

POLITICS THROUGH FILM
POLS 3012
Summer Session I, 2010

Classroom: Brewster C-102
Class time: Tues. and Thurs., 1:15 p.m. to 5:15 p.m.
Office hours: Tues. and Thurs., 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Instructor: Dr. Peter L. Francia
Office: Brewster A-119
Telephone: 252-328-6126
E-Mail: franciap@ecu.edu

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course examines the political messages communicated in various films from the 1930s to the present. Some of the movies covered in class are overtly political (i.e., they depict various aspects of the political system) whereas others are devoid of explicit political references but convey important political or social messages. As the syllabus outlines below, I have organized the course around specific political themes that capture the mood of a given historical period.

COURSE STRUCTURE

Classes will begin with a one-hour lecture on the background and the prevailing political issues of the historical era listed for the week. The second and third hours of class will be devoted to the screening of a selected film that relates to the political issue(s) from the period covered in the lecture. The final hour of class will involve class discussion of the film and its political meaning.

READINGS AND REQUIREMENTS

- (1) *Optional Reading*: Terry Christensen and Peter J. Haas, *Projecting Politics: Political Messages in American Films* (M.E. Sharpe, 2005).
- (2) *Requirements*: Several movies that are a part of this course will not be shown in class. It will be your responsibility to see these movies on your own time. I strongly recommend a subscription with Netflix, Blockbuster, or your local video store.
- (3) *Warning*: Several of the films shown in class have an “R” rating. An R-rated motion picture may include dialogue with profanity, racial, ethnic, and/or sexist slurs; graphic violence; nudity and/or sexual situations; drug use; and/or other adult themes. Please see me if you have any moral, religious, political, or other objections to viewing films with an “R” rating.

EVALUATION

- (1) Class attendance and participation = 20% of your final grade.
- (2) Four short (3-page) writing assignments = 40% of your final grade (10% for each assignment).
- (3) You have the option of choosing to write a 10-page comparative film paper or to take an in-class final exam. The paper/exam = 40% of your final grade.

CLASS ATTENDANCE

Class attendance is mandatory. I will circulate an attendance sign-in sheet at the beginning of each lecture. It is your responsibility to make sure that you sign the attendance sheet if you are present in class. If you arrive excessively late to class or if you leave class early, you will receive only partial credit for attendance. Your class attendance grade will be based on the percentage of classes that you attend (e.g., a student who attends every class will earn a 100; a student who attends half of the classes will earn a 50, etc.). Students who are active participants during class discussions will receive a bonus point added to their overall course grade.

3-PAGE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

As noted above, there will be four short writing assignments. I will provide you with the topic of the paper at the end of every class on Thursday. The papers should be roughly 3 pages in length (double-spaced, one-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font) and will be due to me in one week (i.e., a paper assigned on May 20 will be due on May 27). Grades for the short writing assignments will be scored from 0 to 5. The average of these scores will form the basis of your "short writing assignment" grade (e.g., a student who earns 5 points on the first three writing assignments and 4 points on the fourth assignment would earn 19 out of 20 possible points for an average of 95).

EXCUSED ABSENCES

I will excuse absences only for an incapacitating or contagious illness, unavoidable surgery, a death in the immediate family, or if you are a member of an ECU athletic team that requires you to travel and miss class. You must present some form of verification if you wish to have your absence excused. Acceptable forms of verification include the following: (1) a doctor's note indicating the severity of your illness or that you required unavoidable surgery; (2) an obituary; or (3) official documentation from the athletic department indicating your travel schedule. You must present me with verification no later than one week after the absence.

