

**AMERICAN POLITICAL HISTORY IN FILM
PS 419/519
ON THE WEB**

Professor David Bernell
Gilkey Hall 312
Oregon State University
Corvallis, OR 97331
Phone: 541-737-6281
Email: David.Bernell@oregonstate.edu

Course requirements include the following:

- 20% Participation
Students are expected to participate extensively in the online discussion forum each week.
- 45% Weekly writing assignments
Every week students will write a 2-3 page response to the film shown that week. It is due no later than Sunday of each week.
- 35% Final Paper
10-12 pages, due Tuesday of final exam week.

Course Format

Each week you are required to view the film for the week by Tuesday.

I provide a series of questions that you are to consider and write on while viewing the film. I also provide my own notes for you to read. You should be continually taking notes and recording your reactions as the film is being viewed. This process lends itself well to achieving a greater understanding of the issues being addressed, and a thoughtful, analytical online discussion. It also helps you to actively engage the film, rather than having you merely watch it.

The questions, based on the film and the readings, form the basis of the class discussion, which will take place over the course of the week, between the time you view the film and the time you turn in your weekly papers. As 20% of your grade is participation, you are required to contribute frequently to the online discussion of the weekly topics.

At the end of the week, after you have had an opportunity to discuss the film in the online discussion board, the weekly writing assignment is due no later than Sunday. This will be a 2-3 page paper that integrates questions raised in both the film and the readings. The following week, we will start the whole process over again.

This is very much a student driven course, with great emphases upon participation in discussions and analytical writing. I structure discussion, participate in it, pose questions, and offer interpretations, but to the greatest extent possible, I want you to learn through actively engaging the films, the reading materials, and your fellow students. I will act as a facilitator of discussion and analysis so that you can develop the skills to critically analyze ideas and cinematic representations of those ideas.

Films and Readings (Readings can be accessed on the course website, and there may be some additional readings beyond what is listed below.)

Week 1: The American Ideal – *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*

Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*, 1996.
Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1840. Ch. 3 and Ch. 15.

Week 2: Which American Ideal? – *The Birth of a Nation*

Ronald Davis, "Creating Jim Crow."

Martin Luther King, "Letter from the Birmingham Jail," 1963.

Laura Green, "Stereotypes: Negative Racial Stereotypes and Their Effect on Attitudes Toward African-American.,"

Leonard Steinhorn, "The Noble Negro Stereotype," 1999.

Week 3: The Frontier, The Self-Made Man, and Native Americans – *The Searchers*

Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 1893.

Joshua Derman, "Frederick Jackson Turner and the Gospel of Wealth," *The Concord Review*, 1997.

Bill Friedheim, "The Iron Horse vs. The Buffalo."

Week 4: God, Man, and the State – *Inherit the Wind*

H.L. Mencken, "The Monkey Trial," A Reporter's Account.

A Brief History of Conflict Between Evolution and Creationism.

Supreme Court Decisions on Religious Liberty.

Tim Berra, "Science, Religion, Politics, Law and Education."

The Creation Science Home Page

Teaching Religion and the Bible: Legal Considerations.

Week 5: Bringing Americans Together to Fight for Freedom – *Stalag 17*

Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, "The Atlantic Charter," 1941.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Annual Message to Congress," January 1942.

Charles Krauthammer, "The World War II Memorial: Inadequate and Out of Place," 2000.

Review of Tom Brokaw's "The Greatest Generation," 1999.

Elie Weisel, *Night* or the chapter "The Death of My Father," from the book *Legends of Our Time*.

Week 6: Confronting the Communist Threat Abroad – *Dr. Strangelove*

NSC-68, 1950 (Parts I-V only).

Colin Gray and Keith Payne, "Victory is Possible," 1980.

Samual Williamson, "The Origins of US Nuclear Strategy," 1993.

David Krieger, "Fueling the Nuclear Fire: Nuclear Policies of the Bush Administration," 2003.

Week 7: Confronting the Communist Threat Within – *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*

Ellen Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism*, 1994.

Richard Rovere, "Senator Joe McCarthy."

"Senator Joe McCarthy"

Excerpt from Sloan Wilson, "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit," 1955.

Week 8: Women & Men and the Work They Do – *Norma Rae*

Barbara Kingsolver, "Holding the Line," 1983.

Digital History, Why Did the Socialist Movement Fail in the United States?

Leonard Liggio, "The Future that Never Happened," Policy Review.

Week 9: Imperialism – *Missing*

Paula Dobriansky, "Democracy Promotion," 2003

Thomas Carothers, "Promoting Democracy and Fighting Terror," 2003

Ronald Reagan, Address before a Joint Session of Congress, April 27, 1983.

Peter Kornbluh, "The Chile Coup: The U.S. Hand," 1998.

Department of State, Memo on Charles Horman, 1976..

Week 10: Fighting Terrorism – *The Battle of Algiers*

Caleb Carr, "Terrorism as Warfare," *World Policy Journal*, 1996

Joseph Nye, "U.S. Power and Strategy After Iraq," *Foreign Affairs*, 2003.

William Perry, "Preparing for the Next Attack," *Foreign Affairs*, 2001

Final Paper

Choose one of the following questions to answer:

1. Using the films and the readings and at least four outside sources, discuss and analyze different understandings (or a single understanding) of the relationship between the (American) individual and institutions that are sources of authority (the state, religion, ideologies, etc.). In formulating your paper, consider some or all of the following questions (or others you may develop): In what ways, and for what reasons, are power and authority to be respected, resisted, or ignored? What forms of power and authority are considered to be legitimate? How do ideas of individualism, exceptionalism, justice, or morality inform one's relationship to power? How do these understandings affect one's treatment of other people – minorities, women, men, the privileged, the underprivileged? You need to do more than simply answer my questions. You need to develop your own thesis and argue it.
2. Using the films and the readings, and at least four outside sources, discuss and analyze the idea of identity (or sameness) vs. difference in American politics. How are race, ethnicity, gender, class, and/or political ideology used to define who is, and who is not, "American" and what it means to be an American? In formulating your paper, consider some or all of the following questions (as well as others you may develop): What experiences, outlooks, or characteristics make one American? Is transformation possible, how so? Who is left out? What roles are different types of people expected to play? Again, do more than simply answer my questions. You need to develop your own thesis and argue it.
3. You may select your own topic to write on. It must, of course, address the films and the readings, and involve at least three outside sources. You need to get prior approval from the instructor regarding the topic.

Additional information: The paper is to be 10-12 pages in length (11 or 12 point font, 1-inch margins, and double spaced). It is due no later than Tuesday of final exam week. It is not required, but advised that you have your paper read by at least one other person in the class. The reader's comments are to be typed on a separate page and turned in with your paper (this does not include grammatical changes).