In L.A., nobody touches you. We're always behind this metal and glass. I think we miss that touch so much, that we crash into each other, just so we can feel something.
Don Cheadle (as Detective Graham Waters) in “Crash”

Corruption? We have laws against it precisely so we can get away with it. Corruption keeps us safe and warm. Corruption is why we win.
Tim Blake Nelson (as Danny Dalton) in “Syriana”

Gentlemen, you can't fight in here! This is the War Room.
Peter Sellers (as President Merkin Muffley) in “Dr. Strangelove”

Course Description

This course will explore some important political topics and themes by discussing how they are explored in major motion pictures. Unlike previous editions, this class will have a somewhat international flavor, conveying the universal significance of the five major themes (prejudice; crime; capitalism; the individual and the state; war) while also highlighting some differences in the treatment of topics between US and foreign movies.

Since its inception, film has been used to set political agendas, advocate policies and influence political socialization. It has both challenged and upheld traditional values and institutions. However, since most of our “primary” movies shown in full length in this class were made over the last ten years, this class will not primarily serve as a comprehensive history of film and politics. Instead, we will closely examine the ideas embedded in each of these films and also the techniques film directors and writers use to convey their messages. Both in the assignments and in class, we will discuss if and how a film helps us to answer questions like: Where does a politically relevant problem originate? What effects does it cause? How is it perpetuated, and how can it be overcome? And, is it a problem at all?

Consequently, the primary goal of this course is to learn how to actively exercise critical thought while (hopefully) enjoying a product of the entertainment industry. In addition to different strategies to write about movies, students will also be exposed to key readings by social scientists on some of the political issues raised by the films shown in class.
Readings

There is no textbook assigned for this class. Instead, all the required readings can be found on the class site on Blackboard, along with some supplemental reading material. The readings can be roughly divided into three different categories: general texts on film and film criticism (including on the relations between film and politics), academic or journalistic writings on the political issues raised by our feature films, and specific readings on the films we show and discuss in class.

For optimal enjoyment of this class and to maximize the quality of your three take-home assignments it is recommended (but not required) that you become a member of a video store (such as Netflix, Blockbuster) during this term. Some of the documentaries listed in the course outline below are available for free on the internet. You are also encouraged to use the public and university libraries in the area. The feature films shown in class will be available on course reserve at the Valley Library.

To learn more about specific movies, you may find these websites helpful:

Internet Movie Data Base (IMDB)
http://www.imdb.com/

Rotten Tomatoes (links to dozens of professional reviews for each film)
http://www.rottentomatoes.com/

Roger Ebert (America’s most influential film critic; from the Chicago Sun-Times)
http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/

Assignments and Grading

Film Review (10%)

You are asked to post a film review on the discussion board on the Blackboard class site. You are free to choose any theatrical movie you’d like to review, with the exception of those shown in their entirety in class. The review should contain between 500 and 700 words. You need to cite at least two sources. The due date for the review is Monday, 2/6. You are encouraged (with bonus points) to respond to other students’ contributions on the Blackboard discussion board. For more information read the Film Review Assignment Sheet on Blackboard.

Comparative Essay (20%)

You are asked to post a comparative essay on two movies on the discussion board on the Blackboard class site. You are free to choose any two theatrical movies you’d like to compare, including a maximum of one film shown in class. You are not allowed to write again on the film you reviewed for your earlier Film Review assignment. For this assignment you need to use part of your essay to explore the political content, message and/or impact of each movie, so it is probably easier (but not required) to choose films with explicitly political subject matter. The comparative essay should contain between 900 and 1200 words. You need to cite at least four sources. The due date for the essay is Monday, 2/20. You are encouraged to respond to other students’ contributions on the Blackboard discussion board. For more information read the Comparative Essay Assignment Sheet on Blackboard.