10-PAGE PAPER AND FINAL EXAM ATTENDANCE POLICY

If you opt to write the 10-page comparative film paper, a one-page summary of your topic is due on June 3, 2010. The completed 10-page paper is due at the beginning of class on June 23, 2010. No extensions will be granted for any reason. If you have not completed the one-page summary by June 3 or the completed paper by June 23, then you must take the in-class final exam. I will not accept any work via e-mail attachments (hard copies only). For those students who take the final exam, please come prepared to class with an exam booklet and a pen. Failure to be present for the final exam will result in an automatic "0." If you cannot attend the exam, you must contact me before I have administered the test (no later than 1:00 p.m. on June 23). I will grant a make-up exam only for extraordinary circumstances. If you miss the exam because of an illness, you are still required to contact me before the exam. You must also present me with a note from your doctor that verifies your illness was serious enough to prevent you from taking the exam. If you have questions about a possible school closing due to severe weather or other reasons, please call the University Emergency Telephone Number at 252-328-0062.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I will strictly enforce the university code of academic integrity. Violations include:

- (1) Cheating. Unauthorized aid or assistance or the giving or receiving of unfair advantage on any form of academic work.
- (2) Plagiarism. Copying the language, structure, ideas, and/or thoughts of another and adopting same as one's own original work. (Please note that failure to recognize and cite the work of others in your research constitutes plagiarism.)
- (3) Falsification. Statement of any untruth, either spoken or written, regarding any circumstances relative to academic work.
- (4) Attempts. Attempting any act that if completed would constitute an academic integrity violation as defined herein.

For more information about university policies concerning academic integrity, please visit the website: <http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/fsonline/customcf/facultymanual/part4/44.htm>. The penalties for violating the university code of academic integrity range from failure in the course to possible expulsion from the university.

CLASSROOM RULES

The classroom is a learning environment. I expect all students to observe some basic rules of courtesy, which include the following: (1) arrive to class on time and do not leave before class is dismissed; (2) turn off cell phones; (3) laptop use during class is solely limited to note-taking and may not be used for music listening, game playing, web browsing, or Internet chats; (4) no eating during class; (5) do not read the newspaper, listen to music through headphones, etc., during class; (6) do not sleep during class; (7) do not carry on private conversations with others in the classroom while someone else is speaking; and (8) please be courteous to your classmates and respectful of your fellow students' views, comments, and questions. Failure to follow these rules will negatively affect your class attendance and participation grade. Repeated offenses could result in your expulsion from the class.

DISABILITY SERVICES

East Carolina University seeks to comply fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students requesting accommodations based on a covered disability must go to the Department for Disability Support Services located in Slay 138 to verify the disability before any accommodations can occur. The telephone number is 252-737-1016.

APPOINTMENTS

My office is located in the Brewster Building, Room A-119. My office hours are from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. every Tuesday and Thursday. If you cannot meet with me during office hours, please see me after class or contact me by telephone or e-mail to schedule an appointment. If you need to reach me after 6:00 p.m., please use e-mail.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1. Radical Politics of the Depression Era

May 18, 2010. Screening: *Gabriel Over the White House* (1933, Gregory La Cava)

May 20, 2010. Screening: *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940, John Ford)

- Optional reading for the week: *Projecting Politics*, Chapter 5.

Week 2. Democracy in Transition in the Post-World War II Era

May 25, 2010. Screening: *State of the Union* (1948, Frank Capra)

May 27, 2010. Screening: *The Last Hurrah* (1958, John Ford)

- Optional reading for the week: *Projecting Politics*, Chapters 6-7.

Week 3. Individual Freedom and Civil Liberties in the Counterculture Era

June 1, 2010. Screening: *Easy Rider* (1969, Dennis Hopper)

June 3, 2010. Screening: *Dirty Harry* (1971, Don Siegel); paper topic approval deadline

- Optional reading for the week: *Projecting Politics*, Chapter 8.

Week 4. Corporate Control and Power in the Post-Watergate and Reagan Era

June 8, 2010. Screening: *Network* (1976, Sidney Lumet)

June 10, 2010. Screening: *Wall Street* (1987, Oliver Stone)

- Optional reading for the week: *Projecting Politics*, Chapters 9-10.

