

**History 4990 sec. 001**  
**Senior Seminar: History and Film**

**I Contact Information**

Hist 7680 Three Credit Hours

Location: Irish 211

Time: Wednesdays 2:00-4:30

Dr. Colleen McDannell, Sterling M. McMurrin Professor of Religious Studies

Office: 245 Irish Building

Problems? Don't email, please call (801) 581-4748 and leave a message

[www.CMcDannell.com](http://www.CMcDannell.com)

**II Introduction and Background**

For many people, history is learned not by reading but rather through watching movies. While we know on one level that movies are “just entertainment,” we also know they powerfully convey all sorts of information. This senior seminar considers how American history is shaped by “the movies.” We will look at how historical events and characters are represented in almost a hundred years of American cinema. At the same time we will consider how a changing American society shapes the ways film is produced and marketed. In order to seriously consider the relationship between “history,” “fiction,” “opinion,” and “entertainment we will also study documentary feature films.

During the first half of the semester we will view films, read, and discuss together. After fall break, students will concentrate on preparing a 20 page research paper that carefully examines one film. We will talk about the writing process as well as how to interpret their films. In the last two weeks, students will do presentations on their research conclusions.

Students who have problems watching films with mature themes (for instance “R” rated movies) should not take this senior seminar.

### III Objectives

To broaden and deepen our understanding of culture in the United States

To cultivate a sophisticated knowledge of how history is represented in visual form

To understand how research is conducted

To develop communication and interpretive skills—both in writing and in oral presentation

### IV Course Readings

Mark Harris, *Pictures at a Revolution: Five Movies and the Birth of a New Hollywood*  
Robert Brent Toplin, *Michael Moore's Fahrenheit 9/11: How One Film Divided a Nation*  
Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*,  
seventh edition, 2007

#### Films

<i>Gangs of New York</i>	167 mins	PN1997.2 .G35 2003
<i>The Graduate</i>	105 mins	PN1997 .G677 1985 VHS
<i>Dr. Doolittle</i>	151 mins	PN 1997 D6786
<i>This Divided State</i>	88 mins	PN1997.2 .T49 2005
<i>Fog of War</i>	107 mins	E840.4 .F64 2004
<i>Hearts and Minds</i>	112 mins	DS557.6 .H42 1981 VHS
<i>In the Heat of the Night</i>	110 mins	PN1997 .i5 2001
<i>Bonnie and Clyde</i>	112 mins	PN1997 .B6797 1997

## V Scheduled Topics

Wednesdays	In Class	To <u>Have Viewed</u> , Read or Written
Week 1 <b>Aug 26</b>	Introduction Lecture: Representing History in Film	
Week 2 <b>Sept 2</b>	Discussion: <i>Gangs of New York</i> Quiz on Plot Summaries	Turabian 1-11; 373-386 View: <i>Gangs of New York</i> Plot Summarizes for Films
Week 3 <b>Sept 9</b>	<i>Guess Who's Coming to Dinner</i> (108 mins)	<u>Homework</u> : Assignment #1
Week 4 <b>Sept 16</b>	Discussion: Harris, <i>Pictures at a Revolution</i> Final Day for Picking a Film	View: <i>The Graduate</i> or <i>Bonnie and Clyde</i> or <i>Doctor Doolittle</i> or <i>In the Heat of the Night</i> Read: Harris, <i>Pictures at a Revolution</i>
Week 5 <b>Sept 23</b>	Discussion: Harris, <i>Pictures at a Revolution</i> Sources: Finding, Engaging, Criticizing	Read: Harris, <i>Pictures at a Revolution</i> ; Turabian, 24-47 <u>Homework</u> : Assignment #2
Week 6 <b>Sept 30</b>	<i>Fahrenheit 9-11</i> (122 mins)	View <i>Fog of War</i> <b>OR</b> <i>Hearts and Minds</i> Read: Toplin, <i>Michael Moore's</i>
Week 7 <b>Oct 7</b>	Documentaries and Points of View Discussion: Michael Moore	View: <i>This Divided State</i> Read: Toplin, <i>Michael Moore's</i>
Week 8 <b>Oct 14</b>	<b>Fall Break</b>	<b>No Class</b> <b>(Begin Viewing Course Films)</b>
Week 9 <b>Oct 21</b>	Crafting an Argument	Read: Turabian, 5-23; 48-61 Homework: Assignment #3
Week 10 <b>Oct 28</b>	Tutorials— <b>No Formal Class</b>	Read: Turabian, 62-81
Week 11 <b>Nov 4</b>	History on Film Draft Films #1 #2 #3 #4 #5	<u>Homework</u> : Assignment #4
Week 12 <b>Nov 11</b>	Film in History Drafts Films #6 #7 #8 #9 #10	<u>Homework</u> : Assignment #4
Week 13 <b>Nov 18</b>	Documentaries Drafts Films #11 #12 #13 #14 #15	<u>Homework</u> : Assignment #4
Week 14 <b>Nov 25</b>	Tutorials— <b>No Formal Class</b>	
Week 15 <b>Dec 2</b>	Student Presentations (two teams)	<u>Homework</u> : Assignment #5
Week 16 <b>Dec 9</b>	Student Presentations (one team) General Evaluation	<u>Homework</u> : Assignment #5 Final Paper due in class

