Spring 2016 Professor Steven J. Ross

M-W 10-11:50am SOS 172 (0-1681) sjross@usc.edu

Taper Hall 301 Office Hrs: M&W 12-1pmTime & by apptmt

**HISTORY 225g: FILM, POWER, AND AMERICAN HISTORY**

**GE Social Analysis Learning Objectives:** Courses in the Social Analysis category prepare students to: “Apply methods of social analysis from at least one social science discipline to the study of human behavior and experience in economic, political, cultural, and/or social settings; understand the nature of empirical evidence and assess the usefulness of qualitative and/or quantitative evidence in explaining specific social phenomena; understand the interplay between human action and organizations, institutions, and/or the social and cultural settings of human action.”

**Course Description:** This course analyzes the nature of power in the United States—as exercised from above and below—and how it operated to shape the course of American history from the 1890s to the present. We will examine many of the fundamental social, political, and economic problems that have shaped the 20th and 21st centuries: industrialization, urbanization, war, poverty, crime, politics, success, race, class, and gender conflict. Using methodologies drawn from history and cinema studies, we will learn how to navigate among three different types of sources that inform our knowledge of how human behavior has shaped the economic, political, cultural and social landscape: (a) primary documents that shed light on those issues and behaviors; (b) secondary sources (historical overviews) that assess those issues; (c) films made during the period that address those issues.

A note on our use of film as an analytic tool: Few contemporary institutions have a greater effect on molding popular understandings of the world than film and television. Yet, most citizens lack the critical tools to contextualize, analyze, and critique the images and ideologies conveyed on the screen. This course is designed to join elements of film studies with various schools of historical analysis to provide students with the critical skills needed to analyze the images and ideologies they see on the screen and to understand how those images effect our views of the past and present.

Our films and documents cover the period from 1900 to 2010. We only watch films (which *include fiction films, documentaries, and newsreels)**that were made during that decade* *and deal with one or more of the major problems of the time*. In this way, these films serve as another primary source. But movies offer only one perspective on the world. Each week will also read and analyze works that offer additional perspectives: readings that discuss the general historical events of the era; readings that offer primary documents which shed light on how people of the time saw their world and sought to change it; and readings that discuss what is happening in the motion picture industry and how that, in turn, effected the politics American film. In short, we will triangulate our way through American history using different methodological and source approaches to understanding the past, the present, and the possibilities for the future. It is the student's job to figure out which of these perspectives seem most convincing, why it seems so, and the implications of one form of knowledge being more powerful than another.

**Class Format**: Monday meetings will provide students with a broad overview of the era. They feature a lecture and clips from various newsfilms and documentaries about the era. Wednesdays will generally be spent viewing and discussing films. Two caveats on films: films listed in syllabus are subject to change depending on availability; my goal is to show how the repetition of certain kinds of images comes to form our knowledge base about many past and contemporary issues. Indeed, movies matter most about the things we know the least. Students will learn how to “read” the political ideology embedded in films: that is, how filmmakers use casting, makeup, costuming, choreography of crowd scenes and the like to articulate their political vision (to that end, we will often view only parts of the films listed on weekly viewing so as to demonstrate various techniques of communicating ideological beliefs). All students must enroll in a weekly discussion section. Discussion sections will be run as seminars in which students will analyze the week's readings and discuss the similarities and dissimilarities in what secondary sources, primary sources, and filmmakers say about a particular era. We will also try to reach some final synthesis concerning the popular images and realities of the age. What can movies tell us that history books cannot? What can history books can tell us that movies cannot? What can primary sources tell us that the other two source bases cannot?

**Requirements**: The course includes a midterm (20%), final exam (30%), and term paper (20%); class participation—which includes grades from three written assignments—will constitute an additional 30% of the final grade. We expect students to attend ALL classes and discussion sections; unexcused absence from class or discussion section will affect your grade.All work submitted must be written entirely by the student. Plagiarism will result in an F in the course and the initiation of expulsion proceedings. Discussion readings must be completed by Friday.

