

America on Film (POL2610)

Tue/Fri 4.30 – 6.10

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1. Course Description:

Examines American social and political history during the last decade of the 20th century and the second decade of the 21st century as represented in films. Such topics as memory, war, exceptionalism, white supremacy, corruption, mass-shootings, gender, environment, and trauma will be explored through a variety of cinematic genres from satire and animation, to horror and the spaghetti western. Together we will interrogate the way in which Hollywood, in close collaboration with the government, crafts popular representations of American politics, culture, and society.

2. Course Objectives:

Completion of this course will provide a survey of American post-Cold War cinema through exemplary films and scholarly texts. In so doing, it will equip students with a theoretical and conceptual basis for analyzing the role cinema in representing and shaping perceptions of American political culture. Completion will also grant a sustained reflection on the continued manufacture of consensus in America. Finally, skills such as critical reading, analytical writing, and collaborative discussion will be reinforced and expanded.

3. Required Texts:

All required texts are available on Perusall, accessible through the course Moodle page.

4. Grading (see below for details):

Attendance & Class Participation: 25%.
Perusall Annotations: 25%

First Paper: 10%
Second Paper: 15%
Final Paper: 25% (see below for details).

5. Attendance and Class Participation:

This class will be a discussion-driven exploration of our topics of study. Your attendance and participation is essential to the success of this experiment in learning. Attendance means being present in class, having read the assigned course materials that you also have with you to reference. Participation means verbal contributions to class discussion that refers us to a passage in the text, a concept or idea that is under discussion, and/or a question regarding the aforementioned. You are expected to participate every class.

Screening Times

Films will be screened every Friday, starting at 4.30. However, as some films will run past the allotted class time, students are expected to stay until the film is over.

Absences & Zoom

I know 18 - 22-year-olds are not the most health conscious cohort – at least I wasn't at your age. However, now is the time to err on the side of caution. So, if you have a cough, runny nose, sore throat, even just a tickle in your throat, "allergies," or just feel "off," then **STAY HOME**. You will **NOT** be penalized for prioritizing the health and wellness of your peers.

On such days, if, though likely *as*, they arise, I will make class available in a hybrid manner for any affected student. Simply attend remotely via Zoom if you feel you may even have the hint of something resembling illness. A Zoom link will be easily accessible on the course Moodle page.

However, attending via Zoom is not to become a norm. It is a stop-gap measure to allow us to safely remain in-person. Should you find yourself routinely attending via Zoom without prior consultation with me, this will negatively impact your grade.

6. Perusall Annotations:

Reading the assigned course materials is essential to a successful course. To this end, you are required to do the readings on Perusall, where you are expected to make at least four (4) *substantive annotations* per assigned reading. **Perusall annotations a due on the night before class, by 8pm.**

There will be 15 readings assigned on Perusall; annotations for 13 are due. Those who annotate all 15 may choose which 13 to count toward their grade.

A substantive annotation can take many forms:

1) Asks a deep question, i.e., “When X says ‘y,’ do they they mean ‘x’ or ‘z’. If ‘x,’ then I think that ‘a,b,c’ follows. If ‘z,’ then I think that ‘d,e,f’ follows.”

Not: “What does this mean?”

2) Makes a deep connection to a previous text or author, i.e., “This reminds me of X, where they argue ‘a,b,c,’ only here the claim is ‘x,y,z.’ I think this formulation is better because ‘1,2,3.’”

Not: “This reminds me of ‘x’.”

3) Poses a hypothetical reply to a passage informed by previous readings or the text’s on premises, i.e., “When X claims ‘a,b,c,’ they do so on the basis of positing ‘1,’ but if we instead take ‘2’ to be our beginning premise, then we see that ‘d,e,f’ follows, which better explains the phenomenon X theorizes.”

Not: “But what about ‘x’?”

4) Extends the argument, i.e., “When X argues ‘a,b,c,’ they do so by addressing phenomenon no. 1. If we apply this argument to phenomenon no. 2, then we can see how ‘a,b,c’ provides a way of understanding ‘x,y,z’ about it that otherwise we would not notice or appreciate.”

Not: “This is old and dated and doesn’t apply to our world anymore.”

5) Puts a complex and possibly unclear portion of the argument in more accessible language, i.e., “When X says, ‘a,b,c,’ they are saying ‘a1,b1,c1.’”

Not: “‘a’ means ‘a’.”

7 (a). First Paper: Critical Reconstruction of an Argument

The first written assignment will be 750 – 1000 words in length (approximately 3-4 double-spaced, 12 point, Times New Roman font, **margins justified** pages). Papers either over or under this range will not receive full consideration. The goal of this essay is to reconstruct an argument encountered in the readings and to conclude with a critical evaluation of the argument thus reconstructed. The format of this essay is 75% reconstruction, 25% critical evaluation. To explain the argument here means to reconstruct the argument by clearly stating in your own words its explicit and implicit premises and conclusions. To evaluate the argument means to assess the validity of its premises as well as whether the conclusions follow from its premises. Specific paper prompts will be released in advance.

