

ENGL 345—FILM, TEXT, AND CULTURE

Spring 2021

Section 1

Online (asynchronous—

Arranged as a Tues/Thurs schedule)

***THIS COURSE DOES NOT MEET ON ZOOM.**

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WEBSITE (for blog posts, readings, and assignments)

www.literatureoftheamericas.com

OFFICE HOURS

Anytime, by email

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Since its founding in 1790, Washington, DC has occupied one major place in the global public imagination: national politics. This is so much the case that “Washington” is now a metonymic substitute for all U.S. government operations, and little more. This association extends to the cinema. Beginning with silent films, the motion pictures featured heads of state serving the call of duty, usually in dire times. Yet, the 100+-year history of the movies also tells a different story of the nation’s capital. As a professor of cinema and Washingtonian for the last decade, I seek to complicate the notion that my home city is a stand-in for politics. In this course, we examine several film genres that place the U.S. capital at the center, but in various ways. Once it is safe to travel to Washington, I encourage students to visit many of the sites associated with these films.

COURSE GOALS & OBJECTIVES

- 1) To develop active viewership habits that stress the fundamentals of filmmaking, including business aspects (marketing, distribution, and exhibition) and cinema language used for the purpose of storytelling (mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, and sound).

- 2) To analyze films in their socio-historical contexts, i.e., as a product, reflection, and shaper of culture. We pay careful attention to the development of genre conventions. We retain an open inquiry into all modes of thought, regardless of political orientation.
- 3) To examine the cultural role of Hollywood genres, including the types of rituals that they enable in society. This includes cultural fantasies and the role culture plays in facing adversity, such as global financial depression and distrust of government institutions.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Provided by instructor.

FILM SCREENINGS

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, all screenings will take place at home.

***you are responsible for acquiring and viewing copies of the films ahead of class meetings.**

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This course has a constant and sometimes demanding workload. Active participation during class discussion is essential to doing well. At a minimum, I expect you to:

- 1) do the assigned readings carefully before each class.
- 2) turn in all work on time.
- 3) be respectful to me and to your classmates.
- 4) contribute to class activities on a regular basis.
- 5) have a positive attitude as we deal with Covid-19 restrictions.

Note that you will receive an *unsatisfactory* mark on your mid-semester report if you fail to comply with these requirements and/or have a working course grade lower than a C. **I will accept no late submissions of any kind from you without a medical note.**

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

I want students to learn and to earn the grades that they deserve, so email me should you have undue difficulty with the course. Assignments include:

- 1) six blog posts
- 2) one 2-page midterm exam consisting of an analysis of a scene
- 3) one group project on a Washington, DC film
- 3) one final exam consisting of a 5-page essay

*I will send you instructions for completing assignments at least a week before they are due.

Below is the course grade distribution:

- 1) Group Project: 20%
- 2) Midterm: 25%
- 3) Final Exam: 25%
- 4) Blog Posts: 30%

GRADING CRITERIA

I have designed the following criteria guidelines to help you grasp how I conduct a large part of the grading. I divide formal written assignments in the following ways:

****Papers: Content and Analysis (70%)***

--An average paper (C) demonstrates a superficial understanding of the topic; it is usually based almost exclusively on class notes. It generally relies too much on summary rather than explicit analysis of textual points, and uses quotations ineffectively.

--A better paper (B) incorporates readings that have been assigned in other contexts (including in-class assignments), analyzes literary and film devices as they are employed in a text, and uses specific quotations from texts in order to illustrate the grounding of its analysis.

--A superior paper (A) demonstrates all the qualities of a "B" paper, and includes a more sophisticated understanding of the chosen topic. That is, an "A" paper uses the tools of textual analysis, apt use of quotation, concise and explicit remarks justifying that analysis, while drawing on all the available resources of the course.

****Papers: Form, Style, Mechanics and Usage (30%)***

--An average paper (C) demonstrates a reasonable control of basic English syntax, verb and subject (including pronoun) agreement, tense consistency, proofreading, paragraph organization, etc.

--A better paper (B) demonstrates an ability to vary sentence structure, has few if any proofreading errors, employs careful transitions and organization in a more sophisticated way, and controls grammar.

--A superior paper (A) demonstrates all the qualities of a "B" paper, and in addition demonstrates an ability to control complex sentence structure, vary verbs effectively, and contains no proofreading errors.

***Blog Posts:**

I require that you: 1) post by the deadline, 2) respond to the opening post with ample evidence that you have completed the reading/viewing for the unit, and, 3) post a response only after careful reflection, and using correct grammar and punctuation, and 4) keep to the word length.

***Group Presentation:**

I will assign your group a letter grade based upon how well you apply the critical terminology of cinema grammar to the literary passage, and on the overall care of your visual diagram. I will also grade you on how well you collaborate with your classmates to create a coherent vision.

HONOR CODE

You must pledge all of your work, as the honor pledge obtains for all work submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for this course. I will refer all violations to the Honor Council.

