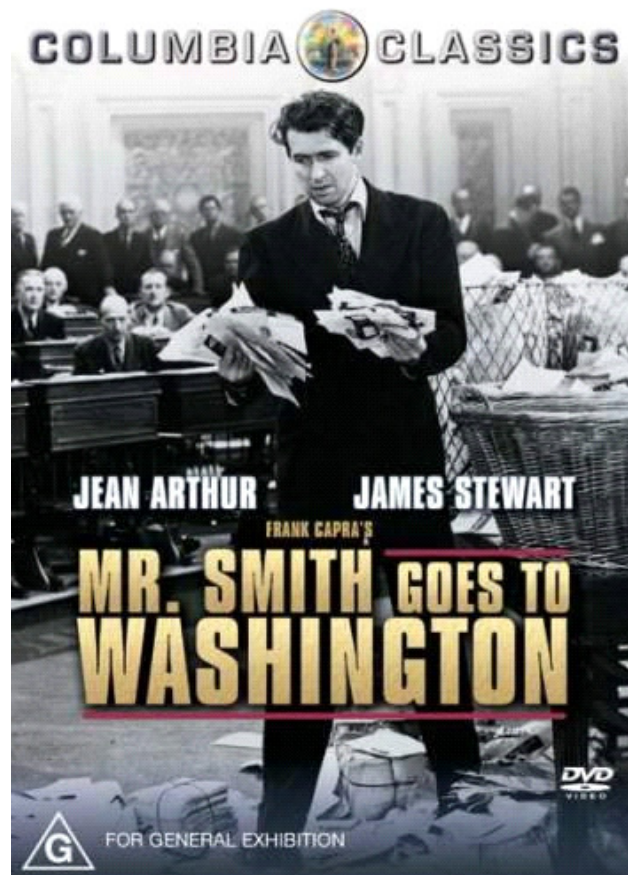


American Politics and Film:  
Entertainment, Commerce, and  
Political Communication  
Political Science 325-01



SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY  
Spring 2019

**INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Thomas A. Gosebrink**

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**OFFICE/HOURS: Before and After Class and whenever we can schedule a meeting**

**Projecting Politics: Political Messages in American Films, by Terry Christiansen and Peter Haas. M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, New York : 2005.  
Politics and Film: The Political Culture Of Television and Movies, by Daniel P. Franklin. Roman & Littlefield, Lanham: 2017.**

**Other print resources of value are ANALYZING POLITICS: Politics and Politicians in American Film by Phillip L. Gianos. Praeger, Westport Connecticut: 1998.**

**The Political Film by Michael A. Genovese, Simon and Schuster , New York 1998. A classic Marxist analysis.**

**Here's Looking at You: Hollywood, Film, and Politics, by Ernest Giglio. Peter Lang, New York 2002.**

**American Politics in Hollywood Film by Ian Scott. Fitzroy Dearborn. Chicago, Il. 2000**

**(This is tough sledding unless you have a semiotics dictionary with you. If you are brave and adventurous—or a masochist—you might use the following online semiotics glossary....**

**REQUIREMENTS: Students are required(if at all possible) to view the film to be discussed prior to class when possible. Films are available on University servers and students will receive appropriate access information.**

**ASSIGNMENTS: 1) *Student Critiques:* Each student will write three one page (single spaced—Format, paragraph, line spacing, single) critiques of any of the films presented in class. Liberal use of the concepts and ideas from valid web sources and /or Christensen, Franklin (See Appendix 1 in Christensen) for this project. You will be self consciously analytical and indicate what you thought of the film. Each is worth 100 pts. (300 points) 2) *Examinations* are worth 300 pts.**

**3) *Student Projects:* Each student or group (no more than three with defined responsibilities) of students will wrap him/her/their selves around one motion picture selected from the list of approved pictures or based on negotiation with the instructor. **This is not to include films discussed in class, except as compared to and /or contrasted with class movies.** The student will learn everything about the picture. This knowledge should then be organized in some logical**