7 (b). Second Paper: Critical Reconstruction of an Argument

The second written assignment will be 1000 – 1500 words in length (approximately 4 – 6 double-spaced, 12 point, Times New Roman font, **margins justified** pages). Papers either over or under this range will not receive full consideration. The goal of this essay shares with the first in being to reconstruct an argument encountered in the readings on ideology and to conclude with a critical evaluation of the argument thus reconstructed. However, you are also expected to incorporate any feedback given in the first paper. The format of this essay is 75% reconstruction, 25% critical evaluation. To explain the argument here means to reconstruct the argument by clearly stating in your own words its explicit and implicit premises and conclusions. To evaluate the argument

means to assess the validity of its premises as well as whether the conclusions follow from its premises. Specific paper prompts will be released in advance.

7 (c). Final Paper—Critical Review:

The objective of the final paper assignment is to provide you with the opportunity to construct an original argument using the assigned materials from this course. The final written assignment will 1750 – 2250 words in length (approximately 7 – 9 double-spaced, 12 point, Times New Roman font, and **margins justified** pages. Papers either over or under this range will not receive full consideration. The goal of this essay is to critically construct an original argument informed by engagement with readings in the class. Specific paper prompts will be released in advance for the final paper.

8. Intellectual Honesty/Plagiarism:

Simply: *do not* plagiarize. If there are any questions whatsoever about the proper way to cite a source, please consult me or the resources provided by the Learning Center. Plagiarism will lead to automatic failure of the course and will be referred to the College administration for additional sanction.

Learning Center Resources:

<https://www.purchase.edu/offices/learning-center/handouts-and-links/>

9. Unwavering Expectations for Respectful Discourse and Conduct:

Under no circumstances will disrespectful discourse or conduct be welcome in our classroom. We will treat one another with respect, patience, and understanding. Learning inherently involves the risk of allowing knowledge to change your life, and this requires courage. We will all exercise an unwavering commitment to encouraging one another in this process.

Mask Policy

The best line of defense we have against in-person transmission is proper masking.

Not all masks are created equal.

TIME IT TAKES TO TRANSMIT AN INFECTIOUS DOSE OF COVID-19

PERSON INFECTED IS WEARING	PERSON NOT INFECTED IS WEARING			
	NOTHING	CLOTH MASK	SURGICAL MASK	N95 MASK
NOTHING	15 minutes	20 minutes	30 minutes	2.5 hours
CLOTH MASK	20 minutes	27 minutes	40 minutes	3.3 hours
SURGICAL MASK	30 minutes	40 minutes	1 hour	5 hours
N95 MASK	2.5 hours	3.3 hours	5 hours	25 hours

To this end, an N-95 masks must be ***properly*** worn at all times, fully covering nose and mouth, and double masking, per CDC guidance, is strongly encouraged.

Should you not have an N-95 mask, one will be provided for you, which you will be expected to wear properly.

Please consult this video for how to properly wear an N-95 mask:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNkdHbYu6Mw>

There will be no food or drinks allowed in class.

If you anticipate that honoring this policy will be a problem for you, then this is not the right class for you to take at this time.

10. Accessibility Statement:

The Office of Disability Resources collaborates directly with students who identify documented disabilities to create accommodation plans, including testing accommodations, in order for students to access course content and validly demonstrate learning. For those students who may require accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Resources as soon as possible, 914-251-6035, ODR@purchase.edu (Student Services Building, #316A), www.purchase.edu/odr.

11. Schedule:

Week One:

Tuesday, February 1, 2022

Introductions: "How to Put on a Critical Lens when Screening a Film."

Friday, February 4, 2022

Screening: The End of History (Drama): *Forrest Gump* (1994)

Week Two:

Tuesday, February 8, 2022

Reading: Wang, Jennifer Hyland. "'A Struggle of Contending Stories': Race, Gender, and Political Memory in" *Forrest Gump*." *Cinema Journal* (2000): 92-115.

Friday, February 11, 2022

Screening: America at War Pre-9/11 (War, Drama): *Saving Private Ryan* (1998)

Week Three:

Tuesday, February 15, 2022

Reading: Crampton, Andrew, and Marcus Power. "Frames of reference on the geopolitical stage: saving Private Ryan and the Second World War/Second Gulf War intertext." *Geopolitics* 10, no. 2 (2005): 244-265.

Friday, February 18, 2022

Screening: America at War post-9/11 (Thriller): *Syriana* (2005)

Week Four:

Tuesday, February 22, 2022

Reading: Jagoda, Patrick. "Terror networks and the aesthetics of interconnection." *Social Text* 28, no. 4 (2010): 65-89.

Friday, February 25, 2022

Screening: America at War post-9/11 (War, Drama): *Hurt Locker* (2008)

Week Five:

Tuesday, March 1, 2022

Reading: Bennett, Bruce, and Bülent Diken. "The Hurt Locker: cinematic addiction, "critique," and the War on Terror." *Cultural Politics* 7, no. 2 (2011): 165-188.

