

Dr. Jon Cowans  
Class meets: TTh 4-5:20, Conklin 342

Office: Conklin 305; 973 353-3893; jonco58@aol.com  
Office hours: TTh 3:30-4, 5:30-6pm

### **FILM AND HISTORY: 21:510:301 (Spring 2016) index 17990**

This course examines how historical films present history, focusing mainly on American feature films. It seeks less to list these films' inaccuracies than to identify and analyze how and why they have mythologized the past. By learning to spot films' ideologies, assumptions, strategies, and visions of the past, one can identify the evolution of modern societies' historical mythologies, values, and beliefs.

#### **READINGS & FILMS**

**Course reader**, available only at Porta Print, 33 Halsey St., 973 622-1828

Students are required to watch a series of films and be prepared to answer quiz questions on them. It is best to watch the assigned film before doing the readings for that session.

#### **GRADING**

Students are bound by the university's academic integrity policy, which appears here:

<http://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/office-dean-student-affairs/academic-integrity-policy>.

If you are unsure whether something is permitted, ask the professor, as the penalties are very strict.

**TESTS:** There will be a midterm on Mar. 8 and a final exam on Wed. May 11, 3-6pm. The format for these exams will be a series of short essays (1/2 to 1 page).

**LECTURE QUESTIONS:** At the end of each lecture, you must hand in one or two brief questions or comments on the day's material. Each unexcused absence will lower this score by five points. Time missed for arriving late or leaving early is added up; each 80 minutes constitutes an absence.

For an absence to be excused, you must provide written evidence of a valid reason, and all excuses must be in by the day of the final exam. Your overall course grade will fall by a half-letter (e.g., from B to C+) for each unexcused absence starting with the fourth one. Any student who misses eight or more sessions through any combination of excused and unexcused absences will not earn credit in this course; such students should withdraw from the class.

**CLASS PARTICIPATION:** Everyone is required to participate regularly in class discussions. Your score reflects both the frequency of your participation and the quality of your comments and questions about the day's readings and films. Use of electronic devices such as *cell phones* and *laptop computers* is strictly *prohibited* and will lower this score. Students are expected to pay attention throughout the entire class, including during the showing of film clips.

**QUIZZES:** There will be several unannounced quizzes, with a few short but specific questions on the readings and films assigned for that day. There can be no makeups for pop quizzes, so missing a quiz without a valid excuse incurs a zero on that quiz. If you have a valid, documented excuse, then we will average one less quiz for you at the course's end; the missed quiz thus does not count against you. The lowest grade on the quizzes will not count.

#### **GRADE BREAKDOWN**

Lecture questions	5%
Class participation	10%
Quizzes	20%
Midterm	25%
Final exam	40%
	100%

**Tue. Jan. 19: Introduction**

**Thu. Jan. 21: Film and History**

In Defense of Hollywood (R-1)

The Role of the Academic Consultant (R-2)

Historical Authenticity in *A Man Called Horse* (R-3)

**Tue. Jan. 26: Rome**

Oppositions, Anxieties, and Ambiguities in the Toga Movie (R-4)

Clips: *Sign of the Cross* (1932); *Quo Vadis?* (1951)

**Thu. Jan. 28: Rome**

The Roman Empire in American Cinema after 1945 (R-5)

**Film:** *Ben-Hur* (1959)

**Tue. Feb. 2: Rome**

Spartacus: Testing the Strength of the Body Politic (R-6)

Clips: *Spartacus* (1960)

**Thu. Feb. 4: Rome**

*Gladiator* and Contemporary American Society (R-7)

Gladiators and Blood Sport (R-8)

*Gladiator* in Historical Perspective (R-9)

**Film:** *Gladiator* (2000)

**Tue. Feb. 9: The Middle Ages**

The Birth of Modern Medievalism in England and America (R-10)

The Holy Grail of Hollywood: King Arthur Films (R-11)

**Film:** *First Knight* (1995)

**Thu. Feb. 11: The Middle Ages**

*Kingdom of Heaven* and the Multi-Temporality of Medieval Film (R-12)

**Film:** *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005)

**Tue. Feb. 16: The American South**

The Growth of a Mythology: The South in Film (R-13)

War Comes to Tara (R-14)

Clips: *Gone with the Wind* (1939)

**Thu. Feb. 18: The American South: Slavery**

Slavery and the South in Silent Film (R-15)

Hollywood's Inscription of Slavery (R-16)

Clips: *Band of Angels* (1957)

**Tue. Feb. 23: The American South: The Civil Rights Era**

Hollywood and the Reinterpretation of the South (R-17)

*Mississippi Burning* (R-18)

