The Reel World: Contemporary Issues on Screen

Films
• “Before the Rain” (Macedonia 1994) or “L’America” (Italy/Albania 1994)
• “Earth” (India 1998)
• “Xiu-Xiu the Sent Down Girl” (China 1999)
• (OPTIONAL): “Indochine” (France/Vietnam 1992)
• “Zinat” (Iran 1994)
• “Paradise Now” (Palestine 2005)
• “Hotel Rwanda” (Rwanda 2004)
• (OPTIONAL): “Lumumba” (Zaire 2002)
• “A Dry White Season” (South Africa 1989)
• “Missing” (US/Chile 1982)
• “Official Story” (Argentina 1985)
• “Men With Guns” (Central America 1997)

Books
• We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda by Philip Gourevitch
• (OPTIONAL/RECOMMENDED): A Dry White Season by André Brink

Course Goals
There are several specific goals to achieve for the course:

- Students will learn to view films historically as one of a number of sources offering an interpretation of the past
- Students will acquire a knowledge of the key terms, facts, and events in contemporary world history and thereby gain an informed historical perspective
- Students will take from the class the skills to critically appraise varying historical arguments based on film and to clearly express their own interpretations
- Students will develop the ability to synthesize and integrate information and ideas as well as to distinguish between fact and opinion
- Students will be encouraged to develop an openness to new ideas and, most importantly, the capacity to think critically

Course Activities and Procedures
This course is taught in conjunction with “The Contemporary World,” although that course is not a prerequisite. We will use material from that course as background and context for the films we see. Students who have already taken “The Contemporary World” can review the material to refresh their memories before watching the relevant titles if they feel the need to do so. You will be required to read ten Units, which include video clips and some web sites for you to visit as designated and as your time allows. Some of the film-related topics for papers from “The Contemporary World” are also offered here, so if you have already written on one of the topics offered, please choose another option.
The emphasis of the course is not issues of art, cinematography, or the directing or acting involved in film making, although these issues may certainly be discussed. Also, the course will not include historical films about the United States or documentary films (except as alternative titles), simply because there are too many of each of those categories to choose from. We will use feature films on historical issues as a window unto the world, examining the historical context of the films themselves as well as reviews, articles about our selected films, and the books to emphasize and critique the varying interpretations of history as presented on the big screen. Of course, students are free to view as many films as they would like beyond the list of preferred/core films, and documentary films in particular may complement the material for this course.

This course might pose logistical concerns because of the limited availability of some films. I will offer alternative titles for each section in case the preferred title cannot be obtained. If you cannot obtain the preferred title, try to view the first title on the alternate list; if you cannot obtain that title, try to view the next one on the list and so on. If you view a film from the alternate list, comment on that film on the Discussion Board after giving a brief description of the film. Feel free also to find reviews and other material about the film online. However, the titles on the preferred or core list of films above are linked by common themes that are important to the course as a whole, so try to secure those titles if at all possible.

Course activities are comprised of two Written Assignments and a Final Paper; an Internet Assignment; Discussion Board prompts; and a personal Blog of reactions to the films. Students are encouraged to do anything they like with the style, design, and content of their blogs (instructions on how to create one will be forthcoming); specific queries and/or tasks will be included under the heading “Blog query.” Students are required to respond to a minimum of at least five of the blog queries, but are encouraged to respond to more and also to read and comment on each others’ blogs as much as time allows.

Ideally, you should complete the Units in order; however, the availability of some films may be limited, so students may have to complete Units according to when they can obtain the relevant titles. Each Unit will have instructions on how to proceed. Questions or problems involving technology should be directed to the Division of Continual Learning. The best way to inform the instructor of problems and/or pose questions about the course is the section on the Blackboard Discussion Board designated for that purpose.

