AMERICAN POLITICAL HISTORY IN FILM  
PS 419/519  
ON THE WEB

Professor David Bernell  
Gilkey Hall 312  
Oregon State University  
Corvallis, OR 97331  
Phone: 541-737-6281  
Email: David.Bernell@oregonstate.edu

Course requirements include the following:

20% Participation  
Students are expected to participate extensively in the online discussion forum each week.

45% Weekly writing assignments  
Every week students will write a 2-3 page response to the film shown that week. It is due no later than Sunday of each week.

35% Final Paper  
10-12 pages, due Tuesday of final exam week.

Course Format

Each week you are required to view the film for the week by Tuesday.

I provide a series of questions that you are to consider and write on while viewing the film. I also provide my own notes for you to read. You should be continually taking notes and recording your reactions as the film is being viewed. This process lends itself well to achieving a greater understanding of the issues being addressed, and a thoughtful, analytical online discussion. It also helps you to actively engage the film, rather than having you merely watch it.

The questions, based on the film and the readings, form the basis of the class discussion, which will take place over the course of the week, between the time you view the film and the time you turn in your weekly papers. As 20% of your grade is participation, you are required to contribute frequently to the online discussion of the weekly topics.

At the end of the week, after you have had an opportunity to discuss the film in the online discussion board, the weekly writing assignment is due no later than Sunday. This will be a 2-3 page paper that integrates questions raised in both the film and the readings. The following week, we will start the whole process over again.

This is very much a student driven course, with great emphases upon participation in discussions and analytical writing. I structure discussion, participate in it, pose questions, and offer interpretations, but to the greatest extent possible, I want you to learn through actively engaging the films, the reading materials, and your fellow students. I will act as a facilitator of discussion and analysis so that you can develop the skills to critically analyze ideas and cinematic representations of those ideas.

Films and Readings (Readings can be accessed on the course website, and there may be some additional readings beyond what is listed below.)

Week 1: The American Ideal – Mr. Smith Goes to Washington  
Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America," 1840. Ch. 3 and Ch. 15.
Week 2: Which American Ideal? – *The Birth of a Nation*
Ronald Davis, "Creating Jim Crow."
Laura Green, "Stereotypes: Negative Racial Stereotypes and Their Effect on Attitudes Toward African-American."

Week 3: The Frontier, The Self-Made Man, and Native Americans – *The Searchers*
Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 1893.
Bill Friedheim, "The Iron Horse vs. The Buffalo."

Week 4: God, Man, and the State – *Inherit the Wind*
A Brief History of Conflict Between Evolution and Creationism.
Supreme Court Decisions on Religious Liberty.
Tim Berra, "Science, Religion, Politics, Law and Education."
The Creation Science Home Page
Teaching Religion and the Bible: Legal Considerations.

Week 5: Bringing Americans Together to Fight for Freedom – *Stalag 17*
Elie Weisel, *Night* or the chapter "The Death of My Father," from the book *Legends of Our Time*.

Week 6: Confronting the Communist Threat Abroad – *Dr. Strangelove*
NSC-68, 1950 (Parts I-V only).

Week 7: Confronting the Communist Threat Within – *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*
Richard Rovere, "Senator Joe McCarthy."
"Senator Joe McCarthy"

Week 8: Women & Men and the Work They Do – *Norma Rae*
Digital History, Why Did the Socialist Movement Fail in the United States?

Week 9: Imperialism – *Missing*
Paula Dobriansky, "Democracy Promotion," 2003
Ronald Reagan, Address before a Joint Session of Congress, April 27, 1983.
Department of State, Memo on Charles Horman, 1976.

Week 10: Fighting Terrorism – *The Battle of Algiers*
Caleb Carr, "Terrorism as Warfare," World Policy Journal, 1996
William Perry, "Preparing for the Next Attack," Foreign Affairs, 2001
Final Paper

Choose one of the following questions to answer:

1. Using the films and the readings and at least four outside sources, discuss and analyze different understandings (or a single understanding) of the relationship between the (American) individual and institutions that are sources of authority (the state, religion, ideologies, etc.). In formulating your paper, consider some or all of the following questions (or others you may develop): In what ways, and for what reasons, are power and authority to be respected, resisted, or ignored? What forms of power and authority are considered to be legitimate? How do ideas of individualism, exceptionalism, justice, or morality inform one’s relationship to power? How do these understandings affect one’s treatment of other people – minorities, women, men, the privileged, the underprivileged? You need to do more than simply answer my questions. You need to develop your own thesis and argue it.

2. Using the films and the readings, and at least four outside sources, discuss and analyze the idea of identity (or sameness) vs. difference in American politics. How are race, ethnicity, gender, class, and/or political ideology used to define who is, and who is not, “American” and what it means to be an American? In formulating your paper, consider some or all of the following questions (as well as others you may develop): What experiences, outlooks, or characteristics make one American? Is transformation possible, how so? Who is left out? What roles are different types of people expected to play? Again, do more than simply answer my questions. You need to develop your own thesis and argue it.

3. You may select your own topic to write on. It must, of course, address the films and the readings, and involve at least three outside sources. You need to get prior approval from the instructor regarding the topic.

Additional information: The paper is to be 10-12 pages in length (11 or 12 point font, 1-inch margins, and double spaced). It is due no later than Tuesday of final exam week. It is not required, but advised that you have your paper read by at least one other person in the class. The reader’s comments are to be typed on a separate page and turned in with your paper (this does not include grammatical changes).
The film looks beyond official narratives to explore the deeper implication of past events and how they have shaped the world today. Although it features no interview subjects, it draws heavily on archive film, photos, historical writings, voice acting, and Stone’s narration to capture the mood of the various eras. Furthermore, while the series is historical in nature, it is also forward looking and includes commentary on the Bush-Obama era and the growth of terrorism.

The Primacy of the Political: A History of Political Thought from the Greeks to the French and American

Don’t Know Much About History: Everything You Need to Know About American History but Never Learned.

707 Pages · 2004 · 2.9 MB · 6,110 Downloads · New!


364 Pages · 2007 · 4.73 MB · 13,765 Downloads · New!

American History (Milestones in Business History) Nikki L. M. Brown|Barry M. Stentiford


The film, in which Penn was honored with the Best Actor Oscar, was symbolically released exactly 30 years after Milk was assassinated in San Francisco, where he fought vehemently against the intolerance of his political rivals to secure a better future for the gay community there and indeed in the whole of the US.

It had been Spike Lee’s dream to direct a feature film on the legacy of the Black Nationalist leader Malcolm Little, and when people demanded for a black director to take charge he willingly stepped up to the challenge.