**Film:** *Mississippi Burning* (1988)

**Thu. Feb. 25: World War II**

The Western and the War Film, 1940-1945 (R-19)

**Film:** *Bataan* (1943)

**Tue. Mar. 1: World War II**

*Patton* (R-20)

Clips: *Patton* (1970); *Catch-22* (1970)

**Thu. Mar. 3: World War II**

The Myth of the Good War (R-21)

**Film:** *Saving Private Ryan* (1998)

**Tue. Mar. 8: Midterm**

**Thu. Mar. 10: Open Session**

SPRING BREAK

**Tue. Mar. 22: Westerns**

The Significance of the Frontier in American History (R-22)

The American West as Symbol and Myth (R-23)

The Frontier Myth (R-24)

Clips: *Stagecoach* (1939)

**Thu. Mar. 24: Westerns**

The Western Is American History, 1939-1941 (R-25)

Criminals as Heroes (R-26)

**Film:** *Jesse James* (1939)

**Tue. Mar. 29: Westerns**

Killer Elite: The Cult of the Gunfighter (R-27)

**Film:** *High Noon* (1952)

**Thu. Mar. 31: Westerns**

Women in Western Films (R-28)

The Woman in the Western (R-29)

**Film:** *Shane* (1953)

**Tue. Apr. 5: Westerns**

The Main Critical Issues in *The Searchers* (R-30)

Captivity, Purity, and Feminine Values in *The Searchers* (R-31)

Native American Reactions to *The Searchers* (R-32)

**Film:** *The Searchers* (1956)

**Thu. Apr. 7: British Royalty**

The Monarchy and Film (R-33)

A Tyrant for All Seasons (R-34)

**Film:** *A Man for All Seasons* (1966)

**Tue. Apr. 12: British Royalty**

The Royal Bio-pic in the 1990s (R-35)

Queen and Country: *Elizabeth* (R-36)**Film:** *Elizabeth* (1998)**Thu. Apr. 14: Revolution**

The Perils of Revolution (R-37)

Clips: *A Tale of Two Cities* (1935); *Viva Villa!* (1934)**Tue. Apr. 19: The Vietnam War**

Vietnam at the Movies (R-38)

**Film:** *Coming Home* (1978)**Thu. Apr. 21: The Vietnam War**Reviews of *The Deer Hunter* (R-39)Clips: *The Deer Hunter* (1978)**Tue. Apr. 26: The Vietnam War**Reviews of *Platoon* (R-40)**Film:** *Platoon* (1987)**Thu Apr. 28: Open Session****Wed. May 11: Final Exam (3 to 6pm)**

## Film Schedule

	Swank	Amazon Rent (\$4 are HD)	Youtube	Netflix DVD
Thu. 1-28: Ben-Hur, 1959 (3:32)	yes	\$4	\$3	yes
optional Tue. 2-1: Spartacus, 1960 (3:04)	yes	\$4	\$3	yes
Thu. 2-4: Gladiator (2:35)	yes	\$4	\$3	yes
Tue. 2-9: First Knight (2:14)	yes	\$4	\$3	yes
Thu. 2-11: Kingdom of Heaven, 2005 (2:24)	NO	\$4	\$3	yes
optional: Tue. 2-16: Gone with the Wind (3:37)	yes	\$4	\$3	yes
Tue. 2-23: Mississippi Burning (2:05)	yes	NO	NO	yes
Thu. 2-25: Bataan (1:53)	yes	\$3	\$3	NO
Thu. 3-3: Saving Private Ryan (2:50)	yes	\$4	\$3	yes
Thu. 3-24: Jesse James (1:47)	NO	NO	\$3	yes
Tue. 3-29: High Noon (1:25)	yes	\$4	\$3	NO
Thu. 3-31: Shane (1:58)	yes	\$4	\$3	yes
Tue. 4-5: The Searchers (1:59)	yes	\$4	\$3	yes
Thu. 4-7: A Man for All Seasons (2:00)	yes	\$4	\$3	yes
Tue. 4-12: Elizabeth (2:00)	yes	\$4	\$3	yes
Tue. 4-19: Coming Home (2:06)	yes	NO	free?	yes
optional: Thu. 4-21: The Deer Hunter (3:03)	yes	NO	NO	yes
Tue. 4. 4-26: Platoon (2:00)	yes	\$4	\$3	yes

DANA library also owns most of these films on DVD.

Be sure to check the year of release as there may be other films with these titles. If you are unsure, ask me.

Try to avoid directors' cuts so that we are watching the same films.

Try to watch the optional films – at least part of them. Knowing them will help you on the midterm and final.