*fashion. What is the picture about –summarize the main action. What genre is the film and what themes are developed in the film? Relate any of these materials to class readings. When was the movie made? How did the time of production influence the production. What did the director and producer say about their film? What did the critics say about the picture? Did anybody go to see the film? Did it win prizes? Alternatively a filmmaker (whose oeuvres include a political film, may be featured. This may include but not be limited to Capra, Kazan, Frankinheimer, Coppola, Stone, Speilberg,.Moore. Presentations will be made during the last three weeks of class. The presentation can be done in any appropriate way the student wishes. A handout for each student might summarize the student’s description and analysis of the film. Students are encouraged, however, to use multimedia for their class presentations—this may be as common as overheads or powerpoints. Students are encouraged to use the “social presentation” web sites such as Glogster or Museum box to support their presentations. Free or cheap software such as Prezi are also appropriate. The Presentation is worth 300 points. 4)**Participation:** Students’ **INFORMED PARTICIPATION**, THAT IS, thoughtful, well-prepared remarks and observations are essential to this class. Since this is a relatively large class, student observations will be absolutely vital.. Participation is 10% of the final grade or 100 points. The value of every class meeting will depend on discussion, exchange of ideas and advancing the direction of the course.*

**GRADING:** Grading Scale—Do not be cowed by the misplaced concreteness of this scale.

A	93-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D	60-70
A-	90-92	B	83-86	C	73-76	F	below 60
		B-	80-82	C-	70-72		

**ACADEMIC HONESTY:** Students are expected to be honest in their academic work. The University reserves the right to penalize any student whose academic conduct at any time is, in its judgment, detrimental to the University. Such conduct shall include cases of plagiarism, collusion, cheating, giving or receiving or offering or soliciting information in examinations, or the use of previously prepared material in examinations or quizzes. Violations should be reported to me and will be investigated and adjudicated according to the Policy on Academic Honesty of the College of Arts & Sciences. If the charges are found to be true, the student may be liable for academic or disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion from the University.

**STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS:** Students with disabilities need to make arrangements with the Disabilities Coordinator, 977-8885, Busch Student Center, Suite 331.

**EVALUATIONS:** Please, please complete an online evaluation for this and all your other courses. We are aware that there are other things on one’s mind at the end of a course and semester. Instructors do read these and use the evaluations to improve instruction. The University also needs these as part of ongoing internal and external evaluations.

## **SCHEDULE OF CLASSES/FILMS/READINGS:**

Week One-Tuesday, January 15. Introduction : Intro of class materials, instructor and members. Expectations and limitations. Syllabus review: Each week we will explore and discuss issues of entertainment as commerce, and political communication in American political culture. In addition to the following types of questions we will explore historical context—Films across eight decades-- and current approaches to political questions. Questions for each week are included as suggestive prompts.

*What is the picture about –the main action. What genre is the film and what themes are developed in the film? Relate any of these materials to class readings. When was the movie made? How did the time of production influence the production. What did the director and producer say about their film? What did the critics say about the picture? Did anybody go to see the film? Did it win prizes?Alternatively a filmmaker(whose oeuvres include a political film, my be featured. This may include but not be limited to Capra, Kazan, Coppola, Stone, Moore.*

### ***Readings: Franklin: Chapters 1-4***

Week Two-- Tuesday, January 22 Mr. Smith Goes to Washington

Readings: *Christensen, Chapters 1-5, Franklin, pp. 178-180*



Questions to consider:

1. What is this film trying to say about American democracy?
2. Over 80 years later, is corruption in government as big a problem as it seems to have been back then?

3. Do similar things happen today that are not called corruption because they're perfectly legal?
4. Was the movie itself, and especially the way it ends, as naïve as Jeff?
5. How is this film reflective of the situation America found itself in back in the late 1930s?
6. How would you describe Jeff? Are there lots of naïve and idealistic people like him around today?
7. Is patriotism a good thing?
8. Is Joe Paine a fundamentally bad person, or just weak?
9. Would Jeff and Clarissa be a good couple?
10. What did you like and not like about this movie

### Week Three Tuesday, January 29 Casablanca

Readings: *Christensen, Chapter 6.*



#### *Questions: to consider:*

The way *Casablanca's* narrative develops, as is true of most Hollywood films, is through a tight sequence, or chain, of cause and effect. What are some of the important links in that chain?

If the major motivating force in classical Hollywood cinema is *desire*, what are the desires of the major characters in this film? To what extent are these desires satisfied?

Rick and Lazlo can be said to represent two different types of heroism. How would you categorize each one as a hero? What qualities, if any, do they share? How do they most differ from each other?

*Casablanca* has become something of a "cult" film, in part because of the personality of Humphrey Bogart. What is it about Bogart as a performer that makes him interesting?

