

HIST 615 B04 History and Film**Summer 2009**

Instructor: Alan Gevinson (agevins1@gmu.edu; Robinson B 373C; 703-993-1250)

Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 6:45-7:15 pm, or earlier by appointment

Class meetings: Mondays and Wednesdays, 7:20-10:00 pm, Robinson B204

For much of the past century, professional historians have discounted the efforts of filmmakers to represent the past in meaningful ways. During the last twenty years, however, a number of historians have begun to value possibilities for films to represent historical events, personages, emotions, landscapes, atmosphere, culture, and change in complex and sophisticated ways. The audiovisual medium, it has been argued, might contribute to historical understanding in ways complementary to written historical narratives. Scholars now take seriously the reception of films in their efforts to understand modern cultures. In this course we will explore the interrelationship of history and film in a number of ways. We will survey historical films produced in different periods and assess their strengths and limitations. We will examine views on ways that historians might take advantage of historically-oriented films in their teaching and appreciate the narrative possibilities of audiovisual media to approach aspects of history in ways different from those of the written word. We will evaluate films as historical evidence to explore attitudes on a variety of subjects, including cultural diversity and democracy. We also will explore divergent views on the “modernity thesis”: that the study of film – as a form of popular culture introduced to industrialized societies during a period of changes cumulatively designated as a shift to “modernity” – can illuminate aspects of this historical period in revealing ways.

Required Books

- 1) John Bodnar, *Blue-Collar Hollywood: Liberalism, Democracy, and Working People in American Film* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).
- 2) David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Harvard University Press, 1998).
- 3) Natalie Zemon Davis, *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision* (Harvard University Press, 2002).
- 4) James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (Oxford University Press, 1988).
- 5) Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (University of California Press, 2004).
- 6) William Guynn, *Writing History in Film* (Routledge, 2006).
- 7) Vanessa R. Schwartz, *It's So French!: Hollywood, Paris, and the Making of Cosmopolitan Film Culture* (University of Chicago Press, 2008).
- 8) Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (Vintage, 1994).
- 9) J. E. Smyth, *Reconstructing American Historical Cinema: From Cimarron to Citizen Kane* (University Press of Kentucky, 2006).
- 10) C. S. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures: Production Design and the History Film* (University of Texas Press, 1998).
- 11) Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson* (Princeton University Press, 2002).

Reading and viewing assignments

(1) Mon. June 1: Introduction

- Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, part 1.
- David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style*, chapters 1-2.
- Natalie Zemon Davis, *Slaves on Screen*, preface and chapter 1.
- Warren I. Susman, "Film and History: Artifact and Experience," *Film and History* 15, no. 2 (May 1985): 26-36 (access via Communication & Mass Media Complete).

(2) Wed. June 3: Film regulation and the mainstreaming of entertainment

- Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema*.

(3) Mon. June 8: Racial virtue and villainy in the American melodramatic mode

- Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, preface, introduction, chapters 1-3
- David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style*, chapter 3.
- Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, part 2.

Films: *The Birth of a Nation*

(4) Wed. June 10: Melodrama and race continued

- Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, chapter 4-5.
- Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, part 3.
- David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style*, chapter 4.
- Gilberto Perez, "The Documentary Image," in *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium*, 29-49 (access via e-reserves)

Films: *Gone with the Wind*

(5) Mon. June 15: Taking 1930s history by Hollywood seriously; modernity thesis

- J. E. Smyth, *Reconstructing American Historical Cinema*, introduction, chapters 1-5. (165)
- Ian Tyrrell, "Movies Made History and History Made Movies," in *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970*, 75-88. (access via e-reserves)
- David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style*, chapter 5.
- David Bordwell, "Staging and Stylistics," in *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging*, 238-249. (access via e-reserves)
- Ronald G. Walters, "Conclusion: When Theory Hits the Road," in Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley, ed., *Hollywood in the Neighborhood: Historical Case Studies of Local Moviegoing*, 250-262. (13) (access via e-reserves)

Films: *Cimarron*

(6) Wed. June 17: 1930s Hollywood history continued

- J. E. Smyth, *Reconstructing American Historical Cinema*, chapter 6-end.
- David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style*, chapter 6.

Films: *Young Mr. Lincoln*; *Citizen Kane*

(7) Mon. June 22: Postwar juvenile delinquency and the movies

- James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*.
- Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, part 4.

(8) Wed. June 24: Film depictions of the working class and American political ideals

- John Bodnar, *Blue-Collar Hollywood*.
- Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, part 5.

(9) Mon. June 29: History in film: theory and practice – slavery films

- Natalie Zemon Davis, *Slaves on Screen*, chapters 2-3.
- “AHR Forum” on history in film—essays by Robert A. Rosenstone, David Herlihy, Hayden White, John E. O’Connor, and Robert Brent Toplin, *American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (December 1988): 1173-1227. (access via JSTOR)
- Robert A. Rosenstone, “Does a Filmic Writing of History Exist?” *History and Theory* 41, no. 4 (December 2002): 134-144 (access via JSTOR).
- Robert A. Rosenstone, “The Historical Film: Looking at the Past in a Postliterate Age,” in Lloyd Kramer, Donald Reid, and William L. Barney, eds., *Learning History in America: Schools, Cultures, and Politics*, 141-160. (access via e-reserves)
- Eric Foner and John Sayles, “A Conversation between Eric Foner and John Sayles,” in Mark C. Carnes, ed., *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*, 11-28. (access via e-reserves)
- William Guynn, *Writing History in Film*, introduction.