Week 5. “Politics as Usual?” Hope and Cynicism in the Clinton Era

June 15, 2010. Screening: *Primary Colors* (1998, Mike Nichols)

June 17, 2010. Screening: *Bulworth* (1998, Warren Beatty)

- Optional reading for the week: *Projecting Politics*, Chapter 11.

Week 6. Foreign Policy and Military Intervention in the Post 9/11 World

June 22, 2010. Screening: *Charlie Wilson’s War* (2007, Mike Nichols)

June 23, 2010. Paper due/Final Exam

- Optional reading for the week: *Projecting Politics*, Chapter 15.

10-PAGE PAPER ASSIGNMENT

The movies shown in class have various messages about important political and social subjects. These films each make somewhat different statements about the health of American government, its elections, its financial system, its people, its criminal justice system, the press, and the military. There are also broader themes in some of the films that touch on issues of power, challenging authority, self-expression and liberation, and even the bounds of how much freedom individual citizens should have. Some films have a pessimistic outlook. Others acknowledge problems, but remain optimistic about the future. For your paper, select a political message and compare it to three films listed in the addendum (see pp. 6-7). The paper should identify similarities and differences in the three films, and discuss how the political circumstances surrounding the historical era in which each film was made may have influenced its message.

There are two deadlines for this assignment. The first deadline is June 3. By this date, you must submit a one-page summary of your paper topic for approval. Your final paper is due on June 23.

PREPARING THE PAPER

- To earn a passing grade, your paper should include a minimum of four academic sources.
- You may find it useful to access movie reviews and other information. Some helpful websites include: mrqe.com; imdb.com; metacritic.com; rottentomatoes.com; and lib.berkeley.edu/mrc. Lexis-Nexus is another excellent resource for movie reviews published in newspapers and magazines.
- Any papers without citations or a proper bibliography are guilty of plagiarism. These papers will receive an automatic “F” and may be subject to additional disciplinary action.
- All papers must follow the *Style Manual for Political Science* (1993) published by the American Political Science Association (APSA). For information, see the website: http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/DocAPSA_RefList.html
- All papers should be organized with headings and subheadings, as well as double-spaced with one-inch margins in 12-point Times New Roman font. Page numbers should also be included.
- A well-written paper requires a thesis or an argument. You should state your thesis in the beginning or introduction of the paper.
- The introduction should tell the reader what exactly you are going to say in the paper. The introduction also should arouse the interest of the reader.
- The body of the paper should provide evidence that convinces the reader of your central argument. Citations from books, articles, and other sources are necessary to make your argument as convincing as possible. The best outside sources are academic books and journal articles.
- The conclusion should summarize your major arguments and consider any implications related to your thesis. It should also tie together your central points in a coherent manner.

FILM ADDENDUM

Any of the 75 films below are acceptable for your 10-page paper. Undoubtedly, countless more films could be added to this list. If there is a film that you wish to include in your paper that is not on this list, please see me for approval (no later than June 3). If you opt to take the in-class final exam, you will be responsible for viewing any movie designated with an asterisk (*).

