COURSE STATEMENT

What is history? It is a body of facts that have been accepted by historians as valid and significant. History is seeing the past through the eyes of today. The main task of the historian is not to record facts, but to interpret and evaluate them. History is the selection, arrangement, and interpretation of facts for the purpose of telling “how it really was.”

Like written history, contemporary Hollywood feature films are an interpretation of their society. They too may be considered historical evidence, for they share some properties with written history. Like traditional historical materials such as diaries and newspapers, contemporary films reflect the society that produced them. Twentieth-century films are a record of that time period. Both the filmmaker and historian share a common methodology. They study appropriate sources, then select and arrange facts to tell their story. But neither a single movie, nor a single article or book can be considered the absolute authority on a topic, for both present biased interpretations. Therefore, film evidence, as well as books and articles must be evaluated in conjunction with other information on the subject, if a more balanced and truthful interpretation of history is sought.

Many argue that film evidence is invalid because filmmakers are not historians. Their primary goal is to entertain and make money, rather than presenting the truth about the past. These elements are most obvious in historical dramas. However, it is the historian’s task to separate fantasy from fact. A major goal of this course is determining what is valid in contemporary films and historical drama.

Therefore, this course examines Hollywood feature films and historical dramas as historical evidence. Students view movies on various topics and write essays comparing that film evidence to information in more
traditional sources, such as articles from history, political science, and sociology journals. The course is based around six broad questions:
1. Is film a legitimate historical source?
2. To what extent is film evidence legitimate?
3. What determines the legitimacy of film evidence?
4. What determines the illegitimacy of film evidence?
5. Is film evidence ever better than traditional historical sources?
6. Can Hollywood films be used to teach history?

ELEMENTS OF U. S. HISTORY STUDIED THIS SEMESTER
1. 1919 Baseball World Series Scandal
2. Prohibition
3. Gendered America
4. American Race Relations [Desegregation]
5. The Cold War
6. The Space Race
7. The Hazards of Nuclear Power
8. Watergate

COURSE GOALS
1. To give students practical experience in critical analysis by evaluating full length feature films as historical evidence
2. To motivate students in the interrogation of traditional scholarly sources by exposing them to relevant written material on past events
3. To use film as a means of motivating students to learn United States history
4. To improve students’ research and writing skills through the assignment of critical essays on selected subjects that use film and traditional sources as evidence
5. To impart some knowledge of U. S. history

RECOMMENDED FOR WRITING COMPETENCY
OR
Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2010

COURSE FORMAT
I begin each topic with a brief lecture on the subject. Students view films during class time. The movie is shown only once. It is the student’s
responsibility to view those missed because of class absences. I do not lend films. Some are available for loan at the Georgia Tech Library. Discussion of the film and assigned readings conclude each unit.

**CLASS ROOM COURTESY**

I run a tight ship. Class begins at **ON TIME at 2:05 p. m.** Lateness is penalized as an absence. Students are allowed three absences and/or late entries. **On the fourth, students loose ten points on their final grade.** IF YOUR SCHEDULE DOES NOT ALLOW YOU TO GET TO THIS CLASS ON TIME, I SUGGEST THAT YOU DROP IT. Excused absences are not penalized. However, students must provide documentation relevant to the absence.

Students **may not** hold private conversations during lectures, discussions, or film viewing. Drinking non alcoholic beverages is permitted; but not eating. Please turn off cell phones and **BE COURTEOUS ENOUGH NOT TO WORK ON MATERIAL FOR OTHER COURSES IN MY CLASS.** Students caught doing assignments for other classes, ordering/dating on-line, generating and/or answering e-mails, loose five points on their final grade. The same applies to students caught texting, using ear phones etc. You are in this class to learn American history, how to critically evaluate related material, and how to write analytical essays on the eight topics studied this semester. This class period IS NOT the time for other professors’ assignments and/or internet quests, unless the material is related to our topic, and is shared in class discussion.

**HONOR CODE**

Students at Georgia Tech adopted the honor system. Therefore, cheating in any form is prohibited. When this is detected, a “ZERO” grade is given for the assignment.

**GRADING**

The final grade is an average of scores accrued during the semester.

A+=95  A=90  A-=89  B+=85  B=80  B-=79  C+=75  C=70  C-=69  D+=65  D=60  D-=59  F=50

**ASSIGNMENTS**

Students will write eight (8) five (5) page essays [double spaced] evaluating selected films and related topical articles as historical evidence. Please note, four and one-half pages or four and three-quarters pages **are not** five page essays! Papers of less than the required pages get low scores. You may of course, write more than five pages. **No late papers will be accepted;**
not even those brought to class by late comers. I start class on time. That is when I’ll collect the essays. If you are not in class when I begin collecting the essays, your paper is late and will not be accepted. You may only slip papers under my office door if you will not be in class on the due date. These papers must arrive before the class begins; that is, before I leave my office for the D. M. Smith Building. Afterwards, they are considered late papers and will not be graded.