How is Ilsa characterized in this film? Would it be fair to say that the main female character in *Casablanca* is merely an object of exchange between men? Does Ilsa ever *do* anything in the

film?

Although the narrative is constructed on a change of heart on Rick's part, are we ever in any real doubt as to what Rick's final choice will be? What are some of the clues, from the very beginning of the film, that tell us what Rick's future behavior will be?

The story in *Casablanca* takes place in two worlds, Paris and Casablanca. How are these worlds compared and contrasted in the film?

One critic has suggested that *Casablanca* is structured around the concept of theft and thievery. How many different "thefts" are there in the film and how are they related to each other?

Week Four: Tuesday, February 5 All the King's Men Giglio pp. 101-102



*Oui*

.....*Mais...Non.....*



Questions to consider:

Consider as "all the king's men" all those who were closest to Governor Willie Stark: Jack Burden, Sadie Burke, Tiny Duffy, Sugar-Boy, and Willie's family and mistresses. How do these characters interact to support Willie or cause Willie's downfall?

Who is the main character in the novel: Jack Burden or Willie Stark? That is, who is the real focus--the "king" or his "man," Jack? What criteria should we use to determine who the main character is?

Is Jack responsible for Willie's death? Does he really believe that he is? From a moral standpoint, is he guilty?

Compare the fictional character Willie Stark with the historical Huey P. Long. How would any ties between Willie and a real-life figure affect the novel's meaning? What details does the author change for his novel?

As narrator, Jack mentions the notion of time frequently. Consider the meaning of "time" how it relates to both the plot and the symbolic language of the novel. How is time used to express Jack's feelings and to influence the narrative?

Snarky, cynical Jack Burden is one of the more vivid and memorable narrators in modern American literature. Compare Jack's character, experience, and style of narration with that of another 20th-century narrator. Consider, for instance, Holden Caulfield (*Catcher in the Rye*), Nick Carraway (*The Great Gatsby*), Quentin Compson (*The Sound and the Fury*), and Dave Eggers (*A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*).

As governor, Willie Stark runs his administration ferociously, using dirty tricks, blackmail, and sometimes bribery to keep his opponents in line. Are such tactics always necessary in politics, sometimes necessary in bad circumstances, or never necessary or justified? Consider today's political situation for comparison. Similar topics might include the use of media, oratory, graft, handouts, and digging up dirt.

The three leading women--Anne Stanton, Sadie Burke, and Lucy Stark--are all involved romantically with Willie Stark. Additionally, all three find difficulty in the male world of 1930s politics; women's suffrage, for instance, was relatively new. Do the women have the same range of moral and political differentiation as the men, from strongly moral to pragmatically semi-moral to strongly immoral, and from strong leadership roles all the way down?

Week Five--Tuesday, February 12 On the Waterfront Readings: *Christensen Chap. 7*



Questions to consider: In the 1950s, Hollywood tended more and more to make films on location, in real places rather than on studio sound stages or back lots. *On the Waterfront* was filmed entirely on the waterfront docks of New Jersey and New York. What is the effect of this location filming? Do you think the film would have been equally convincing had it been filmed in Hollywood?

Although *On the Waterfront* was filmed on location, the art director for the film won an Academy Award for his work. What, exactly, do you think the art director (who traditionally designs sets for movies) did to deserve recognition?

What social issues does this film deal with? How would you define the film's point of view in relation to social issues?

Marlon Brando was as important an actor for the 1950s as, say, Clark Gable was for the 1930s or Bruce Willis for the 1990s. How would you describe, on the basis of this film, Brando's appeal? What kind of qualities does he embody?

What is the film's view of the relationship between the individual and society? What, finally, changes the social awareness of Terry Malloy?

What is the function of the priest in *On the Waterfront*? How do you respond to the priest as Karl Malden plays him? Can you imagine another way of playing the same character?

Although ostensibly a "realistic" film, *On the Waterfront* employs a good deal of symbolism and what might be called "poetic" touches. What are some of the film's symbols? How effective is the film in using these symbols? Which work best and which work least well? What do you make of the symbolism of the film's ending? Given the political mood of the time and the director's own experiences, how might the entire film be viewed as a metaphor a symbol for something else?

What is noteworthy about the music in this film? Contrast with *Mr. Smith*.





