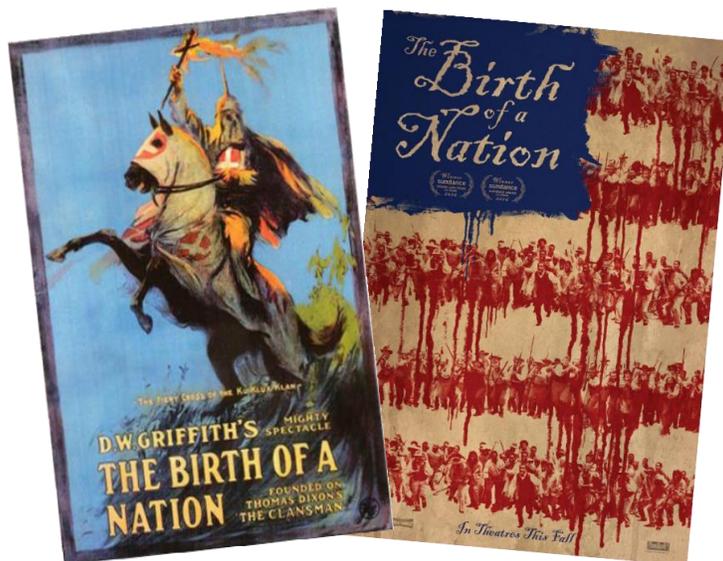


HISTORY 2189B

History at the Movies

Winter 2021



Posters for *The Birth of a Nation*, 1915 & 2016

online synchronous seminar/lecture course, Thursdays 2:30-4:30
with an occasional synchronous movie screening, Mondays 6:30-9:30

Instructor: Prof. Alan MacEachern

Office Hours: Wednesdays 1:00-2:00pm via Zoom

Email: amaceach@uwo.ca

This is the FINAL syllabus, Jan. 2021.

Course Description (in academic calendar):

This course explores representations of history on film, and the strengths and weaknesses of film as a medium for history, in both fictional film and documentaries from more than a century of historical moviemaking.

Course Description (in full):

Film is one of the most powerful ways in which we imagine and remember the past. There is no shortage of historical films – both feature films and documentaries – that imaginatively re-create the past while simultaneously raising important questions about that past. And yet historical films are “good” or “bad” in

different ways than historical texts are. As a medium for history, film has its own strengths and weaknesses, its own genres and conventions.

His2189 goes to the movies to study the past, the history of filmmaking (to a limited degree), and, above all, the nature of history itself. We will watch the entirety or snippets of a host of films from more than a century of filmmaking: Hollywood blockbusters, documentaries, Heritage Minutes, and even online conspiracy videos. As we will see, every historical film represents a dialogue between the time it depicts and the time it was created – so each is doubly a window into the past.

Most movies will be available through Western Libraries subscriptions to [Kanopy](#), [Criterion on Demand](#), and [Audio-Cine Films](#), or the [National Film Board](#) or [Internet Archives](#). A few are not available through a subscription service, and so as part of the course timetable Monday evening is set aside for an occasional screening throughout the term. Either way, students are expected to have watched the week's movie and submitted a response paper *by Tuesday 5pm*. There is then a Thursday afternoon class with both lecture and seminar components. Both the screenings and classes will be on Zoom.

Please note: The films, readings, and class discussion in this course concern historical content involving topics such as war, violence, and gender and racial discrimination. Students may find some scenes or discussions of those scenes upsetting or offensive. I will attempt to warn students of disturbing content. And I will ask the class to be respectful and sensitive in discussion with one another. Our Zoom classroom will provide a space for a critical and civil exchange of ideas.

Learning outcomes:

Students completing this course will

- Appreciate and evaluate historical films as both secondary sources (representations and interpretations of the past they describe) and primary sources (representations of the time in which they were created).
- Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of film as a medium for history.
- Become familiar with the history of film.
- Develop historical thinking skills: assessing historical significance, evaluating evidence and accuracy, identifying context and perspective.
- Develop verbal and written communication skills.

Course Materials:

There is no textbook to purchase for this course. Readings are available on the course OWL site, through the Weldon Library online system, and/or at the URL given. Students are expected to complete the assigned readings and be prepared to discuss them in class and in the final exam.

Methods of Evaluation:

*All written work is to be submitted to the OWL course site as **Microsoft Word docs** (not as Adobe pdfs or in some other*

form), preferably with the filename “Last name assignment” (ex. “MacEachern response week 4”). All assignments will be discussed further in class.

- **Participation – 15%**

You are expected to watch all assigned films, attend all classes and screenings, and participate in class discussion on Zoom, as well as (potentially) polls and/or forums on OWL.

- **Film response papers – 10 x 3% = 30%**

By Tuesday of weeks 2 through 12, you are to have watched that week’s film and submitted on OWL a 250-word response paper about it. You will be graded on all 11 weeks, and your top 10 grades will go toward your final mark.

