoma." Red River Valley Historical Review, 3:1 (1978) 77-92
- Steinbeck, John. "John Steinbeck Describes the Migrant Experience." Screening America. Ed. By James J. Lorence. New York: Pearson Longman, 2006
- WEEK VI Beginning September 23—**TOPIC:** Chain Gangs
FILMS:
I Am A Fugitive From the Chain Gang
Cool Hand Luke
- READINGS IV**
 Lewis, Randolph. "Black and White on the Chain Gang: Representing Race and Punishment." Borderlines, 3:3 (1996) 225-248
- Lichenstein, Alex. "Good Roads and Chain Gangs in the Progressive Era." Journal of American History, 59:1 (February 1993) 85-110

WEEK VII Beginning September 30—**TOPIC:** Chain Gangs
(Continued)

FILMS: I Am a Fugitive From the Chain Gang
Cool Hand Luke

WEEK VIII Beginning October 7—**TOPIC:** Prohibition

FILMS: Public Enemy
Little Caesar

READINGS IV

Gerdes, Louise. "The Changing Mood of America:
The Repeal of Prohibition." The 1930s.
San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2000

_____. "Gangsters and G-Men: Fighting
Crime in the Thirties." The 1930s. San Diego:
Greenhaven Press, 2000

Jowett, Garth. "Bullets, Beer and the Hays Office:
Public Enemy (1931)." American History/American
Film: Interpreting the Hollywood Image. Ed. By
John O'Connor and Martin Jackson. New York:
Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1979

Repetto, Thomas. "Prohibition: The Mob Strikes a
Bonanza." American Mafia: A History of Its Rise
To Power. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004
_____. "The 'Get Capone' Drive: Print in Legend."
American Mafia: A History of Its Rise to Power. New
York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004

WEEK IX Beginning October 14—**TOPIC:** Prohibition
(Continued)

FILMS: Public Enemy
Little Caesar

WEEK X Beginning October 21—**TOPIC:** Film as World War II
Propaganda

FILM: Casablanca
Lecture: World War II Propaganda Films

Readings V

- Black, Gregory. "Keys to the Kingdom: Entertainment And Propaganda." South Atlantic Quarterly, 75: 4 (1976) 434-446
- Fynes, Koppes, and Myers, "World War II Propaganda Films." Class Readings
- Martin, James et al. "Beginning of World War II." America And Its People: A Mosaic in the Making. New York: Pearson Longman, 2004
- Rehorn, Marlette. "Casablanca—A Farewell to Isolationism." Screening America: Using Hollywood Films to Teach History. New York: Peter Lang, 1998
- Weinberg, Sydney. "What to Tell America: The Writer's Quarrel in the Office of War Information." Journal of American History, 55: 1(1968) 73-89

WEEK XI Beginning October 28—TOPIC: McCarthyism
 FILMS: Goodnight & Good Luck
See It Now: Report on Senator McCarthy
Guilty By Suspicion

Lecture: McCarthyism

READINGS VI

- Kallen, Stuart. "The Cold War and McCarthyism." The 1950s. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2000
- Knecht, Richard J. "The Ethos of Senator Joseph McCarthy." Michigan Academician, 20:4 (1988) 110 429-438
- O'Connor, John E. "Edward R. Murrow's Report on Senator McCarthy: Image as Artifact." Film & History, 16:3 (1986) 52-72
- Thornton, Brian. "Published Reaction When Murrow Battled McCarthy." Journalism History, 29: 3 (Fall 2003) 1-17
 (Finish Casablanca)

WEEK XII Beginning November 4—TOPIC: McCarthyism
 (Continued)

FILMS: Goodnight & Good Luck

Guilty By Suspicion

See It Now: Report on Senator Joseph McCarthy

WEEK XIII Beginning November 11--**TOPIC: McCarthyism**
(Continued)

FILMS: The Crucible

High Noon

Invasion of the Body Snatchers

READINGS:

Morgan, Ted. "Red-Hunter Joe." Reds: McCarthyism

In Twentieth-Century America. New York:

Random House, 2003

WEEK XIV Beginning November 18—**TOPIC: McCarthyism**
(Continued)

FILMS: The Crucible

High Noon

Invasion of the Body Snatchers

WEEK XV Beginning November 25—**TOPIC: McCarthyism**

FILMS: The Crucible

High Noon

Invasion of the Body Snatchers

WEEK XVI Beginning December 2—Discussion and Review

WEEK XVII Final essay due on final exam day