Engl 345—Film, Text, and Culture

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Week #1

INTRODUCTION TO GENRE

1/26 Tues

Introduction to the course [email]

1/28 Thurs

What are genres (“the 3 C’s”)? [email]

Week #2

2/2 Tues

Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres* [excerpt]:

<http://www.literatureoftheamericas.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Thomas-Schatz-Hollywood-Genres1.pdf>
[email]

2/4 Thurs

Practice Blog post due by 12:00 pm

Week #3

THE SYSTEM: POLITICAL DRAMA

2/9 Tues

Frank Capra, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939)

2/11 Thurs

Blog post #1 due by 12:00 pm

Week #4**THE UNDERBELLY: FILM NOIR**

2/16 Tues

Alfred Hitchcock, *Strangers on a Train* (1946)

2/18 Thurs

Blog post #2 due by 12:00 pm

Week #5**THE APOCALYPSE: BLACK COMEDY**

2/23 Tues

Stanley Kubrick, *Dr. Strangelove* (1964)

2/25 Thurs

Midterm Due by 12:00 pm

Week #6**THE ABYSS: HORROR**

3/2 Tues

William Friedkin, *The Exorcist* (1973)

3/4 Thurs

Feedback on student midterms [email]

Week #7**THE TRUTH: JOURNALISM**

3/9 Tues

Alan J. Pakula, *All the President's Men* (1976)

3/11 Thurs

Blog Post #3 due by 12:00 pm

Week #8**THE CRUEL WORLD: COMING-OF-AGE**

3/16 Tues

Spring Break

3/18 Thurs

Joel Schumacher, *St. Elmo's Fire* (1985)**Week #9****THE UNION: ROMANTIC COMEDY**

3/23 Tues

Rob Reiner, *The American President* (1995)

3/25 Thurs

Blog Post #4 due by 12:00 pm

Week #10**THE BLOCKBUSTER: SCI-FI / ACTION**

3/30 Tues

Roland Emmerich, *Independence Day* (1996)

4/1 Thurs

Blog Post #5 due by 12:00 pm

Week #11**THE FOUNDATION: HISTORICAL DRAMA**

4/6 Tues

Lee Daniels, *The Butler* (2013)

4/8 Thurs Blog Post #6 due by 12:00 pm

Week #12 GROUP PROJECTS

4/13 Tues Group Project Due by 12:00 pm

4/15 Thurs Group Project Due by 12:00 pm

Week #13 THE UNIVERSE: SUPERHERO

4/20 Tues Anthony and Joe Russo, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014)

4/22 Thurs Student feedback on group projects [email]

Week #14 THE RECORD: DOCUMENTARY

4/27 Tues Scott Crawford, *Salad Days: A Decade of Punk in Washington, DC (1980-90)* (2014)

4/29 Thurs Kemp Symposium [classes cancelled]

Week #15 THE CULT OF PERSONALITY: BIOPIC

5/4 Tues Pablo Larraine, *Jackie* (2016)

5/6 Thurs Course Review [student questions on blog]

Week #16 *Final Exam Due

APPENDIX:

Accessibility Statement

“The Office of Disability Resources has been designated by the college as the primary office to guide, counsel, and assist students with disabilities. If you receive services through the Office of Disability Resources and require accommodations for this class, make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss your approved accommodation needs. Bring your accommodation letter, along with a copy of our class syllabus with you to the appointment. I will hold any information you share with me in strictest confidence unless you give me permission to do otherwise.

If you have not made contact with the Office of Disability Resources and have reasonable accommodation needs, (note taking assistance, extended time for tests, etc.), I will be happy to refer you. The office will require appropriate documentation of disability.”

Title IX Statement

University of Mary Washington faculty are committed to supporting students and upholding the University’s Policy on Sexual and Gender Based Harassment and Other Forms of Interpersonal Violence. Under Title IX and this Policy, discrimination based upon sex or gender is prohibited. If you experience an incident of sex or gender based discrimination, we encourage you to report it. While you may talk to me, understand that as a “Responsible Employee” of the University, I MUST report to UMW’s Title IX Coordinator what you share. If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, please contact the below confidential resources. They can connect you with support services and help you explore your options. You may also seek assistance from UMW’s Title IX Coordinator. Please visit <http://diversity.umw.edu/title-ix/> to view UMW’s Policy on Sexual and Gender Based Harassment and Other Forms of Interpersonal Violence and to find further information on support and resources. Resources Confidential Resources On-Campus Stefanie Lucas-Waverly, M.S. Talley Center for Counselling Services Title IX Coordinator Lee Hall 106, 540-654-1053 Office of Title IX Fairfax House Student Health Center 540-654-5656 Lee Hall 112, 540-654-1040 slucaswa@umw.edu Crystal Rawls Off-Campus Title IX Deputy for Students Empowerhouse Assistant Director of Student Activities 24-hr hotline: 540-373-9373 540-654-1801 crawls@umw.edu Rappahannock Council Against Sexual Assault (RCASA) 24-hr hotline: 540-371-1666

Recording Statement

Classroom activities in this course may be recorded by students enrolled in the course for the personal, educational use of that student or for all students presently enrolled in the class only, and may not be further copied, distributed, published or otherwise used for any other purpose without the express written consent of the course instructor. All students are advised that classroom activities may be taped by students for this purpose. Distribution or sale of class recordings is prohibited without the written permission of the instructor and other students who are recorded. Distribution without permission is a violation of copyright law. This policy is consistent with UMW’s Policy on Recording Class and Distribution of Course Materials.