* <i>All Quiet on the Western Front</i> (1930, Lewis Milestone)
<i>I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang</i> (1932, Mervyn LeRoy)
* <i>Mr. Smith Goes to Washington</i> (1939, Frank Capra)
<i>Citizen Kane</i> (1941, Orson Welles)
<i>Meet John Doe</i> (1941, Frank Capra)
* <i>All the Kings Men</i> (1949, Robert Rossen)
<i>High Noon</i> (1952, Fred Zinneman)
<i>On the Waterfront</i> (1954, Elia Kazan)
<i>Invasion of the Body Snatchers</i> (1956, Don Siegel)
* <i>12 Angry Men</i> (1957, Sidney Lumet)
<i>The Bridge on the River Kwai</i> (1957, David Lean)
<i>Spartacus</i> (1960, Stanley Kubrick)
<i>Advise and Consent</i> (1962, Otto Preminger)
<i>The Manchurian Candidate</i> (1962, John Frankenheimer)
* <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> (1962, Robert Mulligan)
<i>Dr. Strangelove</i> (1964, Stanley Kubrick)
<i>Seven Days in May</i> (1964, John Frankenheimer)
<i>The Graduate</i> (1967, Mike Nichols)
<i>In the Heat of the Night</i> (1967, Norman Jewison)
<i>Planet of the Apes</i> (1968, Franklin Schaffner)
<i>Catch-22</i> (1970, Mike Nichols)
<i>MASH</i> (1970, Robert Altman)
* <i>Patton</i> (1970, Franklin Schaffner)
* <i>The Candidate</i> (1972, Michael Ritchie)
<i>Blazing Saddles</i> (1974, Mel Brooks)
<i>Swept Away</i> (1974, Lina Wertmuller)
<i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i> (1975, Milos Forman)
* <i>All the President's Men</i> (1976, Alan Pakula)
<i>F.I.S.T.</i> (1978, Norman Jewison)
<i>An Unmarried Woman</i> (1978, Paul Mazursky)
<i>Apocalypse Now</i> (1979, Francis Ford Coppola)
<i>The Deer Hunter</i> (1979, Michael Cimino)
<i>Hair</i> (1979, Milos Forman)
<i>Kramer vs. Kramer</i> (1979, Robert Benton)
<i>Norma Rae</i> (1979, Martin Ritt)
<i>Gideon's Trumpet</i> (1980, Robert Collins)
<i>Gandhi</i> (1982, Richard Attenborough)
<i>Mr. Mom</i> (1983, Stan Dragoti)
<i>Red Dawn</i> (1984, John Milius)
<i>Platoon</i> (1986, Oliver Stone)

FILM ADDENDUM (continued)

<i>Full Metal Jacket</i> (1987, Stanley Kubrick)
<i>Matewan</i> (1987, John Sayles)
<i>Mississippi Burning</i> (1988, Alan Parker)
<i>Born on the Fourth of July</i> (1989, Oliver Stone)
<i>Do the Right Thing</i> (1989, Spike Lee)
<i>The Hunt for Red October</i> (1990, John McTiernan)
<i>Boyz N the Hood</i> (1991, John Singleton)
<i>Hoffa</i> (1992, Danny DeVito)
<i>Malcolm X</i> (1992, Spike Lee)
<i>Dave</i> (1993, Ivan Reitman)
<i>Falling Down</i> (1993, Joel Schumacher)
<i>Menace II Society</i> (1993, Allen and Albert Hughes)
<i>Philadelphia</i> (1993, Jonathan Demme)
<i>Schindler's List</i> (1993, Steven Spielberg)
<i>The Shawshank Redemption</i> (1994, Frank Darabont)
<i>The American President</i> (1995, Rob Reiner)
<i>Braveheart</i> (1995, Mel Gibson)
<i>Dead Man Walking</i> (1995, Tim Robbins)
<i>Nixon</i> (1995, Oliver Stone)
<i>The People v. Larry Flynt</i> (1996, Milos Forman)
<i>Amistad</i> (1997, Steven Spielberg)
* <i>Wag the Dog</i> (1997, Barry Levinson)
<i>Les Miserables</i> (1998, Bille August)
<i>Saving Private Ryan</i> (1998, Steven Spielberg)
<i>The Contender</i> (2000, Rob Lurie)
<i>The Patriot</i> (2000, Roland Emmerich)
<i>Thirteen Days</i> (2000, Roger Donaldson)
<i>Steal This Movie</i> (2000, Robert Greenwald)
<i>Black Hawk Down</i> (2001, Ridely Scott)
<i>We Were Soldiers</i> (2002, Randall Wallace)
* <i>V for Vendetta</i> (2005, James McTeigue)
<i>The Lives of Others</i> (2006, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck)
<i>Frost/Nixon</i> (2008, Ron Howard)
<i>Milk</i> (2008, Gus Van Sant)
<i>W</i> (2008, Oliver Stone)