

KEYSTONE COLLEGE

**FILM 350 C Syllabus
Special Topics in Film: Film as History**

**Spring 2003
3 credits**

Instructor: Julia Peterson

Contact Information

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Office Hours: Monday, 1 pm – 2 pm
Tuesday and Thursday, 11 am – 12 noon
Wednesday, 12 noon – 2pm
Other hours by appointment.

Course: FILM 350 C, Special Topics in Film: Film as History, Section 1,
Monday, 2 pm – 4:50 pm, C 212

Required Texts: Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies
Carnes

Other Materials: There will be supplementary viewing and reading assignments beyond the scope of the textbook. Access to a television and VCR is required to complete assignments.

Course Content: This course analyzes various types of films, which fit into the broad category of historical films, with respect to form and content. The role of film in shaping knowledge and public opinion about history and world events is also examined. The economic, social, cultural, and psychological effects of film are investigated. Additional analysis includes questions of historical debate, bias, and social issues. We also look into multicultural and diversity issues in film. Students learn about the development of the film medium and its unique vocabulary. Film content, structure, and genre are discussed. Each film under discussion is examined through the broad context of the prevailing historical, social, and political climate in which it was produced.

Lectures and discussions concentrate on material in the text along with additional material presented throughout the course. Viewing films supplements reading, research, lectures, discussions, and written assignments. Finally, students create and deliver class presentations dealing with important topics related to film.

Overall Course Objective: At the conclusion of this course, students will have increased their knowledge of the medium of film as well as the genre of historical films.

Individual Objectives: These objectives will be provided as an introduction to each unit.

They include:

the ability to recognize and identify important elements in the medium of film;
the ability to identify different genres of film which would be considered historical;
the ability to identify various factors which influence how history is presented through film;
the ability to engage in thoughtful viewing and analysis of film; and
the ability to write about film.

Course Requirements:

1. Five essays
2. One class presentation dealing with a selected topic related to film
3. Active class participation
4. Mid-term exam
5. Final exam

Essays are generally 2-3 typewritten pages in length. For each assignment detailed instructions will be provided. *Please note that whenever an assignment is required to be typewritten, you will be expected to use a word processor.* Please save *all* work done for this course in digital form; i.e., save copies of your assignments on diskette, zip disc, cd, hard drive, etc.

Please note that this course designed to develop knowledge and understanding of the film medium. Much of the knowledge is transmitted through the lectures and assigned readings. Understanding is gained by carefully viewing the films under discussion, engaging in film analysis, and by writing high quality response papers. That understanding is solidified by active participation in discussions of readings, viewing, and papers. Active participation and attendance comprise a major portion of the grade for this course.

Grades:

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| Essays (5 assignments, @ 10%) | 50% |
| Class Presentation | 20% |
| Class Participation | 10% |
| Mid-term exam | 10% |
| Final exam | 10% |

Grading Standards:

A (Outstanding): Your work contains organized thoughts, development of key ideas, a complete grasp of mechanics (grammar), originality, imagination, honesty, and is of reasonable length to fully cover your topic.

B (Good): Your paper shows command of thought and expression and a knowledge of mechanics, but it may lack originality or may show some grammatical shortcomings or other flaws, or may lack specifics, which may cause readers to need more information about key ideas.

C (Adequate): A "C" paper usually lacks content but is mechanically flawless, or is excellent in content but filled with mechanical errors.

D-F (Unacceptable): These papers contain inferior content, expression, or both.

I (Incomplete): Because of unforeseen circumstances, you were unable to complete the requirement.

NOTE: You must request an Incomplete. An "I" will not automatically be assigned simply because work has not been submitted. Make an appointment and we will talk about uncompleted work.

Policies:

Your presence and active participation are absolutely necessary for successful completion of this course. Of course, sickness or a personal emergency may occasionally prevent your attending class, and for those instances you are allowed 3 absences.

- In this class, for every absence over 3, your grade will be reduced by one notch. For example, if your semester average is a B but you had 4 absences, the grade becomes a B-. If you had 5 absences, the same grade would become a C+.
- Three lates to class equal one absence.
- All assignments must be submitted on or before the due date. Review the tentative class schedule and decide how to best structure your time. Late assignments will receive an automatic 10% reduction.
- In addition to promptness in attendance and assignments, you are expected to come to each class "fully prepared" for active participation. The emphasis of this course is upon providing you with experience with the television medium; therefore, a major responsibility for you would be to come to class fully prepared to experience media content in a critical and meaningful way.
- Plagiarism will not be tolerated and may result in suspension from the College.

