MODERN AMERICAN HISTORY THRU FILM

Combining films and readings, this class will focus on how filmmakers have portrayed the United States during the 20th and 21st centuries. This course will wrestle with how film and history align. We will explore how the art of cinema—and sometimes totally lacking any art save capturing dollars—demonstrates a variety of cultural trends, values, and ideals that are at the center of the American identity. Films often are fictitious even when purportedly telling the truth about historical events, but within that fiction resides clear ideals and ethical stances that illuminate societal values. Film in fact is brilliant at uncovering mythic truths about American culture and society (for example while the western gunslinger movies are almost always historically ridiculous, they betray a clear and vibrant American myth personified from Theodore Roosevelt to George W. Bush). Films thus are vital cultural products that can help us understand our society and its values. We will cover the various decades of the 20th century on thru today, but this class is not after just learning a time line. This class will explore the society and its values as it evolves over time. We will examine such issues as women’s rights, civil rights, race, war, class, as well as the mythic American ideal (in all its nuances).

Silver Core:

This class satisfies the following objectives:

CO 13: Students will be able to integrate and synthesize Core knowledge, enabling them to analyze open-ended problems or complex issues.

Students will also develop:

CO 1: CO1: Students will be able to effectively compose written, oral, and multimedia texts for a variety of scholarly, professional, and creative purposes. IN HIST 403, students will write responses and papers that analyze different aspects of contemporary American life as presented in the films viewed and discussed in class.

CO3: Students will be critical consumers of information, able to engage in systematic research processes, frame questions, read critically, and apply observational and experimental approaches to obtain information. Students will examine and analyze a variety of sources including film and will research materials and write a paper that marshals data and interpretations to formulate and prove a thesis.

Students will integrate:
CO 10: Students will demonstrate an understanding of diversity through courses that focus on topics such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, physical ability, language, and/or social class with an emphasis on the analysis of equity. Students will apply and evaluate approaches or modes of inquiry used to analyze diversity and equity and the social barriers to these goals. In HIST 403, students will explore the experiences of distinct groups and diversity issues that include race and ethnicity, class and gender.

**Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and Core Objectives (COs)**

Students successfully completing this course will be able to:

1. explain the ethical principles, belief systems, and social contexts that have shaped the modern American culture (also known as the “American identity”) as it developed from 1880 to today.

2. Identify how different groups were represented and came to be included or excluded from this “American Identity.”

3. analyze and synthesize primary, secondary, and cultural sources especially films

4. present ideas in a clear and persuasive manner both orally and in writing

5. use relevant scholarship and historical evidence to articulate a theory of how and why American culture was shaped by a variety of social forces and social groups and analyze what that transformation tells us about American history and society.

**Skills-Based Curriculum**

The history program at UNR helps students to develop proficiency in broadly applicable skills while mastering specific subject areas. In addition to learning about American society, film and culture, students in this class will have opportunities to practice and improve the following skills:

- critical thinking (through reading and analyzing written documents and cultural sources, formulating arguments supported by historical evidence, and organizing information in a clear and logical manner)
- historical research (through finding information about historical topics in short assignments and a research project)
- written communication (through writing short assignments, a research presentation, and an integrative essay)
- primary source analysis (through reading and identifying the key points, meaning, and significance of arguments and ideas presented historical documents and cultural artifacts created during the time periods we are studying)
- secondary source analysis (through reading and identifying the key points, meaning, and significance of arguments and ideas presented in books and articles written by scholars about the
time period we are studying)
• cultural text analysis (through thinking about the significance of cultural texts such as films and placing them in historical context)
• oral expression (through small group and whole class discussions and student presentations)
• using the internet (through research assignments and guidance on how to evaluate internet sources)

**TEXTS:**
Rollins, Peter: **THE COLUMBIA COMPANION TO AMERICAN HISTORY ON FILM**
Wiegand: **AMERICAN HISTORY FOR DUMMIES**

**ASSESSMENT:**

**DISCUSSION:** ACCOUNTS FOR 30% OF YOUR GRADE.

**RESPONSE:** ON THE READINGS & FILMS 40% OF GRADE

**RESEARCH PAPER:** DRAFT 5%, CRITIQUE 5%, FINAL PAPER 20% OF GRADE

**MAKEUPS:** LIMITED TO THREE SAVE FOR EXTREME SITUATIONS

**Participation:** This course will be taught in a lecture/discussion format. Short lectures will provide historical background and explain key concepts, but much of your learning will occur through discussion of the assigned readings and other class activities. Therefore, regular attendance and participation are essential. If you are not present, you cannot participate, so excessive absences will lower your final grade. It is also very important that you complete the readings before the days they are assigned. Students who have not done the reading will find it hard to fulfill the class participation requirement, and this makes up a significant part of your grade.

You will not acquire the knowledge and skills you need to pass this course through passive reading or listening. Instead, you will need to take an active role in the learning process. This means working through the assigned texts carefully and critically, analyzing the information and not just summarizing it, and coming to class prepared to share your own thoughts and interpretations of the material.
Responses: In and out of class assignments are designed to encourage you to keep up with the reading and help you to prepare for class discussions and activities each week. In addition, the research and writing exercises required by the assignments provide opportunities to practice skills related to studying American culture. Developing these skills through short assignments will help you to do well on the longer research and writing assignments required later in the course. Although the assignments will not be cumulative, you must try and link materials and ideas and draw comparisons or make other connections to the current week’s material. This is another reason why regular attendance and paying close attention to lectures and discussions are essential.