**Required Readings**:

Robert Marcus & David Burner, America Firsthand, VOL II **(\*course packet at bookstore)**

Steven J. Ross, Movies and American Society (2nd edition only)

Steven J. Ross, Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America

Elaine May, Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era (20th anniversary edtn.)

Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s (4th edtn)

\*\*See assignments for additional essays posted on Blackboard

***LECTURES, FILMS, AND READINGS***

**Jan 11: INTRODUCTION: SEEING & BELIEVING: FILM, HISTORY & POWER**

General issues of course: socio-political-economic problems in America; class, race, gender as key themes. Triangulation approach to synthesizing and analyzing history, media, and primary documents. What we see is not always what we should believe. The elusive nature of power.

**Jan 13: THE PROMISES & PROBLEMS OF AMERICAN LIFE, 1890-1917**

America in the late 19th century: big business, class conflict, poverty, immigration, women's sphere, mass protest. Progressivism and the Progressive movement, 1890s-1917; the "invention" of modern leisure; origins of TGIF. Documentary footage of Progressive-era America..

**Discussion Section Readings:**

Ross, Movies and American Society, 1-42

Ross, Working-Class Hollywood, xi-xv; 3-55

M&B, Am First Hand, 65-73, 83-94

**Jan 18: NO CLASS: Martin Luther King Jr. Day**

**Jan 20: AMERICA, THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY: BUT NOT FOR ALL THE POOR**

Movies, immigrants, workers, and the problems of everyday life. Films look at the [in]justice system, monopolies, poverty, gangs, prostitution, authority figures, and the American Dream gone awry. Class as a vital element of early 20th century life, both on and off the screen.

The Kleptomaniac (1905) Corner in Wheat (1908) Work (1915)

The Musketeers of Pig Alley (1912) The Italian (1915)

**Discussion Section Readings:**

Ross, Movies and American Society, 43-65

Ross, Working-Class Hollywood, 56-111

M&B, America First Hand, 121-31, 151-60, 180-85

***Writing Assignment #1***: ***Analyzing Primary Documents***: ***Due Friday, Jan 22 at discussion section:*** Write a three-page, double-spaced analysis of Andrew Carnegie’s “Climbing the Ladder,” in M&B, America First Hand, pp.67-73. What does this document say about the American Dream? Who is not included in Carnegie’s vision? How does the document deal with themes of class, ethnicity, gender, and race?

**Jan 25:**  **WAR, REVOLUTION, REDS, AND REPRESSION: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL**

**PROBLEMS IN THE 19teens and 1920s**

How class, radical politics, and Progressivism are effected by World War I, the Russian Revolution, and Red Scare. Examination of the Bolshevik Menace, labor militancy, Americanization movement, decline of social problem films. Political "others" in America.

**Jan 27: SAVING AMERICA: CINEMATIC BATTLES LEFT AND RIGHT**

Ideological battles on the screen; worker-made films vs Hollywood productions.

Dangerous Hours (1920) Labor's Reward (1925) The Passaic Textile Strike (1926)

**Discussion Section Readings:**

Ross, Working-Class Hollywood, 115-72

M&B, America First Hand, 115-20, 196-209

Emma Goldman, “Patriotism: A Menace to Liberty” (available online at:

<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/goldman/Writings/Anarchism/patriotism.html>

**Feb 1: REDEFINING AMERICA: CLASS, GENDER, & THE PROMISES OF CONSUMPTION**

Mass Production, Mass Consumption, and rise of a Consumer Society in 1920s; women, work, the vote, and changing gender roles; how movies and movie palaces help forge new visions of class and self-identity in America.

**Discussion Section Readings:**

Ross, Working-Class Hollywood, 173-257

Ross, Movies and American Society, 91-98

M&B, America First Hand, 214-227

**Feb 3: SEX AND THE FAST LIFE**

Reorientation of film in the 1920s; consumption, gender, class; leisure vs work.