Term Paper (30%)

You are asked to write an in-depth term paper, for which you have two basic choices:

Topic A: You may compare and contrast in detail any three different films from the 70 films (films shown in class plus recommended films) listed in the course outline below. In addition to reviewing the films, you need to discuss the political messages conveyed in these films as well as briefly sketch the specific political or historical background of the subject matter(s) of these films. Importantly, you need to show if and how a film succeeds in conveying a political message (or not).
**Topic B:** You may write a theoretical essay exploring the relationship between politics and film. Notice that in this case you have to formulate and explore a specific research question pertaining to a specific era and/or country in regard to either (a) the effect of politics, culture or economics on filmmakers or the film industry or (b) the effect of film on society or politics. To answer your research question effectively, you will need to demonstrate knowledge of a considerable number of films and of the literature pertaining to your question.

Regardless if you choose topics A or B, the paper has to be 10-15 pages long and include a bibliography of at least 10 sources (with at least 4 that are not listed on Blackboard). The paper is due on Monday of Finals Week (3/19). Written feedback will be provided to any drafts that are emailed to golvat@onid.orst.edu by Friday, 3/9.

Read the instructions and tips on the Paper Assignment Sheet (on Blackboard) on format and content carefully!

**In-Class Quizzes (40%)**
Starting in Week 3, there will be six short quizzes given in class out of which your highest four scores will count. These quizzes will not be announced in advance. In other words, this also serves as a test of your attendance. In each quiz, you will be tested on the content of that week’s and the previous week’s movie, as well as the required readings assigned for those two weeks (see course outline below).

**Grading**
Even though more than 100 points are possible (due to bonus points), your minimum grade will be determined by treating the total number of points in this class as percentage points in the following way:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>98 or more</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93.0-97.5 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90.0-92.5 points</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>87.0-89.5 points</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>83.0-86.5 points</td>
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<td>B-</td>
<td>80.0-82.5 points</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>70.0-72.5 points</td>
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<td>67.0-69.5 points</td>
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<td>60.0-66.5 points</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>59.5 or fewer points</td>
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If your final Blackboard score is close to a cutoff point between grades, you will be rewarded for regular contributions to class discussions with the higher grade.

**Class Policies**

**Late Work / Make-Ups**
There is no make-up for the quizzes. In fact, the additional quiz scores that will get dropped can be seen as make-up opportunities. For late submissions of the review, the essay or the paper, 10% of the maximum possible score will be subtracted per late day. If medical or other emergency situations or time conflicts prevent you from handing in your assignment at the due date, you need to contact me about such issues as soon as you become aware of them and NOT after the due date. Student-athletes should contact me as early as possible (i.e., at the beginning of the term) regarding excused days of absence.

**Incompletes**
Incompletes will only be granted in exceptional emergency situations. In all other cases the grade will be based upon the work completed by the end of the class, which may result in a failing grade. The grade “I” for Incomplete will be assigned only after the instructor and the student have completed and
signed a Contract for Grade of Incomplete, which will specify deadlines for the student to finish the missing assignments.

**Academic Integrity and Civility**

The Oregon State University Student Conduct Code will be enforced. You can read the code at: [http://oregonstate.edu/studentconduct/code/index.php](http://oregonstate.edu/studentconduct/code/index.php)

Behaviors disruptive to the learning environment will not be tolerated and will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for disciplinary action. The Conduct Code is also concerned with academic dishonesty, which it defines as an act of deception such as: cheating (use or attempted use of unauthorized materials, information or study aids); fabrication (falsification or invention of any information); assisting (helping another commit an act of academic dishonesty); tampering (altering or interfering with evaluation instruments and documents); and plagiarism (representing the words or ideas of another person as one's own). If you are caught doing any of this you risk failing the class and being reported to university authorities. Whenever you’re in doubt about what constitutes cheating, contact me before problems arise.

**Disabilities**

Students with documented disabilities will be accommodated. Please contact Disability Access Services, A200 Kerr Administration Building (737-4098 or [http://ds.oregonstate.edu/home/](http://ds.oregonstate.edu/home/)) and they will advise me as to how to meet your needs.

