

HTS 3803 A

REEL HISTORY II: UNITED STATES HISTORY
THROUGH FEATURE FILMS

Spring Semester 2006
Dr. Eleanor Alexander

eleanor.alexander@hts.gatech.edu

Class Meets: Tuesday & Thursday

Time: 1: 35-2:55 p. m.

Office: 216 D. M. Smith Building

Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 8:00-9:30

OR

Tuesday & Thursday 11:00-12:00 p. m.

OR

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 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 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 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 chapter 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 evidence of the past. 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 feature films be used to teach history?

ELEMENTS OF U. S. HISTORY EXAMINED THROUGH FILM THIS SEMESTER:

1. American Communism
2. The Cold War
3. The Problem of Nuclear Power
4. Anti-Semitism in America
5. Juvenile Delinquency in the 1950s
6. Labor Unions
7. Racial Segregation in America
8. Civil Rights Era: The Mississippi Freedom Summer
9. The Aids Epidemic

COURSE GOALS

1. To give students experience in critical analysis by evaluating feature films and related written documents as historical evidence
2. To motivate students to study selected historical events and periods through the use of related feature films
3. To improve students' research and writing skills through the assignment of critical essays that use film and traditional sources as evidence
4. To acquaint students with the historian's craft of writing history
5. To impart some knowledge of America's past

COURSE TEXTS

1. Griffith, John Howard. Black Like Me. N.P: Wings Press, 2004
2. Rampolla, Mary Lynn. A Pocket Guide to Writing in History. Third Edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Marin's, 2001
3. Students will receive loose leaf binders of reading material relevant to each film's topic. There are TWO VOLUMES of reading mater. **DO NOT WRITE IN, UNDERLINE, OR HIGHLIGHT PASSAGES! EACH BINDER MUST BE RETURNED IN PRISTINE CONDITION , OR THE STUDENT LOSES TEN POINTS FROM HER/HIS FINAL GRADE. IF THE BINDERS ARE NOT RETURNED, THE STUDENT WILL RECEIVE THE GRADE OF "INCOMPLETE."**

COURSE FORMAT

The course is divided into nine units of study. Feature films related to the topic will be shown in class. Films will be shown only once, and during class periods. Movies are not available for loan. It is the student's responsibility to view films missed because of absences. Critical essays will be written on each unit, using films and written sources as evidence. A class discussion of this material follows the completion of each essay assignment.

CLASS ROOM COURTESY

The class begins at 1:35 p. m. At 1:36 you are late and may not enter the room. Therefore, lateness is penalized as an absence. Also, students may not hold conversations

during lectures, discussions or the viewing of films. Similarly, there is no eating and drinking during class time.

CLASS ATTENDANCE AND THE LATE ARRIVAL FACTOR

Students are required to attend class. 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 ARRIVALS 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 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 COURSE. 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. Plagiarism is cheating!

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 F=50

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Regular attendance
2. Participation in class discussions
3. A well prepared critical essay for each unit of study. The essay will evaluate the historical accuracy of the film(s) viewed, and comment on the event or period represented. Use each unit's assigned readings in your essays. You may also use additional Internet material if properly documented. However, you may not substitute these articles for the assigned readings. Internet sources may also be used as background information. **PLEASE NOTE:** Late papers are not accepted; not even those brought by late-comers. Essays are due at 1:36 on the assigned due date. Also, I do not give make-up work!

HOWTO WRITE AN ANALYTICAL ESSAY

1. Essays must be **five full pages in length** and double spaced. Also, they must contain at least one quote from each assigned reading associated with the film. The quote must be cited in the text in this manner: "Quote" (Last name of author from whose article you took the quote, page number on which quote is located). Example: "How now brown cow" (Alexander, 13).
2. When referring to books, journals, or films in your essay, you must underline the titles.
3. Your essay must have a title.
4. Your essay must have a thesis or statement of what your paper is about.

5. Place your thesis within an historical context. Your assigned readings will give you clues.
6. Do not write about the film's musical score, actors, cinematography, or technical wizardry. They have nothing to do with the historical validity of the film's content.
7. A brief summary of the film follow the opening paragraph. **BRIEF—NOT MORE THAN TWO PARAGRAPHS.**
8. You will be given a guide sheet of questions for your essays. **YOU MUST ADDRESS ALL OF THESE ISSUES IN THE ESSAY.**
9. Each essay contains a bibliography. This is a list of the articles and books from which you cited quotes. The bibliography is placed at the end of the essay. Use Mary Lynn Rampolla's book, A Pocket Guide To Writing in History for information on constructing a bibliography.

FILM, READING, AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

Unit I: American Communism

Films: I Was a Communist for the FBI

I Married a Communist

My Son John

Readings I

"Communism." <http://bartleby.com/65/col/communism/html>

Accessed December 31, 2005

"Communism vs. Capitalism." <http://www.germane-software.com/~ser/Files/Essay/communism.html#N400018>

Accessed December 31, 2005

"Communist Party, in the United States." <http://www.bartelby.com/65/00/CommunismUS.html>.

Accessed January 2, 2006

"History of the FBI: Postwar America, 1945-1960." <http://fbi.gov/libref/historic/history/postwar.html>

Accessed December 31, 2005

Klehr, Harvey et al. The Secret World of American Communism.