Male and Female (1919) Sex (1920) The Sheik (1921) Smouldering Fires (1925) Our Dancing Daughters (1928)

***Writing Assignment #2***: ***Due Friday, Feb 5: Do******Exercise 1: Reading Politics in Images*** (answer Question 1 and Question 2) from Visualizing Ideology: Labor vs Capital In the Age of Silent Film (dornsife.usc.edu/hist225g/pages/home/index.html) **\*Hand in hard copy to TA**

**Feb 8: ON THE MARGINS OF POWER: RACE IN AMERICA**

What does America look like when some "color" is added to the historical mix? The problems faced by racial groups excluded from American society and marginalized in films: African-American, Asians, Mexicans. Scenes from The Bronze Screen: 100 Years of Latinos in Hollywood

**Feb 10: CINEMA AND RACE**

Midnight Ramble documentary on the rise of a black cinema—“race films”—for black audiences; footage of early race films. George Johnson, Oscar Micheaux; G.C. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois. D.W. Griffith and Birth of a Nation. Scenes from Micheaux’s The Symbol of the Unconquered (1920) and/or Within Our Gates (1920)

**Discussion Group Readings:**

Ross, Movies and American Society, 165-90

M&B, America First Hand, 10-31, 210-13

W.E.B. DuBois, “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others,” (available on line at:

<http://www.bartleby.com/114/3.html>)

Marcus Garvey, “If You Believe the Negro Has a Soul: Back to Africa” (text and Garvey

audio speech available at <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5124>)

***Feb 15: NO CLASS: President’s Day***

***Feb 17: MID TERM EXAM***

**Feb 22: THE GREAT DEPRESSION: POVERTY, DESPAIR, AND HOPE**

Cinematic responses to poverty and despair; farmers and workers organize; rise of CIO; popular culture and the masses—movies and radio. Challenges to the New Deal and to state power; the fragility of democracy in the 1930s; the repressive nature of American government as it deals with threats like the Bonus March; fascism at home and abroad; rise of Hitler, Franco, Mussolini, and Stalin.

**Feb 24: THE MYTH OF THE ORDINARY AMERICAN: YOU CAN BEAT CITY**

**HALL—OR, CAN YOU?**

Myths of the politics, political heroes, and political manipulation.

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939) Gabriel Over the White House (1933)

Meet John Doe (1941)

**Discussion Group Readings:**

M&B, America First Hand, 132-46

Ross, Movies and American Society, 128-163

**Feb 29: WORLD WAR II AND THE PROMISES OF AMERICAN LIFE**

Impact of war and return of prosperity and seeming harmony; effects of war on class, race, and gender. Hopes and disappointments of postwar era.

**March 2: OPPORTUNITY AND DISILLUSIONMENT**

The dark side of domestic life during the war—“fast” and dangerous women. Myths and realities of the “Good War” and readjustment to postwar life.

Double Indemnity (1944) The Best Years of Our Life (1946)

**Discussion Group Readings:**

May, Homeward Bound, 1-108

***Additional Assignment for March 4:* Turn in a one-pagetyped term paper** **proposal** to your TA**.** List the topic, the critical questions you wish to explore, and the books you plan to consult.

**March 7: PROSPERITY & POVERTY, CONFORMITY & REBELLION: THE 50s**

Postwar prosperity; rise of suburbia; new middle class. Corporate world and corporate workers; beatniks, rebels, and youth culture. Elvis the Pelvis.

**March 9: YOUTH CULTURE BEFORE THE SOCIAL MEDIA REVOLUTION**

Rebel Without a Cause (1955)

**Discussion Group Readings:**

May, Homeward Bound, 109-216

M&B, America Firsthand, 288-91

***Writing Assignment #3***: ***Due March 11:*** Write a three-page double-spaced critical summary of May, Homeward Bound. The first paragraph should summarize the book’s main arguments; the first 2 pages should analyze her key points/arguments. The final page should have your critical thoughts and comments on the book.

***March 14-16:* No Class:Spring Break**

**March 21: THE COLD WAR HEATS UP: WHO IS THE ENEMY?**

Cold War at home & abroad: 1940s-60s; Communist menace and American liberties; Hollywood blacklist; labor, ethnics, minorities under assault. What is patriotism?