Films: *Spartacus*; *Burn!*; *The Last Supper*

(10) Wed. July 1: The historical film: theory and practice – slavery films continued

- Natalie Zemon Davis, *Slaves on Screen*, chapters 4-5.
- Julie Roy Jeffrey, “*Amistad* (1997): Steven Spielberg’s ‘True Story,’” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 21, no. 1 (2001): 78-96.
- William Guynn, *Writing History in Film*, chapter 1.
- Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, chapter 6-end.

Films: *Amistad*; *Beloved*

(11) Mon. July 6: Production design and historical films

- C. S. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures*.
- Leger Grindon, “Drama and Spectacle as Historical Explanation in the Historical Fiction Film,” *Film and History* 17, no. 4 (December 1987): 74-80. (access via Communication & Mass Media Complete).
- Richard Seaver, “Interview with Alain Resnais,” in *Stavisky ...*, 151-163. (access via e-reserves)
- William Guynn, *Writing History in Film*, chapter 2.

Films: *Stavisky*; *The Rise to Power of Louis XIV*

(12) Wed. July 8: Cosmopolitan culture and cinema

- Vanessa R. Schwartz, *It's So French!*
- William Guynn, *Writing History in Film*, chapter 3.
- Leger Grindon, "History and the Historians in La Marseillaise," *Film History* 4 (1990): 227-235. (access via JSTOR)

Films: *La Marseillaise*; *I Am Cuba*

(13) Mon. July 13: Teaching history with film

- Jeremy D. Stoddard, "Attempting to Understand the Lives of Others: Film as a Tool for Developing Historical Empathy" in Alan S. Marcus, ed., *Celluloid Blackboard: Teaching History with Film*, 187-214.
- Jeremy D. Stoddard and Alan S. Marcus, "The Burden of Historical Representations: Race, Freedom, and 'Educational' Hollywood Film," *Film and History* 36, no. 1 (2001): 26-35.
- Peter Seixas, "Popular Film and Young People's Understanding of the History of Native American-White Relations," *History Teacher* 26, no. 3 (May 1993): 351-370. (access via JSTOR)
- Kathryn Helgesen Fuller, "Lessons from the Screen: Film and Video in the Classroom," *Perspectives* 37, no. 4 (April 1999). (access via <http://www.historians.org/Perspectives/>)
- William Guynn, *Writing History in Film*, chapter 4.

(14) Wed. July 15: History/Memory/Controversy

- William Guynn, *Writing History in Film*, chapter 5.
- Michael S. Roth, "*Hiroshima Mon Amour*: You Must Remember This," in Robert A. Rosenstone, *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past*, 91-101. (access via e-reserves)
- Avrom Fleischman, "Dramatized Narration: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Hiroshima Mon Amour*," in *Narrated Films: Storytelling Situations in Cinema History*, 99-100, 112-127. (access via e-reserves)
- Eric Foner, "Ken Burns and the Romance of Reunion," in *Who Owns History? Rethinking the Past in a Changing World*, 189-204. (access via e-reserves)
- Jane Turner Censer, "Videobites: Ken Burns's *The Civil War* in the Classroom," *American Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (June 1992): 244-254. (access via JSTOR)
- David Harlan, "Ken Burns and the Coming Crisis of Academic History," *Rethinking History* 7, no. 2 (2003): 169-192. (access via InformaWorld)
- Thomas Cripps, "Historical Truth: An Interview with Ken Burns," *American Historical Review* 100, no. 3 (1995): 741-764. (access via JSTOR)
- David Thelen, "The Movie Maker as Historian: Conversations with Ken Burns," *Journal of American History* 81, no. 3 (December 1994): 1031-1050. (access via JSTOR)
- AHR Forum on *JFK* (essays by Marcus Raskin, Michael Rogin, and Robert A. Rosenstone) *American Historical Review* 97, no. 2 (April 1992): 486-511. (access via JSTOR)

Films: *S21—The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*; *Hiroshima Mon Amour*; *JFK*

Writing Assignments

Critical engagement (5-8 pages) – Due the session in which the reading is assigned, or the session in which the final segment of the book is assigned

Choose one of the assigned books and write an analytic review that identifies the book's thesis and offers a thorough critique. Assess the book's strengths and weaknesses. Some questions to consider: Has the author accomplished the goals set out? Is the logic sound? Is the evidence persuasive?

Final paper (10-15 pages) – Due Monday, July 20

Topics for the final essay will be discussed in class.

Oral Assignments

Be prepared to lead the discussion for two of the readings. If appropriate, choose relevant film clips and present them. Try to engage students through open-ended questions in a discussion of the readings and films.

Grading

Class participation (including oral presentations): 25%

Critical engagement: 30%

Final paper: 45%

Additional information

Please come prepared to participate thoughtfully in class discussions. As this class is a seminar, its quality will be determined in large part by the quality of our discussions.

Kate L. Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* is an authoritative guide for footnoting and other stylistic matters.

Students are expected to abide by the GMU Honor Code (honorcode.gmu.edu). Instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Honor Committee. In written assignments, exact language taken from another source must be put in quotations and cited. Paraphrased language from another source also must be cited. Always acknowledge in a footnote the work of another when your own work draws on it. The point is to distinguish between your own contributions and those of others on whom your work relies. Work submitted for an assignment that contains exact language from another source that is not in quotations and cited, or paraphrased language from another source that is not cited, will be reported to the Honor Committee.