History 3390: Special Topics
“Reel History”

This course focuses on films that interpret and reflect U.S. history. Throughout the semester we will pay close attention to both how the past is presented on the screen and the forces that led to the motion pictures’ production. Thus, we are interested in contextualizing why films about various historical subjects emerged when they do. As such, we will watch the films at home (via links provided on Blackboard), then discuss highlights and the readings in class. Our discussions will be based not only on the images, but also on criticism and other writing analyzing the films and history.

The films I have picked were for the most part produced in Hollywood and depict either a historical era or event. Most of them were released nationwide, while a few had limited viewership. In order for us to get a glimpse of not only the depiction of history, but also the history of film, I have chosen some silent films for us to watch.

My primary objective in this class is to use cinema as a way to approach the study of history. I hope that we all learn to see the past in different ways and that in the process gain a new perspective not only on history, but also on the production of film, both artistically and commercially.

Required Texts:
Robert A. Rosenstone, History on Film, Film on History.
ISBN: 978-1-4082-8255-7
(The assigned articles are available on Blackboard.)

Course Requirements:
There will be two exams: a midterm and a final. Your midterm will be administered on March 20 and the final will take place on Thursday, May 10, 1 p.m. -3:45 p.m. In addition, three response papers on the films will be due throughout the semester and one essay based on film reviews will also be required. There are no designated due dates for the response papers, instead I have divided the course into three parts and each essay will be due during one of those sections. The film review paper will be due on April 24. You are required to come to class and watch the films as a community.
Grade Distribution:
Midterm Exam: 20 %; Final Exam: 20%; 3 Response Papers: 10%. Film Review Assignment: 10%; Attendance and Participation: 20%.

Plagiarism, Rules, Procedures:
I must remind you that academic dishonesty, including cheating on an exam or quiz, and plagiarism of any form, meaning presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, will not be tolerated. Cutting and pasting information from a website without citing the data constitutes plagiarism. If anybody is caught committing this egregious offense she/he will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution. To prevent you from committing plagiarism, your papers will be submitted to “Safe Assign,” on Blackboard, which will check your essay to ensure you are not trying to pass someone else’s work as your own.

In addition, I ask that you respect your fellow students and me. If you are compelled to talk while in class—DO NOT. I find this habit annoying and just plain rude. I will not tolerate class disturbances of any kind. This means cell phones and other electronic devices are prohibited. If you do not comply with these rules I will ask you to leave the room. Finally, I must remind you that this class starts when I walk in the classroom; therefore, you should be ready to pay attention and take notes when I start talking. I urge you to take notes—you will not be able to remember what was said if you do not, and a good deal of the exams are based on class content.

Schedule

Part I
Week 1: January 16
Introduction

Week 2: January 23


Week 3: January 30

The General (1927)
Birth of A Nation (1915)

Week 4: February 6
The Big Parade (1925)


Week 5: February 13
Gone with the Wind (1939)


Week 6: February 20
Stagecoach (1939)


Part II

Week 7: February 27
Salt of the Earth (1954)


Week 8: March 6
Spring Break: March 12-16

Week 9: March 20
Midterm.
Week 10: March 27

*Reds (1981)*

*Reading:* Rosenstone, Chapter 6.

**Part III**

Week 11: April 3

*Platoon (1986)*


Week 12: April 10

*Saving Private Ryan (1998)*


Week 13: April 17

*United 93 (2006)*


Week 14: April 24

*Selma (2014)*


Film Review Paper Due.

Week 15: May 1

*Stonewall (2015)*


The final exam is scheduled for Thursday, May 10, 1 p.m.-3:45 p.m.