(Note: Because each week’s response papers will be read prior to Thursday’s class, and the class’s responses may be discussed in class, no response paper will be accepted after Tuesday 5pm.)

- *For more on this assignment, see “Film Response papers” document in OWL resources.*

- **Historical film review – 15%**

Your first major assignment will be to write a historical film review. You will choose and watch a film about some historical subject; the film must be made before the year 2000, and not be one we study in class. You should then research and find reviews of this film from when it was first released (we will discuss where to find these reviews in class). You will then write a paper of about 1500 words describing both how your film portrays the historical event and also how your film is a product of the historical period in which it was made. You must inform me of your chosen film, via email, by 3 February. The film review is due on 25 February.

(Note: The film review has a built-in, blanket extension: it can be submitted up to 4 March without penalty. Beyond that, there is a 5% deduction per day, including weekends.)

- *For more on this assignment, see “Film Review” document in OWL resources.*

- **Historical film treatment – 20%**

Your second written assignment will be to write a treatment for a proposed historical film. A “treatment” is a pitch for, and synopsis of, a proposed film. You will come up with an idea for a film about a real historical figure or event, research that topic, and write a synopsis of the imagined film you would like to make about this topic in history. Your treatment should be about 2000 words, concisely describing the plot or structure of your imagined film, identifying its main characters and themes, and explaining the argument or statement it seeks to make about the past. The film treatment is due on 1 April.

(Note: The film treatment has a built-in, blanket extension: it can be submitted up to 8 April without penalty. Beyond that, there is a 5% deduction per day, including weekends.)

○ *For more on this assignment, see “Film Treatment” document in OWL resources.*

- **Final take-home exam – 20%**

The Registrar’s Office will post the April exam schedule by February. A take-home examination covering all material in the course (films, readings, and classes) will be distributed on OWL 7 days prior to the Registrar-assigned exam slot, to be completed and submitted on OWL by the Registrar-assigned exam slot.

(Note: There will be no extensions granted for the exam. Those unable to submit by the deadline must seek academic accommodation from Student Counselling and, if granted, write a make-up exam.)

The fine print:

Students are to submit all written assignments in electronic form through the course OWL site.

All course assignments must be completed to pass the course, and all must be submitted by 22 April.

Use of Electronic Devices:

Computers may be used during tests and examinations.

Additional Statements:

Please review the Department of History Course Must-Knows document, <https://www.history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/Docs/Department%20of%20History%20Course%20Must-Knows.pdf>, for additional information regarding:

- Academic Offences
- Accessibility Options
- Medical Issues
- Plagiarism
- Scholastic Offences
- Copyright
- Health and Wellness

Course Schedule – Topics, screenings, & readings:

Note: Because the availability of movies changes on subscription services, I have chosen not to post the planned schedule for the 2nd half of term. I would welcome suggestions of films or topics you hope we explore in the 2nd half.

1. Week of 11 January **Trailers**

- To watch: *nothing this week*
- To read:
 - Pierre Sorlin, “The Film in History,” in Marnie Hughes-Warrington, *The History on Film Reader* (2009), 15-16.

2. Week of 18 January **What time does to film & what film does to time**

- To watch: *Dawson City: Frozen Time* (Bill Morrison, 2016) – [Kanopy](#)
- To read:
 - Mary A. Doane, “The Representability of Time,” in Marnie Hughes-Warrington, *The History on Film Reader* (2009), 75-84.

3. Week of 25 January **The history of film**

- To watch: *The Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915) – [Kanopy](#)
- To read:
 - Godfrey Cheshire, “Why No One Is Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Feature Film,” *Southern Cultures* (Winter 2015), 28-37.

4. Week of 1 February **Historical film as secondary & primary source**

- To watch: *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967) – [Criterion on Demand](#)
- To read:
 - Charles Thomas Samuels, Review of *Bonnie and Clyde*, *The Hudson Review* (Spring 1968), various pages.
 - Arnon Gutfeld, “Nostalgia, Protest and Tradition in the 1960s: History as Reflected by *Bonnie and Clyde*,” *Journal of the American Studies Association of Texas* (2009), 5-34.

5. Week of 8 February **Text & film**

- To watch: *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Daniel Vigne, 1982) – [Kanopy](#)
- To read:
 - Excerpts from Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983): preface, introduction, 42-47, 60-1, and 76.
 - Robert Finlay, “The Refashioning of Martin Guerre,” *American Historical Review* (1998), 553-71.
 - Natalie Zemon Davis, “On the Lame,” *American Historical Review* (1998), 572-603.

Week of 15 February **Reading week – no classes**

6. Week of 22 February **TBA**

7. Week of 1 March **TBA**

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| 8. Week of 8 March | TBA |
| 9. Week of 15 March | TBA |
| 10. Week of 22 March | TBA |
| 11. Week of 29 March | TBA |
| 12. Week of 5 April | TBA |