Paper: Students will analyze and synthesize the ideas and information presented in lectures, readings, assignments, discussions, student presentations, and their own research throughout the semester to answer one of the following questions:

Grading Criteria (+/- grading system is used in this course)

F (less than 60%)
F is for work that is not acceptable. It demonstrates that the student has no idea what the course material is about, suggesting a lack of interest or effort and possibly some absences from class.

D– (60–62%), D (63–66%), D+ (67–69%)
D is given for work that is inadequate. It omits important points, contains more than a few inaccuracies, and is badly organized. It suggests that the student has not been paying much attention to the course or is having problems understanding the material.

C– (70–72%), C (73–76%), C+ (77–79%)
C is given for work that is average. The student shows familiarity with the material and is mostly accurate, but the paper lacks detail or effective organization. The C essay might make general points but fail to support them with specific evidence, or it might be merely a collection of facts, with no coherent theme or thesis.

B– (80–82%), B (83–86%), B+ (87–89%)
B denotes work that is above average in quality. It demonstrates that the student knows and understands the material covered in class, and that s/he is capable of synthesizing it into a competent essay. It is accurate, detailed, and well organized, with an introduction, a thesis, and a conclusion.

A– (90–94%), A (95–100%)
A is for work of exceptional quality. This grade is for essays that present a clear thesis supported by persuasive evidence and analysis, logically organized, and free from typing or grammatical errors. The A essay does more than just competently summarize material from the readings or lectures. It shows the student has thought things through on a deeper level and offers his or her own perspective on the topics under consideration.
Deadlines and Policies Regarding Missed Work

Assignments are due in class on the dates indicated in the course Schedule. Makeups are possible but they are limited to three each term save for extreme situations or if pre-approved. Missing class destroys the grade you earn in many ways.

Students with Disabilities

The History Department is committed to equal opportunity in education for all students, including those with documented physical disabilities or documented learning disabilities. If you have a documented disability and will be requiring assistance, please contact me or the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building Suite 101) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

Academic Dishonesty

The university’s Academic Standards policy states:

Academic dishonesty is against university as well as the system community standards. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following:

Plagiarism: defined as submitting the language, ideas, thoughts or work of another as one’s own; or assisting in the act of plagiarism by allowing one’s work to be used in this fashion.

Cheating: defined as (1) obtaining or providing unauthorized information during an examination through verbal, visual or unauthorized use of books, notes, text and other materials; (2) obtaining or providing information concerning all or part of an examination prior to that examination; (3) taking an examination for another student, or arranging for another person to take an exam in one’s place; (4) altering or changing test answers after submittal for grading, grades after grades have been awarded, or other academic records once these are official. . . .

Sanctions for violations of university academic standards may include the following: (1) filing a final grade of “F”; (2) reducing the student’s final course grade one or two full grade points; (3) awarding a failing mark on the test or paper in question; (4) requiring the student to retake the test or resubmit the paper.

Class Schedule

January 26: Introduction to Cultural History & American Myths
Assignment: Rollins: 561-567, 572-578, 583-590, 596-603; Films on the American Myths
February 2:  The American Century
Assignment: Rollins: 10-15, 88-91, 103-109;
                 Dummies: 209-222, 225-252,
Films on the American Century

February 9:   The “Other” America: Class
Assignment: Rollins: 218-241, 249-269;
                 Dummies: 195, 227, 244, 266, 305, 331
Films on the Other America

February 23: Native & Hispanic “Real” Americans
Assignment: Rollins: 269-288, 161-169, 103-109;
                 Dummies: 244, 265, 302,
Films on the “Real” Americans

March 2:  Black America & Civil Rights
Assignment: Rollins: 207-218, 331-344;
                 Dummies: 176-8, 180, 198, 221, 228, 244, 264, 289-93, 300
Films on Race & Civil Rights

March 9:   Female America & Feminism
Assignment: Rollins: 303-315, 534-541
                 Dummies: 154, 218-221, 237, 246, 263, 286, 304
Films on Women in culture

March 23:  Robbers: gangsters to lawyers and politicians
Assignment: Rollins: 297-303, 344-352, 398-409, 509-518
                 Dummies: 200-06, 231-3, 253-7
Films on “Robbers”

March 30:  Modern Wars
Assignment: Rollins: 69-86, 109-116, 125-139
                 Dummies: 222-225, 257-275
Films on Wars
April 6:  Drugs & Bugs & Uughs
Assignment: Rollins 518-527
Dummies: 215,237,304,331,295,281,
Films on Drugs, Bugs or Uughs

Paper Topic Due

April 13:  America in Crisis
Assignment: Rollins 29-42
Dummies: 277-296,309-18
Films on the 1950s-1980s

April 20:  Vietnam War and its Legacies
Assignment: Rollins 93-103, 42-45
Dummies: 296-300,306-9,
Films on the War & its legacy

Paper Draft Due

April 27:  America at the end of the 20th Century
Assignment: Article NY Times
Films from 1990-2005

Paper Critique Due

May 4:  America Today
Assignment: Article NY Times
Dummies: 337-357
Films of Today 2005-2015

PAPER DUE 8th AT 5PM