Week Six-- Tuesday, February, 19 -- Dr. Strangelove Readings: Christensen  
Chapter 8-9



Questions to consider:

Who did the following characters represent in the real world: Dr. Strangelove; President Merkin Muffley; General Buck Turgidson; General Jack D. Ripper (P.O.E.); Group Commander Lionel Mandrake; Major King Kong; Russian Premier Dimitri Kissoff; Ambassador De Sadesky?

Why are there so many sexual references throughout the film--such as the copulatory refueling scene of the opening credits, the character names, the seductive messages scrawled on the sides of the missiles, the conflation of military and romantic terminology by Buck Turgidson and his secretary/mistress ("you just start your countdown, honey...")? What explanations for this can you find in Elaine May's essay, "Women, Sex and the Bomb"?

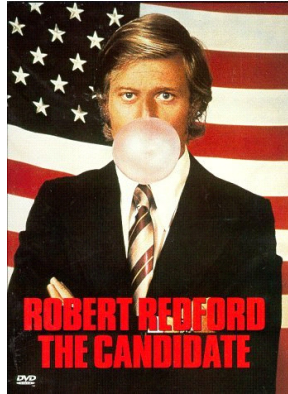
And on the same wavelength, why so many sports metaphors --like "the big board" in the War room, references to the dropping of bombs as "scoring," the weather ship that offers refuge for the bombing plane called "TD" as in touchdown, Buck Turgidson's speech encouraging a pre-emptive strike like Knute Rockne in the locker room at halftime? What is Kubrick saying about seeing nuclear war as a game?

To what extent does Jack D. Ripper's concern that fluoridation represents a commie plot and his conviction that his political well being depends on his "denying his essence" to women reflect mainstream fears about Communism in the Cold War years? How many people were drinking rainwater and grain alcohol and striving to "Preserve Our Essence"? What kinds of actual activities was Kubrick parodying with Ripper's paranoia?

Discuss instances of irony used to make a point about the absurdity of the Cold War in the film. What do the billboards at the army base ("Peace is Our Profession") and the

President's statement to the wrestling Soviet ambassador and Buck Turgidson ("You can't fight in here, this is the War Room!") illustrate? If you have read George Orwell's 1984, what parallels occur between Orwellian "doublespeak" and Kubrick's ironic statements

WEEK Seven, Tuesday, February 26 The Candidate Readings:



Questions to consider:

In what ways are political campaigns today similar to Bill McKay's campaign in the Candidate? What does the campaign do to Bill McKay? Examine his relationships to his beliefs, his wife, his friends and his father?

What cinematic innovations were introduced in the movie and to what extent are we still living with them?

Do large constituencies mandate the kind of campaign that bill McKay ends up in.

Any thoughts about the portrayals of McKay's and Stark's campaigns.



WARNER BROS. PRESENTS ROBERT REDFORD in "THE CANDIDATE" STARRING PETER BOYLE • TECHNICOLOR®  
NSS 72/235

Week Eight--Mid Term Tuesday March 5, 2018 Week Nine--Spring Break Tuesday  
March 12, 2018

**One of your reviews and a brief description of your project are due at Mid-term**

**Week Ten:...Tuesday, March 19 Apocalypse Now Readings:  
Christensen...Chapters 9-10...**



**Questions for consideration:**

Does this film romanticize war? Does it matter that the Vietnam was over when the film was made? Was the boat ride an effective use of the stagecoach, das boat

technique. Did you empathize with Willard and/ or Kurtz ? Does the movie give clues as to the reasons for the mixed results of the Vietnam War? Wise people or talking heads blame the current state of civil discourse on the Vietnam war; cynicism about government and the absence of a draft being fulcrums leading to national divisions.

**Week Eleven, Tuesday March, 26 Do the Right Thing Readings: Christensen...Chapter 13**



Questions for Consideration:

What are your affective responses? What are your feelings, at the movie's end, for Mookie, for Sal, for the police, for the community, for Radio Raheem? Who does--and who does not do--"the right thing"? Whose actions seem meaningful, purposeful, humane? What has been earned, learned, or lost?