**The #1 Class Policy**

Have fun – with the movies, the assignments, the readings, and, hopefully, in class! After each primary movie there will be plenty of discussion time in class. Take advantage of that! As in other areas of life, you will get as much out of this class as you are willing to put into it.

**Course Outline**

Films Shown in Class, Recommended Films and Required Readings

Check Blackboard’s Course Documents for additional optional readings.

Note: All primary films will be shown with English subtitles. (D = Documentary)

**I. Prejudice**

1/9 Crash (USA 2004)
   *(No readings)*

1/16 MLK Holiday (no class)
   • Corrigan 2010: *Writing About the Movies.* In: *A Short Guide to Writing about Film.* Ch. 1
   • Giglio 2010: *Hollywood, Race and Gender.* In: *Here’s Looking at You.* Ch. 12

1/23 A Wednesday! (India 2008)
   • Corrigan 2010: *Film Terms and Topics for Film Analysis and Writing.* In: *A Short Guide to Writing about Film.* Ch. 3

II. Crime

1/30 Traffic (USA 2000)
  • Bertram et al 1996: Three Fatal Flaws in the War on Drugs. In: Drug War Politics: The Price of Denial. Ch. 2
  • Corrigan 2010: Six Approaches to Writing about Film. In: A Short Guide to Writing about Film. Ch. 4

Recommended Films: Bowling For Columbine (D), Boyz N The Hood, City of God, Enron: The Smartest Guys In The Room (D), Inside Man, Man Bites Dog, The Manchurian Candidate, Michael Clayton, Mystic River, Natural Born Killers, The Parallax View, Thelma & Louise, The Weather Underground (D)

III. Capitalism

2/6 Thank You For Smoking (USA 2005)
  • Christensen & Haas 2005: Setting the Scene: A Theory of Film and Politics. In: Projecting Politics: Political Messages in American Films. Ch. 1
  • Detmering 2010: Exploring the Political Dimensions of Information Literacy through Popular Film. Libraries and the Academy 10(3). 265-282.

2/13 Syriana (USA 2005)
  • Franklin 2006: Film Criticism: What is a Bad Movie? In: Politics and Film. Ch. 5

Recommended Films: Blood Diamond, Capitalism: A Love Story (D), Citizen Kane, The Constant Gardener, The Corporation (D), Inside Job (D), The Insider, Modern Times, Silkwood, Roger & Me (D), Up In The Air, Wall Street

IV. The Individual And The State

2/20 Mr. Smith Goes To Washington (USA 1939)
  • Christensen & Haas 2005: The 1930s: Political Movies and the Great Depression. In: Projecting Politics: Political Messages in American Films. Ch. 1
  • Franklin 2006: Why They Don’t Make Them Like They Used To. In: Politics and Film. Ch. 6

2/27 The Lives Of Others (Germany 2006)
  • Nickerson 2006: German Film Prompts Open Debate on Stasi. Boston Globe, 5/29/06.
Recommended Films: All The President’s Men, Enemy Of The State, Fahrenheit 9/11 (D), Good Night And Good Luck, In The Name Of The Father, JFK, Life Is Beautiful, 1984, Schindler’s List, The Siege, Sophie Scholl: The Final Days, Taxi To The Dark Side (D)

V. War

3/5 Dr. Strangelove (UK 1964)
  • Giglio 2010: Hollywood Confronts the Nuclear Holocaust. In: Here’s Looking at You. Ch. 11

3/12 No Man’s Land (Bosnia-Herzegovina 2001)

Recommended Films: Apocalypse Now, Das Boot, The Deer Hunter, Fail-Safe, Flags Of Our Fathers, The Fog Of War (D), The Hurt Locker, In The Valley Of Elah, Letters From Iwo Jima, No Way Out (D), Saving Private Ryan, Why We Fight (D)

Due Dates
2/6 Last day to post Film Review on Blackboard
2/20 Last day to post Comparative Essay on Blackboard
3/19 Term Paper due
There is NO FINAL in this class!