ESSAY FORMAT

Since this is a history class, expect not only to view history; but also to read and write about it. The five page essays critique the unit film[s] by discussing the veracity of their information based on assigned readings. Each essay must have a title. The title cannot be Essay One, Essay Two, etc. Essays include a BRIEF ONE PARAGRAPH SUMMARY of the film’s plot. It should not cover an entire page, nor should it consist of two or three paragraphs. Give the essence of the film, not a blow by blow account.

The analysis of the film is based on articles accompanying each unit. Include and document at least one quote from each. Compare what is true or false about Hollywood’s version of history by using the designated articles as a guide. Consider what is missing in Hollywood’s account of history. Is the film presentation biased? Also comment on articles written by historians, psychologists, political scientists, journalists, and/or sociologists. Do they agree/contradict each other, or themselves? Explain. Is the author’s thesis believable? Does s/he cite supporting valid evidence? Is her/his article biased? These are considerations when writing analytical essays.

REQUIRED ARTICLES are listed in the syllabus under each unit. They will be posted on line ON-LINE. You will receive an access code and instructions on accessing this material. On rare occasions some articles may be distributed in class. If absent that day, acquiring the material is your responsibility.

The essay ends with a bibliography of readings for the unit and any additional sources you quoted. A bibliography is arranged in alphabetical order by the author’s last name. It is not numbered. You may copy the bibliography for each unit directly from this syllabus. ON AVERAGE, STUDENTS READ 60-110 PAGES WEEKLY. I RESERVE THE RIGHT TO SUBSTITUTION FILMS AND/OR ARTICLES. STUDENTS WILL BE NOTIFIED BY E-MAIL A MINIMUM OF ONE WEEK BEFORE THE ESSAY IS DUE.

Essays lose points for misspelled words, improper citation of quoted material, improper bibliographic form, grammatical errors, unclear thoughts,
and typos. Plagiarized film reviews are not read. You must cite the source and include the reviewer’s remarks in quotation. Plagiarized film reviews are easily recognized. Also, someone else in the class will have found and used the same material.

Essays are usually due the week following a completed unit.

**DUE DATES FOR ESSAYS**
1. Unit I—January 23, 2012
2. Unit II—February 6, 2012
3. Unit III—February 20, 2012
4. Unit IV—March 5, 2012
5. Unit V—March 26, 2012
6. Unit VI—April 9, 2012
7. Unit VII—April 23, 2012
8. Unit VIII—Final exam date

**TOPICS, FILMS, UNIT READINGS**

**Unit I 1919 WORLD SERIES SCANDAL**

**FILM:** *Eight Men Out*

**READINGS**


UNIT II: PROHIBITION

FILMS

The Roaring Twenties
The Public Enemy

READINGS


UNIT III: GENDERED AMERICA
FILM: A League of Their Own
READINGS

UNIT IV: AMERICAN RACE RELATIONS [DESEGREGATION]
FILMS: The Jackie Robinson Story
Ruby Bridges
READINGS (Ruby Bridges)


**READINGS (Jackie Robinson)**


Lamb, Chris. “I Never Want to Take Another Trip Like This One: Jackie Robinson’s Journey to Integrate Baseball.” Journal of Sport History. (Summer 1997) 24:2, 177-191.


UNIT V: THE COLD WAR

FILMS: Fail Safe
Dr. Strangelove

READINGS


UNIT VI: THE SPACE RACE

FILMS: The Right Stuff
Apollo 13

READINGS


UNIT VII: THE QUESTION OF NUCLEAR POWER

**FILMS:** *The China Syndrome*  
*Silkwood*

**READINGS**

Selected articles from the special issue of *Time: Japan’s Meltdown.* (2011) 177:12

UNIT VIII: WATERGATE

**FILMS:** *All The President’s Men*  
*Nixon [Part II]*
READINGS


Wrong, Dennis. “Watergate: Symptom of What Sickness?” 

Zimmer, Troy. “Impact of Watergate on the Public’s Trust 
And Confidence in Mass Media.” *Social Science Quarterly.* (March 1979) 59:4, 743-751.

####
Reel history unfolds according to the dramatic conventions with which audiences are familiar. Reel history is comprehensible and accessible,” Marc C. Carnes. Actors David Oyelowo and Tom Wilkinson as MLK and LBJ in the movie Selma (Paramount).â€œHollywood regards history as an inexhaustible gold mine,” says Carnes. History sells, but “real history is less fun than reel history.” Film directors are visual thinkers, says Carnes. And they justify their claims that their movies are truthful by faithfully replicating the look of the past by creating historically accurate costumes and settings. To them, and to millions of viewers, if a movie that looks like the past, then it is like the past. Another story states H. J. Whitley came up with the name while honeymooning in the area in 1886. Whichever story is correct (if either), all three people played an important role in the famous city’s development. Hollywood Film Studios. Pre-movie cartoon reels left audiences guffawing and were often used to promote war propaganda in a lighthearted way. On a serious note, documentary newsreels brought the realities of war to life in ways audiences had never experienced yet couldn’t resist. But things weren’t business-as-usual in Hollywood. Movie studios had to prepare for civil defense and erected elaborate bomb shelters. Hollywood During the Great Depression. Digital History. Hollywood’s Dream Factory During World War II. Warfare History Network. Silent Films: Part 1. AMC Filmsite.