Assignments
2 Written Assignments (3-5 pages) worth 15 points each 30 points
1 Internet Assignment worth 10 points 10 points
10 Discussion Prompts worth 3 points each 30 points
Student Blogs 10 points
Final Paper (5-7 pages) 20 points
TOTAL 100 points

COURSE SCHEDULE
Week 1:

The Balkans. Read: Unit 1: The Balkans; View:

either

or
  ▪ “L’America” (Italy/Albania 1994) and Read: “L’America: A Film Review” by James Berardinelli; “Coming to L’America” by Howard Feinstein, The Village Voice, 41 January 2, 1996: 58; and “L’America: A Review” by Leo Goldsmith; Write: A (2-4 paragraph) reaction on the Discussion Board and Respond to the Blog query if you choose

Alternative titles: “Tito and Me”; “Vukovar”; “No Man’s Land”

India. Read: Unit 2: India; View “Earth” (India 1998); Read: “Earth: Unforgettable” by Zarminae Ansaryi and “Earth: Reviewed by C. J. S. Wallia”; Write: A (2-4 paragraph) reaction on the Discussion Board and Respond to the Blog query if you choose


Week 2:


* Beware: the first 2-3 pages of this article is full of a lot of anthropological jargon, so feel free to skim/skip that part and focus on the much more readable and comprehensible section that begins with the heading “The Example of Before the Rain” on p. 163.

Alternative titles: “The Fog of War”; “Killing Fields” (Cambodia); “The Scent of Green Papaya”; “The Year of Living Dangerously” (Indonesia)

Written Assignment #1 (3-5 pages double-spaced, 12-point font) due
Topics (choose one of the following)*:
1. View the 1994 film “Schindler’s List” and read the reviews of the film on e-reserve. Feel free to identify other reviews of the film as well. Write your own review of the film responding to the issues of historical debate raised in these readings (identify 2-3 criticisms in the reviews and tell why you agree or disagree with them).
2. View the 1983 film “Gandhi” and read the reviews of the film on e-reserve and these brief reviews by Dragan Antulov, Damian Cannon, and George Chabot. Feel free to identify other reviews of the film as well. Write your own review of the film responding to the issues of historical debate raised in the reading (identify 2-3 criticisms raised in the reviews and tell why you agree or disagree with them).
3. View the 1994 Indian film “Bandit Queen” and visit these web sites with reviews and discussion of the controversial film: Reviews of the film “Bandit Queen”; “India’s Bandit Queen” by Mary Anne Weaver, The Atlantic Monthly 278 November 1996: 89-104; “The Bandit Queen” by William Pinch in the American Historical Review 101 October 1996: 1149-1150; and The “Bandit Queen” Phoolan Devi. Optional: Links to material about Phoolan Devi. Read through several of the reviews and articles about the film, then write your own review of the film responding to the issues of historical debate raised in this material (identify 2-3 key points made in the readings and tell why you agree or disagree with them).
4. View the film “Enemy at the Gates” and read the e-reserve review of the film by Godfrey Chesire. Do you agree with Chesire’s criticisms of the film? Why or why not? (Identify 2-3 main criticisms of the film made by Chesire and cite specific examples from the film to either support or refute those criticisms).
5. Write a review of any film listed as either a Core/Preferred film or an Alternative Title for Units 1-5 or for any of the following titles: “Europa! Europa!”; “Divided We Fall”; “The Pianist”; “Goodbye Lenin”; “Zentropa”; “Downfall”; or any title that you identify that is relevant to the material in these units. Feel free to locate and

* Numbers 1-3 are also paper topics for The Contemporary World course, so if you have already written on this topic please choose another option.
respond to online reviews of the title you choose, although you are not obligated to do so. Your review should identify 2-3 issues of historical significance from the film and comment or elaborate on them.