Friday, March 4, 2022

Screening: Animating American Exceptionalism (Family, Animation): *The Incredibles* (2004)

First Paper Due Friday, 4.30pm: Projecting the American War Machine

Week Six:

Tuesday, March 8, 2022

Reading: Dietmar Meinel. "And when everyone is super ... no one will be"- The End of the American Myth in *The Incredibles* (2004), in *Pixar's America* (2016).

Friday, March 11, 2022

Screening: Shooting American Exceptionalism (Action): *Rampage* (2009)

Week Seven:

Tuesday, March 15, 2022

Reading: Osterweil, Vicky. “Uwe Boll’s Weaponized Cinema” *The New Inquiry*, Oct 1, 2013. *and* Blanchfield, Patrick. “The Brutal Origins of Gun Rights,” *The New Republic* December 11, 2017.

Optional Resources:

Podcast:

Know Your Enemy, feat. Pat Blanchfield, Aug. 15, 2019 <https://know-your-enemy-1682b684.simplecast.com/episodes/gunpower-w-patrick-blanchfield>

YouTube Talk:

“Smitty Lecture Series: Patrick Blanchfield's ‘American Gunpower’”. Paul Smith's College Nov. 19, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kjN1hYy2I4>

Friday, March 18, 2022

Screening: Electioneering (Satire): *The Campaign* (2012)

Week Eight:

Tuesday, March 22, 2022

Reading: Frame, Gregory. "The Real Thing': Election Campaigns and the Question of Authenticity in American Film and Television." *Journal of American Studies* 50, no. 3 (08, 2016): 755-777. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0021875815000651.

Friday, March 25, 2022

Screening: Post-Racial American Fantasies (Western): *Django Unchained* (2012)

Week Nine:

Tuesday, March 29, 2022

Reading: Winters, Joseph. “Rescue US: Birth, Django, and the Violence of Racial Redemption.” *Religions* (Basel, Switzerland) 9, no. 1 (2018): 21–

Friday, April 1, 2022

Screening: Post-Racial American Fantasies (Horror): *Get Out* (2017)

Week Ten:

Tuesday, April 5, 2022

Reading: Landsberg, Alison. “Horror *Vérité*: Politics and History in Jordan Peele’s *Get Out* (2017).” *Continuum* (Mount Lawley, W.A.) 32, no. 5 (2018): 629–642.

Friday, April 8, 2022

Screening: Corporate Power (Neo-Noir): *The East* (2013)

Second Paper Due Friday 4.30 pm: Styling American Culture: Genres of Exception

Week Eleven: Spring Break

Tuesday, April 12, 2022

Friday, April 15, 2022

Week Twelve:

Tuesday, April 19, 2022

Reading: Granovsky-Larsen, Simon, and Larissa Santos. "From the war on terror to a war on territory: corporate counterinsurgency at the Escobal mine and the Dakota Access Pipeline." *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies/Revue canadienne des études latino-américaines et caraïbes* 46, no. 1 (2021): 121-145.

Friday, April 22, 2022

Screening: Political Corruption (Thriller): *Ms. Sloane* (2016)

Week Thirteen:

Tuesday, April 26, 2022

Reading: Richards, Robert. 2017. "The Role of Interest Groups and Group Interests on Gun Legislation in the U.S. House." *Social Science Quarterly* (Wiley-Blackwell) 98 (2): 471–84. doi:10.1111/ssqu.12424.

Friday, April 29, 2022

Screening: Post-9/11 Reckonings (Bio-Pic): *Vice* (2018)

~ or ~

Screening: Post-9/11 Reckonings (Revisionist History): *The Report* (2019)

Week Fourteen:

Tuesday, May 3, 2022

Reading: deHaven-Smith, Lance. "State Crimes Against Democracy in the War on Terror: Applying the Nuremberg Principles to the Bush-Cheney Administration." *Contemporary Politics* 16, no. 4 (2010): 403–420.

~ or ~

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Reading: Reed, George E. "The Senate Torture Report: Necessary but Not Sufficient?" *Public Administration Review* 76, no. 2 (2016): 352–354 *and* Linnemann, Travis, and Corina Medley. "Black sites, "dark sides": War power, police power, and the violence of the (un) known." *Crime, media, culture* 15, no. 2 (2019): 341-358.

Friday, May 6, 2022

Screening: Environmental Melancholia (Drama): *First Reformed* (2018)

Week Fifteen:

Tuesday, May 10, 2022

Reading: Tremblay, Jean-Thomas, and Steven Swarbrick. "Destructive Environmentalism: The Queer Impossibility of *First Reformed*." *Discourse* 43, no. 1 (2021): 3-30.

Friday, May 13, 2022

Screening: Remaking Mo(u)rning in America (Action/Adventure): *Spider-Man: Far From Home* (2021)

Final Paper Due Wednesday, May 18, 2022: Write Your Own Critical Review