**March 23: CLASS, ETHNICITY, RACE, GENDER AND AMERICAN POLITICS**

The “most dangerous” movie ever made in the United States: race, class, gender, and ethnicity on the screen. Salt of the Earth (1953)

**Discussion Group Readings**

Isserman and Kazin, America Divided (4th edition), 7-22

Ross, Movies and American Society, 193-249

Vicki L. Ruiz, “South by Southwest: Mexican Americans and Segregated Schooling,

1900-1950,” (posted on **Blackboard**)

M&B, America Firsthand, 359-64

**March 28: RACE, RACE RELATIONS & CIVIL RIGHTS: POWER FROM BELOW**

The rise of the Civil Rights movement; power being exercised at grass roots level; JFK-LBJ War on poverty; rise of Black Power movement.

**March 30: CIVIL RIGHTS ON THE SCREEN**

Hollywood liberal views of race and the Blaxploitation film movement.

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner (1967) Shaft (1971)

**Discussion Group Readings:**

Isserman and Kazin, America Divided (4th edition), xi-xii, 1-6; 23-149

Ross, Movies and American Society, 252-74

Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet” (on line at http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/speeches/malcolm\_x\_ballot.html

M&B, America Firsthand, 302-11

**April 4: VIETNAM AND THE CRISIS OF AMERICAN POWER**

Vietnam and challenges to national power; war's impact on all aspects of American life; student revolts; the politics of the counterculture.

**April 6: AMERICA: LOVE IT, LEAVE IT, OR CHANGE IT!**

Debate over Vietnam splits a nation. Who is responsible? Who is a patriot? What to do? Nationalist and nihilist depictions of the war. Drugs, freedom, the counterculture and the New Hollywood.

The Green Berets (1968) Apocalypse Now (1979) Deer Hunter (1978)

**Discussion Group Readings:**

Isserman and Kazin, America Divided, 151-309

Ross, Movies and American Society, 277-308

M&B, America Firsthand, 292-301, 312-20

**April 11: FEMINISM, SEXUALITY, & SOCIAL CHANGE: HOPE & FEAR IN THE 1980s-1990s**

Women's movement; feminism; gender roles questioned; backlash. Why are men—and women—afraid of changing gender roles?

**April 13:** **BEING A "WOMAN" IN THE '80s,‘90s, and ‘00s**

What does it mean to be a woman or man in the modern world? The problems of family and divorce. Gender and class in society and on the screen. Rise of feminism and rise of backlash.

Fatal Attraction (1987)

**Discussion Group Readings:**

Ross, Movies and American Society, 310-39

M&B, America Firsthand, 327-35; 354-58

**April 18: THE CONSERVATIVE REVOLUTION: THE RISE OF RONALD REAGAN AND THE CONSERVATIVE ASCENDENCY**

The emergence of a new conservative movement that challenged the New Deal welfare state; the decline of federalism; culture wars; the decline of American political discourse

**April 20: RAPPIN’ POLITICS: WHAT MIGHT A REAL TWO-PARTY SYSTEM**

**LOOK LIKE?**

Bulworth (1998)

**Discussion Group Readings:**

Ross, Movies and American Society, 344-66

Work on term papers

**April 25: WAR & GREED IN A TIME OF PEACE: REAGAN, BUSH, CLINTON, BUSH & THE GLOBAL WORLD ORDER**

Prosperity and poverty, war and peace; advances and setbacks at home and abroad; impact of globalization on America and the world.

**April 27: ACTION, DRAMA, AND THE CAUSES OF WAR**

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq war as action films with a strong political edge (think of this as an updated worker film strategy of silent era). What features can do; what documentaries can do.

The Green Zone (2010)

**Discussion Group Readings:**

May, Homeward Bound, 217-28

Ross, Movies and American Society, 342-86

***\*\*FINAL EXAM: MONDAY, MAY 9, 8am-10am in this room!***