Make-ups:

There will be no make-ups for missed in-class work or for the final exam (except in the case of documented catastrophe).

Manuscript Format:

All out-of-class writing must be word-processed, double-spaced, and one side only, on standard 8 ½ x 11 white paper, using 1" margins. Please use an easy-to-read font and 12-point type size. In the upper right hand corner of the first page, type your name, FILM 350, and the date. Double space and center the title of your essay. Double space and start typing. Indent the first line of all paragraphs by hitting the tab key once or by hitting the space bar five times. Number the pages on the bottom. Staple the pages together. MAKE SURE TO KEEP A COPY OF EVERYTHING YOU SUBMIT.

Tentative Schedule and Assignments:

| <u>Week #</u> | <u>Date</u> | <u>Topic</u> | <u>Assignment</u> |
|---------------|-------------|--|---|
| 1 | 1/20 | Introduction/ <i>History of the World, Part I</i> | |
| 2 | 1/27 | Basic concepts and vocabulary of film | Read pp. 31-35 |
| 3 | 2/3 | <i>Jurassic Park</i> /Mindy Curis talks about film | Essay #1 |
| 4 | 2/10 | <i>The Black Robe</i> /Watching with a critical gaze Essay #1 due | Read pp. 78-81 |
| 5 | 2/17 | No class | |
| 6 | 2/24 | <i>The Last of the Mohicans</i> | Read pp. 82-85 Essay # 2 |
| 7 | 3/3 | Mid-term exam | |
| 8 | 3/10 | Film genres/The Western <i>Unforgiven</i> Essay # 2 due | Read pp. 154-161 Essay # 3 |
| 9 | 3/17 | <i>Matewan</i> /Class, privilege Essay # 3 due | Read pp. 11-28, & pp. 204-207 Essay # 4 Presentation proposals |
| 10 | 3/24 | <i>Guilty by Suspicion</i> HUAC Trials and McCarthyism Essay # 4 due Presentation proposals due | |
| 11 | 3/31 | <i>A Beautiful Mind</i> | |
| 12 | 4/7 | <i>Heaven and Earth</i> Issues of Gender, Culture, and Spirituality | |
| 13 | 4/14 | <i>Wall Street</i> | Read pp. 305-312 Essay # 5 |
| 14 | 4/21 | No class | |
| 15 | 4/28 | Student Presentations Essay # 5 due | Study for Final |

Essay # 1 – *Jurassic Park*

Science

Discuss one of the following themes in an essay of at least two pages in length. Make ample references to elements of the film, *Jurassic Park*, and include references (with at least one citation) to the selected reading (pp. 31-35) in the text.

- I. Chaos Theory
- II. Pre-history, Dinosaurs
- III. DNA, Cloning
- IV. Hubris—Man's interference with nature, Man's relentless pursuit of scientific advancement, the use of knowledge for individual gain or unethical purposes

Essay # 2 – *The Black Robe and Last of the Mohicans*

Culture

Compare and contrast the two movies in terms of their cinematic techniques, their depiction of cultures and religions, and their reliance on stereotypes. For each movie, comment on both the elements of realism and those of romanticism used to portray historical events.

Essay # 3 – *Unforgiven*

Revisionism

Discuss what elements of *Unforgiven* allow us to categorize the movie as a traditional Western. In what ways does it typify the genre? Identify the features of the movie that you consider to be revisionist and explain your point of view. In comparing this revisionist movie to traditional Westerns, which do you think offers a more realistic depiction of the Old West?

Essay #4 -- Matewan

Class and Privilege

Complete the Class Background Inventory. Then, using your imagination, complete the same Class Background Inventory for one of the characters (of your choice) in the movie. Create a back story for the character. Explain how that particular character's class and socioeconomic status might affect his/her attitudes and behavior. For that same character, speculate on possible future scenarios—how much of his/her future will be determined by his/her past?

Essay # 5 – Wall Street

Economics in Popular Film

What parts of this movie do you think present an accurate portrayal of the American economic climate of the 1980s? Comment on any similarities between the movie and current events (in 2003) regarding politics, the economy, corporate practices, etc.

Class Presentation

This will be an oral presentation about a movie of your choice, or about a specific topic related to film. Discuss the film (or topic) in relation to some person, event, or period in history. Include a bibliography with at least three sources, with photocopies of each source. Do not use more than one movie review as a source; instead, look for sources which present information about the person, event, or historical period. The presentation should be approximately fifteen minutes long and should include clips of the film(s).