New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995

"The Communist Party and African-Americans." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Communist_Party-and_African-Americans

Accessed January 3, 2006

"What Was the Cold War?" <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/what%20was%20the%20cold%20war.htm>

Accessed January 2, 2006

Essay Due: January 26

Unit II: The Cold War

Films: Dr. Strangelove

Fail Safe

Readings II

- Friedman, Norman. "The Nuclear Revolution in Warfare." The Fifty Year War. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000
- Healy, Paul. "In Retrospect: What Did the World Learn in 50 Years?" <http://www.pjhealy.com/coldwar/final#yalta>.
Accessed January 2, 2006
- _____. "The Arms Race: How Technology Defined Our Identity." <http://www.pjhealy.com/coldwar/arms.html>
Accessed January 1, 2006
- _____. "The Cold War Abroad: The Foreign Policy of the Cold War." <http://www.pjhealy.com/coldwar/foreign.html>
Accessed January 2, 2006
- Kallen, Stuart. "What to Do in Case of Atomic Attack." The 1950s. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2000
- "Military: Cuban Missile Crisis." <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/cuba-62.htm>
Accessed January 2, 2006
- "Treaty of Tlatelolco" <http://www.opanal/Tlateloloco/Frame2i.htm>
Accessed January 2, 2006

Essay Due: February 9

Unit III: The Problem of Nuclear Power

Films: The China Syndrome
Silkwood

Readings III

- Mayell, Mark. "Accidents Waiting to Happen." Nuclear Accidents. San Diego: Thompson Gale, 2004
- _____. "From Meltdowns to Leaks." Nuclear Accidents. San Diego: Thompson Gale, 2004
- "The Furor Over Fission: The Images and Realities of Nuclear Technology." http://www.fbs.org/newshour/forum/november96/nuclear_fears5.html
Accessed January 2, 2006
- Webb, Richard. "Introduction." The Accident Hazards of Nuclear Power Plants. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1976
Accessed January 2, 2006

Essay Due: March 2

Unit IV: Anti-Semitism in America

Films: Crossfire
Gentlemen's Agreement

Readings III

- Dinnerstein, Leonard. "Antisemitism at High Tide: World War II." Antisemitism in America. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994
- Gerber, David A. "Anti-Semitism and Jewish-Gentile Relations in American Historiography and the American Past." Anti-Semitism in American Life. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1986
- Jaher, Frederick. "The Anatomy of Anti-Semitism." A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994
- Perlmutter, Nathan and Ruth Ann Perlmutter. "Discovering Anti-Semitism and Together Growing Older." The Real Anti-Semitism in America. New York: Arbor House, 1982

Essay Due: March 16

Unit V: Juvenile Delinquency in the 1950s

Films: Rebel Without a Cause
The Blackboard Jungle
The Wild Ones

Readings V

- Cohen, Ronald D. "The Delinquents: Censorship and Youth Culture in Recent U. S. History." History of Education Quarterly, 37:3 (1997) 251-290
- Jezer, Marty. "Chapter Eleven." The Dark Ages: Life in the United States, 1945-1960. Boston: South End Press, 1982
- Mathias, Charles McC. "Everything Begins at Home: The Problem Of Juvenile Crime." American Judicature Society, 56: 5 (1972) 189-194
- Polk, Kenneth. "A Reassessment of Middle Class Delinquency." Youth & Society, 2:3 (1997) 333-352

Essay Due: March 30

Unit VI: Labor Unions

Films: Norma Rae
On the Waterfront

Readings VI

- Hall, Jacqueline Dowd. "Disorderly Women: Gender and Labor Militancy in the Appalachian South." Journal of American History (September 1986) 73, 354-382
- Johnson, Malcolm. On The Waterfront. New York: Chamberlain Brothers, 2005 (pages 3-32; 45-55)
- Patton, Randall L. "Textile Organizing in a Sunbelt South Community: Northwest Georgia's Carpet Industry in the Early 1960s." Labor History, 39: 3(1998) 291-309
- Simon, Bryant. "Rethinking Why There are So few Unions in the South." Georgia Historical Quarterly, 81 (1990) 465-484

Essay Due April 13

Unit VII: Racial Segregation in America

Films: Black Like Me

The Jackie Robinson Story

Readings VII: Griffith, John Howard. Black Like Me

Essay Due: April 27

Unit VIII: Civil Rights: The Mississippi Freedom Summer

Film: Mississippi Burning

Readings VIII

Williams, Juan. "Mississippi Has Never Been Free." Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1945-1965. New York: Penguin Books, 1988

Essay Due: May 4

Unit IX: The AIDS Epidemic

Film: Philadelphia

Readings IX

Donovan, Mark C. "Social Construction of People With Aids." Policy Studies Review, 12:3-4 (Autumn/Winter) 3-29

Grmek, Mirko. "Proclaim a New Disease." History of Aids. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990

N'Daba, Louis and Jane Hodges-Aeberhard. "Enterprising Practices Regarding The Employment of Workers With HIV/AIDS." HIV/AIDS and Employment. Geneva: International Labour Office, 1998

_____. "The Role of Employer's and Worker's Organizations." HIV/AIDS and Employment. Geneva: International Labour Office, 1998

Perrow, Charles and Mauro Guillen. "The Unique Features of Aids." The Aids Disaster. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990

Sargeant, Georgia. "N. Y. Lawyer With AIDS Fired, Vindicated by Human Rights Commission." <http://media.server.amazon.com/exedrm/amzproxy.cgi/MzUyH/zQjq3R3V7X/EWEASJ5C7NQU5VWDXbUHw+Jgh+2NfRHoLCSE9zXJQkGkTL7GjusOaO+8G>
Accessed January 2, 2006

Essay Due: Day of finals