Politics and Film PS 350 – Fall 2015
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Office hours and location: Mondays and Wednesdays – 4:30 to 5:30, PLC 808

GTFs:

Culture constitutes shared signs and expressions that can reveal, determine, and otherwise influence politics. The film medium is perfectly tailored for this: the power of moving image with sound, reflected in public spaces, produces politically charged identities and influences the way spectators see themselves and their shared communities. Moreover, the interwoven nature of the economic and social in cinema makes it an especially intriguing site for observing change of political culture over time. The economic commodity of the cinema is necessarily social—a nexus of public and shared images of the world. Conversely, the social constraints (ie moral regulation or censorship of film content) is necessarily shaped by economic factors.

The “Dream Machine” of Hollywood is a potent meaning-making site not just for Americans but across the world (today, roughly half of a Hollywood film’s revenue often comes from overseas), and so this course will pay close attention to Hollywood film texts and contexts in a global setting. The second half of the term (starting in Week 5) will shift to a comparative approach, contrasting American and Italian film styles, industries, regulatory concerns, and economic strategies. Analytic comparison is a crucial aspect of this course—be it comparisons across genres, time periods, films, or industries—and will culminate in a comparative research paper due on Week 10.

There will be one film screening in class every week. Please note: Attendance to these screenings is part of your class responsibilities. I think it is important to view these movies in a critical and shared setting. Being around your fellow peers and sharing a film experience can really help critical observation and understanding. In addition to in class screenings, there will be an assigned viewing for every week, a film that you must procure, rent, or otherwise obtain and watch in its entirety. These films will also be available on reserve at the UO library.

There will be a midterm exam on Week 6, the exam will have 10 multiple choice questions and 4 short essays questions. There will be a final during finals week, with the same format as the midterm. In addition to a midterm and final, there will be two unscheduled pop movie quizzes. The quizzes will test you only on screened and assigned films, not on the assigned readings. A comparative 10 page paper is due on Week 10. This paper will critically examine two films, genres, industries, or time periods of your choice, comparing their political reflection and outcomes, with a specific argument that shapes your analysis. Paper topics need to be discussed via email or in person to a GTF before you begin research and writing. I will provide you with a guideline for the comparative analysis by Week 3. All readings for the course will be available on blackboard.
Plagiarism is a violation of your responsibilities as a student at the university and will not be tolerated.

Please come see me with any special needs you may have as a student. We will do our best to accommodate any issues or concerns.

Midterm Exam: 20% of your grade
Final Exam: 20% of your grade
Comparative Analysis Final Paper: 35% of your grade
Pop Movie Quiz 1: 10% of your grade
Pop Movie Quiz 2: 10% of your grade
Class attendance and participation: 5% of your grade

**Date of Final Exam: TBD**

Schedule:

**Week One** – film as a reflection of politics; reading political meaning through film grammar; cinema and the production of politics

**Screenings:** selections from *The Fountainhead* (1949) and *Twelve Angry Men* (1957), Jack Johnson films (1909-12), *The Birth of a Nation* (1915, narration)

**Assigned Viewing:** *The Birth of a Nation* (complete)

**Assigned Readings:** none

Recommended Readings: Rogin, “The Sword Became a Flashing Vision” (190-235); *Sims Act* (1912); *Mutual Film Co. v. Ohio* (1915)


**Week Two** – *The Birth of a Nation* and Progressive Era cinema; regulatory anxieties in early American cinema; film as art, film as speech: the cinema and the first amendment; Progressive Era politics and the educative function of film; the failures of Progressive cinema; race and censorship, cont.; blackface in American culture; protest in film

**Screening:** *Birth of a Nation* (1915, narration); selections from *Within Our Gates* (1919, narration); selections from *Forrest Gump* (1994, narration)

**Assigned Viewing:** All of *Within Our Gates*

**Assigned Readings:** Grieveson, *Policing Cinema*, ch. 1 (11-36), ch. 4 (121-150), conclusion (193-215)

Recommended Readings: Gaines, *Fire and Desire*; McGilligan, *Oscar Micheaux*, all

Recommended Films: *Body and Soul* (1924)
**Week Three** – late silent era and the foundations of the studio system; the rise of Warners; silent narrative and screen aesthetics; the emergence of sound; the moguls

Screening: *The Jazz Singer* (1927)

Assigned viewing: *Sunrise: A Tale of Two Humans* (1927)

Assigned Readings: Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own*, chapter 4 (120–150) and chapter 6 (187–236); Rogin, *Blackface White Noise*, ch. 1-2 (3-44)

Recommended Readings: Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own*, all; Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*, all.

Recommended Films: *The Big Parade* (1925), *The Last Laugh* (1924)

**Week Four** – regulation and censorship before the PCA; entertainment, utopia, and desire; the Production Code and economic consolidation; “A certain idea of competition”: the dope on Will Hays

Screening: *Baby Face* (1933)

Assigned Viewing: *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933)

Assigned Readings: Doty, “Entertainment and Utopia” (2-13); Doherty, *Hollywood’s Censor*, ch. 3 and 4 (49-96); Malby, “*Baby Face* or How Joe Breen made Barbara Stanwyck Atone for Causing the Wall Street Crash,” (251-278); sample script revisions from Warner Bros. (5 pages)

Recommended Films: *Little Caesar* (1931), *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932)

**Week Five** – film form and censorship; noir genre and subversive film content; race and ethnicity in *Double Indemnity*, screening begins early

Screening: *Double Indemnity* (1944)

Assigned Viewing: *Gun Crazy* (1949)


**Week Six** – Midterm Exam week; International trends in film post WWII; Hollywood and foreign competition; transitions from American to Italian cinema

Screening: Selections from *Cabiria* (1914), *Il Miracolo* (1948)

Assigned Viewing: No assigned viewings

Assigned Readings: No assigned readings

**Week Seven** – Neorealism and melodrama; melodrama and free speech in cinema

**Screening**: *The Bicycle Thieves* (1949)
**Assigned Screening**: *Pinky* (1949)
**Assigned Readings**: Doherty, ch. 12, “Invasion of the Art Films” (264-291); Jowett, “A Significant Medium for the Communication of Ideas: The Miracle Decision and the Decline of Motion Picture Censorship, 1952-1968” (258-276); Shiel, *Italian Neorealism: Rebuilding the Cinematic City* (1-16) and (54-62)
**Recommended Readings**: None
**Recommended Films**: *Stella Dallas* (1937), *Dark Voyage* (1939)

**Week Eight** – cinema blueprints for war; counterinsurgency and narrative structure; the unstable politics of film content

**Screening**: *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012)
**Assigned Viewing**: *The Battle of Algiers* (1966)
**Recommended Readings**: none

**Week Nine** – What’s so political about the art film? Decline of the studio system; Aesthetics of violence; Metz and the Imaginary Signifier

**Screening**: *Blow Up* (1966)
**Assigned Viewing**: *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967)
**Assigned Readings**: Huss, ed. *Focus on Blow-Up*, Intro (1-6) and “From the Word to the Image (116-128); Friedman, *Bonnie and Clyde* BFI (7-75)
**Recommended Readings**: Corliss, “When Antonioni Blew Up the Movies,” *Time* (http://content.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1649984,00.html), Mark Harris, *Pictures at a Revolution*
Week Ten – Comparative Essay Due – the creators of the new Hollywood; zombies of low culture: camp and cultural subversion in Hollywood horror; horror and the end of the PCA

Assigned Viewing: *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)
Assigned Readings: Epstein, *The Big Picture*, chapters one and two; Hervey, *Night of the Living Dead* BFI, all