## **VI Assignments**

### **50% Research Essay**

Early in the course, students will choose one film from three lists: “History on Film” or “Film within History” or “Documentaries.” These films are all made in the US and deal with American topics and people. Each student must choose a different film and there can be no more than five students in any one category. All of the students who pick films from one category will comprise “a team.”

The goal of the research paper is to examine in depth one film from a historical perspective. Students need to conduct research that will help them understand the historical context in which the film was produced and the ways that the film interprets a period of history or event. Students need to be familiar with what scholars say about a particular historical character or event or era. The essays need to describe how the filmmaker “bends” historical facts and chooses interpretations—and why the filmmaker is shaping history in a particular way. To do that, the student needs to reflect on how the film works as a “film.” How do art design, music, directing, lighting, screenplay, and acting create a particular “feel”? There is a non-verbal dimension to movies must not be ignored. Thus the analysis needs to reflect the world inside of the film and the world outside of the film. What was the critical reception of the film?

Research essays need to be argument driven, they need to make a point. Essays will be evaluated on how well they support a critical perspective on the film by marshalling evidence. It is not enough merely to collect information about the film or about the time period represented in the movie. You must construct a cogent, persuasive, and thorough argument about what you see in the film. The essay must show evidence of your own ideas.

As this seminar is geared to producing a formal research paper, the essay will be evaluated on how well it conforms to the University of Chicago formatting style as outlined in the *Turabian*. You need to illustrate mastery of general organization, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and citation style. Everything you turn in must be in the proper style--cover sheet, page number, double spaced, strong paragraphs. Students who are careless about the mechanics of writing will receive only a standard grade, even if their thoughts are brilliant.

The final essay is due, in class, on December 9.

### **25% Seminar Participation**

This course is a “seminar.” This means that it is up to the students in the class to actively discuss the reading materials, films, and essay drafts. It is expected that students will attend all classes, having read the assigned reading and viewed the films (recently!). Please be prepared for careful listening and discussion. You must make this seminar

exciting by talking with each other not just to me. Participation will be evaluated on how verbally engaged you are in the class discussions.

If you prefer to be quiet; sitting back and listening to those more comfortable at verbal interaction—your grade will suffer. Observers will receive less than a standard grade. Please come and talk with me if you have any questions about how I define “observer,” and how I can help you become a more active participant in our class.

Obviously, if you are not in class, you cannot be participating. Please attend all classes.

### **25% Homework** (five assignments)

Homework assignments will be given throughout the course to help students practice the craft of research and writing. Late homework or homework turned in when the student is not in class will receive 50% of the points.

Please see me *before* the homework is due if you have any problems.

## **VII Evaluation Scale**

A	93-100	C+	77-79	D-	60-62
A-	90-92	C	73-76	E<	60
B+	87-89	C-	70-72		
B	83-86	D+	67-69		
B-	80-82	D	63-66		

## **VII Classroom Policies**

It is expected that students will attend all classes, having read the assigned reading and prepared for careful listening and discussion. Class will begin and end on time, so please do not be late for class. Turn off your cell phones and do not engage in any electronic distraction. Cheating or plagiarism will result in failing the assignment and the class. If you do not know what constitutes such misconduct, check with me and read the Student Code.

Likewise, if you have any problems speaking up in class, arriving on time, or watching movies that deal with adult situations, please tell me within the first week of class. If you don't talk with me immediately, I will assume that all students can meet these basic expectations.

I am willing to work with you on any problems that might arise during your time in this class. However, you must contact me *as soon as something comes up* so that we can work together on your issue. Informing me that a homework assignment will be late does not mean that you will get full credit on it, we need to talk before hand. Do not wait until

the assignment is due to ask questions or to discuss problems as by then it will be too late.

#### ADA Statement

University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Olpin Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations.

#### Student/Faculty Responsibilities:

All students are expected to maintain professional behavior in the classroom setting, according to the Student Code, spelled out in the Student Handbook. Students have specific rights in the classroom as detailed in Article III of the Code. The Code also specifies proscribed conduct (Article XI) that involves cheating on tests, plagiarism, and/or collusion, as well as fraud, theft, etc. Students should read the Code carefully and know they are responsible for content. According to Faculty Rules and Regulations, it is the faculty responsibility to enforce responsible classroom behaviors, and I will do so, beginning with verbal warnings and progressing to dismissal from class and a failing grade. Students have the right to appeal such action to the Student Behavior Committee.