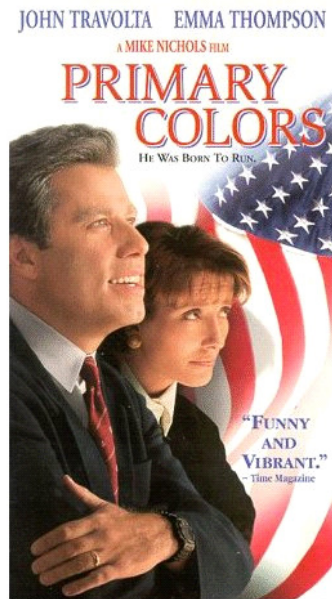
Paraphrase the film's ending quotes from Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. What is the effect of juxtaposing these two seemingly irreconcilable messages? Which is more important: to do the right thing, or to fight the power? Explain.

Describe Lee's direction. What are the elements of camera angle, movement, and editing used most often? How do the use of leitmotif and other dubbed sound contribute? What uses are made of tone and color?

Michael Cromartie, writing in World, accuses Lee of "encouraging senseless violence and rage over superficial issues"; Micah Morrison writes in National Review that in Do the Right Thing "People are more threatened by pizza than by drugs"; and other critics have suggested that the film may provoke copy-cat violence by black youth. What are the reasons for such allegations, and to what degree are such criticisms warranted?

Name, describe, and characterize as many uses of music--and their effects--as you can.

**Week Twelve.... Tuesday April, 2 .... Primary Colors. Reading: Christensen..Chapter 11**



**Questions to consider:** One critic has called Primary Colors a kind of “political Pompey.” What justifies this evaluation? What information from the movie and from the careers of the Clintons would justify calling them high risk patrons.? Primary colors raises interesting questions about ends and means in politics. Is the ends and means debate really only personal or does it also apply to governments and political parties? Who are the main characters in real life and where are they now?

**Week Thirteen: Tuesday, April 9, Wag the Dog**



### **Questions to consider:**

. Wag the Dog is adapted from a book called American Hero by Larry Beinhart. Would American Hero be a more or less suitable title for the movie... discuss what each title means to the audience and say why one is the most appropriate.

Why would two such high profile actors, Robert DeNiro and Dustin Hoffman give their services - 'act' - for free for this movie?

. Are spin doctors evil? How is spinning a story to persuade an audience any different than exaggerating a personal story that you would tell a friend?

Why would the film makers have chosen Albania?

Who was the martyr in the movie? Who was the hero? Why?

."It must be true it's on TV. "Why is this significant in the movie?

.How would you verify that the war was actually happening if you had seen the news broadcasts put out by the White House Press Office?

The American President isn't a person its a product. Explain how the presidency was sold in the re-election tv ad's in the movie and list 5 other slogans and the product associated with them.

*Compare and contrast with the candidate*

### **Week Fourteen: Tuesday April 16. Class Presentations**

### **Week Fifteen: Tuesday April 23 Class Presentations**

**All critiques are due.**

### **Week Sixteen: Tuesday April 30, Class Presentations**

### **Thursday May 14....Finals**

**Suggested films for semester projects are listed below. Other film projects must be approved by Mid-Term. Approval involves the "oeuvre" as well as the number of participants on a team (no more than three). All must be aware of the logic of collective action and the problem of the freedom rider.**

**Intolerance**

**Birth of a Nation**

**The Crowd**

**All Quiet on the Western Front**

**Mr. Deeds Goes to Town**

**Grapes of Wrath**

**The Wizard of Oz**

**Meet John Doe**

**Lifeboat**  
**Citizen Kane**

**The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence**

**Stagecoach**

**High Noon**

**Last Hurrah**

**Red Dawn**

**The Day the Earth Stood Still**

**Five Days in May**

**Manchurian Candidate (1 and 2)**

**China Syndrome**

**Z**

**Reds**

**Invasion of the Body Snatchers**

**Mississippi Burning**

**Dead Man Walking**

**JFK**

**Nixon**

**Lincoln**

**Nixon Frost**

**All the President's Men**

**Malcolm X**

**Green Berets**

**Full Metal Jacket**

**The Deer Hunter**

**Platoon**

**Coming Home**

**Thelma and Louise**

**The Contender**

**Forrest Gump**

**Bullworth**

**Bowling for Columbine—Roger and Me**

**Fahrenheit 9/11**

**Sicko**

**American History X**

**On the Beach**

**Being There**

**Dick**

**Bob Roberts**

**American President**  
**Charlie Wilson's War**  
**Ides of March**  
**American Hustle**  
**Spielberg's Lincoln**  
**Milk**  
**Game Change**  
**Zero Dark Thirty**  
**House of Cards**  
**Vendetta**