**Week 3:**

**Iran.** Read: Unit 5: Iran. **View:** “Zinat” (Iran 1994); Read: “Marriage Iranian Style” by Janet Maslin, *New York Times*, April 1, 1995; Write: A (2-4 paragraph) reaction on the Discussion Board and Respond to the Blog query if you choose


**The Middle East**

1. Read: Unit 6: The Arab-Israeli Conflict; View: “Paradise Now” (Palestine 2005); Read: Reviews and stories about “Paradise Now”; Write: A (2-4 paragraph) reaction on the Discussion Board and Respond to the Blog query if you choose


2. **Internet Assignment: “Reel Bad Arabs”—follow the step-by-step instructions and post your Responses to the steps on the Discussion Board**

**Rwanda.** Read: *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* by Philip Gourevitch; View: “Hotel Rwanda” (Rwanda 2004); Optional: identify and read reviews of the film online; Write: A (2-4 paragraph) reaction on the Discussion Board and Respond to the Blog query if you choose

Alternative titles: “Sometimes in April”; “Shake Hands With the Devil”; “Gacaca: Living Together Again in Rwanda?”; “In Rwanda We Say . . . The Family That Does Not Speak Dies”

**Week 4:**


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* Via the UNC-G Library web page go to Databases and then to Film Literature Index. If that yields little next try a broad Google search.
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2001: 17-18; Write: A (2-4 paragraph) reaction on the Discussion Board and Respond to the Blog query if you choose

Alternative Title: “Lumumba: Death of a Prophet”

South Africa. Read: Unit 9: South Africa; and (OPTIONAL) A Dry White Season by André Brink; View: “A Dry White Season” (South Africa 1989); Optional: identify and read reviews of the film online; Write: A (2-4 paragraph) reaction on the Discussion Board and Respond to the Blog query if you choose


Written Assignment #2 (3-5 pages double-spaced, 12-point font) due: Topics (choose one of the following):
1. Sketch a scene from We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda by Philip Gourevitch that you think could have been included in the film Hotel Rwanda. Justify your choice, i.e. why adding it would benefit the film? How and where exactly in the film would you add it? (Include dialogue if you choose).
2. Sketch a scene from the novel A Dry White Season by André Brink that you think could have been included in the film version but was not. Justify your choice, i.e. why adding it would benefit the film? How and where exactly in the film would you add it? Include dialogue if you choose.
3. View “Black Hawk Down” (US 2002) and read Somalia: A Brief History, this brief background article on the history of Somalia, and these reviews of the film (feel free to identify other reviews of the film as well). Finally, read the newspaper article “The Oil Factor in Somalia” (Los Angeles Times, January 18, 1993) discussed by some of the reviewers. Write your own review of the film responding to the issues of historical debate raised in these readings (identify 2-3 criticisms in the reviews and tell why you agree or disagree with them).
4. View the documentary film “Panama Deception” available in three separate parts at www.youtube.com. Feel free also to identify reviews of the film and/or additional reading about the event, although you are not obligated to do so. What were the main factors behind US intervention in Panama in 1989? Do you think US military intervention in Panama was justified? Why or why not?
5. Write a review of any film listed as either a Core/Preferred film or an Alternative Title for Units 6-12 or for any of the following titles: “Fahrenheit 9-11”; “The Revolution Will Not be Televised”; “Life & Debt”; or any title that you identify that is relevant to the material in these units. Feel free to locate and respond to online reviews of the title you choose, although you are not obligated to do so. Your review should identify 2-3 issues of historical significance from the film/reviews and comment or elaborate on them.

* Via the UNC-G Library web page go to Databases and then to Film Literature Index.
* Numbers 3-4 are also paper topics for The Contemporary World course, so if you have already written on this topic please choose another option.
Week 5:

South America: Chile and Argentina
1. Read: Unit 10: South America; View: “Missing” (US/Chile 1982); Read: “Chile con carnage” by John Simon, National Review 34 March 19, 1982: 308-10; “New Film by Costa-Gavras Examines the Chilean Coup” by Flora Lewis, New York Times, February 7, 1982; News and Information on the Charles Horman case; Write: A (2-4 paragraph) reaction on the Discussion Board and Respond to the Blog query if you choose

Alternative Titles: “Machuca”


Alternative Titles: “Salvador”; “Strawberry and Chocolate”; “I am Cuba”

Final Paper (4-7 pages double-spaced, 12-point font) due
• Drawing on at least five titles from the preferred/core list of films for the course, what do you see as the main theme or themes running throughout these films? What broad historical forces are at work in the films we’ve seen, how have people in the films responded to those forces, and what similarities and differences can you draw between the life experiences portrayed in these films?