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 these 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.

We will be discussing the readings on Tuesdays and the films on Thursdays. Thus, you must do the readings before Tuesday and watch the film before Thursday. The readings are designed to contextualize the film (and its production) and help you think about the film.

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 7 and the final will take place on Tuesday, May 14, 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 May 2. 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 22 & 24
Introduction


Week 2: January 29 & 31
Birth of A Nation (1915).

Week 3: February 5 & 7  
*The Big Parade* (1925).


Week 4: February 12 & 14  
*Gone with the Wind* (1939)


Week 5: February 19 & 21  
*Stagecoach* (1939).


**Part II**

Week 6: February 26 & 28  
*Salt of the Earth* (1954).


Week 7: March 7 (No class meeting on March 5) Midterm

Week 8: March 12 & 14  

**Reading:** Rosenstone, Chapter 6; “Who Were Those Witnesses in Reds.” *American Film*. Vol. 7 (1982).

Week 9: March 26 & 28  
*Platoon* (1986)

**Reading:** Rosenstone, Chapter 7-9; Marita Sturken, “Reenactment, Fantasy, and the Paranoia of History: Oliver Stone's Docudramas.” *History and Theory* 36, no. 4 (1997): 64-79.
March 18-22: Spring Break

Week 10: April 2 & 4


Part III

Week 11: April 9 & 11

*United 93* (2006)


Week 12: April 16 & 18

*Parkland* (2013).


Week 13: April 23 & 25

*Selma* (2014).


Week 14: April 30 & May 2

*Howl* (2015)

(Readings to follow)

Film Review Paper Due.

Week 15: May 7 & 9

*Stonewall* (2015).


The final exam is scheduled for Tuesday, May 14 from 1 p.m.-3:45 p.m.