CTCS 564: Political Cinema
Dr. Todd Boyd
Fall 2018

Wednesdays 1:00pm-3:50pm (SCA 216) & 4:00pm - 6:50pm (SCA 112)

Dr. Boyd’s Office Hours
Wednesdays 12:00pm-12:45pm
Thursdays 12:00-12:45pm

Appointments for Dr. Boyd’s office hours must be made in advance through the Cinema and Media Studies Office, SCA 320 (213.740.3334 or mediastudies@cinema.usc.edu)

Course assistant: Sasha Kohan (sashakoh@usc.edu)

Course Description
This course will focus on cinema and the representation of political issues, themes, and historical events, from the Cold War era to the present, covering a range of topics from the Nixon/Kennedy presidential election of 1960 through the post 9/11 era. Using each film screening as a case study, the course will highlight the political in both Hollywood cinema and in a broader global context as well. The screenings in question, several deemed “classic,” will also serve as an opportunity to explore representations of various political figures and movements, while noting certain politically motivated cultural shifts relative to the late 20th and early 21st century. Certain screenings have been paired with celebrated books that underline the political issues in question. Finally, the course will discuss the changing nature of political cinema over time, focusing on the role that political cinema occupies, as both discourse and popular culture, in an era when blockbusters, superheroes, and science fiction have generally dominated Hollywood box office numbers.

Books
The Paranoid Style in American Politics, Richard Hofstadter
The Wretched of the Earth, Frantz Fanon
Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance, Noam Chomsky
The Shock Doctrine, Naomi Klein
The Greatest Story Ever Sold, Frank Rich
The Untold History of the United States, Oliver Stone and Peter Kuznick
Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention, Manning Marable
Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America, Rick Perlstein
Schedule

Week 1: 8/22
Screening: *The Manchurian Candidate* (John Frankenheimer, 1962)
Reading: *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, Richard Hofstadter

Week 2: 8/29
Screening: *The Battle of Algiers* (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966) and *Z* (Costa Gavras, 1969)
Reading: *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon

Week 3: 9/5
Screening: **Che (Part 1)** (Steven Soderbergh, 2008)
Reading: “The Cold War? Who Started It” (Chapter 5) and “Eisenhower: A Not So Pretty Picture” (Chapter 6) *The Untold History of the United States*

Week 4: 9/12
Screening: *Lumumba* (Raoul Peck, 2000) and *Dr. Strangelove Or: How I Learned To Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (Stanley Kubrick, 1964)
Reading: “JFK: The Most Dangerous Man in History” (Chapter 7) and “LBJ: Empire Derailed” (Chapter 8) *The Untold History of the United States*

Week 5: 9/19
Screening: *Malcolm X* (Spike Lee, 1992)
Reading: *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, Manning Marable

Week 6: 9/26
Reading: *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, Manning Marable, cont.

Week 7: 10/3
Screening: *Born on the Fourth of July* (Oliver Stone, 1989)
Reading: “Nixon and Kissinger: The Madman and the Psychopath” (Chapter 9) and “Collapse of Détente: Darkness at Noon” (Chapter 10) *The Untold History of the United States*

Week 8: 10/10
Screening: *All the President’s Men* (Alan J. Pakula, 1976)
Reading: *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America*

Week 9: 10/17
Screening: *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979)
Reading: *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America*, cont.
Week 10: 10/24
Screening: The Baader Meinhof Complex (Uli Edel, 2008)
Reading: “The Reagan Years: Death Squads For Democracy” (Chapter 11) and “The Cold War Ends: Squandered Opportunities” (Chapter 12) The Untold History of the United States

Week 11: 10/31
Screening: Carlos (Olivier Assayas, 2010)
Reading: Hegemony or Survival, Noam Chomsky

Week 12: 11/7
Screening: Carlos, cont.
Reading: The Shock Doctrine, Naomi Klein

Week 13: 11/14
Screening: Zero Dark Thirty (Kathryn Bigelow, 2012)
Reading: “The Bush-Cheney Debacle: The Gates of Hell Are Open in Iraq” (Chapter 13) and Obama: Managing a Wounded Empire” (Chapter 14) The Untold History of the United States

Week 14: 11/21
Thanksgiving break

Week 15: 11/28
Screening: There Will Be Blood (Paul Thomas Anderson, 2007)
Reading: The Greatest Story Ever Sold, Frank Rich

Course Requirements

Critical Essay
The final assignment is a 5,000-6,000-word critical essay which analyzes and critically engages the individuals, issues, themes, and ideas that have defined this course. You are to select one of the films screened in the course, along with one of the books from class, to build an essay that looks at the role of political cinema relative to a particular US President, historical era, and/or significant political/historical event or theme. Examples might include, “Apocalypse Now and Political Cinema in the Age of Vietnam,” “All the Presidents Men and Political Cinema in the Age of Watergate,” “Zero Dark Thirty and Political Cinema in the Age of 9/11” etc. Though you will highlight one film and book as the foundation of your writing, your essay should also include references to course lectures, other readings, and additional films and other forms of media.

Attendance/Participation
Attendance and participation in class discussions are required components of the overall seminar experience. You are expected to be in attendance and prepared to discuss course topics.