

POT 3102: Political Thought in Fiction (Politics & Film)

Will H. Moore

Fall 2005

Tue 5:30-8:00 pm, Bellamy 004

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This course is structured to teach you critical thinking skills. The content is popular depictions of politics, with *politics* defined very broadly as power relations among people. We will view fourteen influential and/or controversial films. We will also read assigned material, some of which comments directly on the films but much of which comments on issues raised in the films. All of the films are relevant to important (in my opinion) contemporary issues of politics (i.e., power relations). One of the interesting parts of the course will be learning where we each find important politics in these films.

I hope that you will further develop intellectual skills that will be useful to you regardless of what you do after leaving FSU. Specifically, I will emphasize the importance of thinking analytically and critically, and presenting and supporting logically sound arguments.

Finally, I want to stress that this course is challenging. I expect more of you than perhaps is typical, but the adage that ‘what one gets out of a course is a function of what one puts in’ is appropriate. If you skip class, fail to do the reading, etc. then the course will be a struggle and you will likely be frustrated and have a poor experience, not to mention a poor grade.

Requirements & Evaluation

You are expected to have completed the assigned reading prior to attending class. Being an upper division course, the emphasis is on reading and class discussion.

There will be 3 mechanisms for evaluation:

1. Attendance (15%)
2. Class Participation (15%)
3. Papers (70%)

Attendance

Attendance is required. We will show 14 films and each class meeting is worth 7 points. You start class with 2 points and accumulate more as you attend class. If you attend all 14 films you will earn 98 additional points and have a 100 for attendance. If you attend 13 films you will earn 91 additional points and finish with a 93 for attendance. You can figure out the other values on your own.

If you cannot attend class you may want to try to rent the film. Many of the films we will be watching are available for rent in town, though some of them may not be. PLEASE

NOTE: watching the film on your own will not substitute for attendance **regardless** of why you missed class. I will not accept family emergencies, illness, etc. as reasons to excuse an absence. University policy requires me to accept [1] University sponsored events that a student is required to attend and [2] religious observance. I disapprove of this policy, but am bound to observe it, so I do. No other excused absences are permitted: if you must miss a class, you will not earn attendance points for that day.

Class Participation

Class participation will be graded based on your civil¹ contributions to in class discussion or the class discussion board (on Blackboard). You begin the semester with a 50 (out of 100, i.e., an F) for participation. By contributing civilly to class discussion or posting a civil contribution to the discussion board you can earn participation points and raise your grade as follows.

In class I will call on people at random. Students who are present and contribute to civil discussion when called upon will earn 5 points. If a student is called upon and present, but declines to respond to the comment or query, or does so in a counter-productive fashion, s/he will lose 3 participation points for that day. Students who are absent when called upon will also lose 3 participation points. Students who are not called upon may participate by raising their hand, and will earn 5 points when they contribute to civil class discussion. Those who do not get an opportunity to comment in class will have until noon on Wed to post a civil comment to the class discussion board. Those who post a civil comment by noon Wed will earn 5 points. Those who post counter-productive messages will lose 3 points. Students are welcome to post comments after noon on Wed, but they will not earn participation credit.

One cannot earn additional points by posting multiple comments in a given week (i.e., the maximum number of points one can earn in a week is 5). The maximum participation grade is 100. A student who participates during each of the 14 films will earn 70 additional participation points, but the score of 120 (recall that you begin with 50) will be rounded down to 100. To reach 100 a student must contribute to discussion on 10 of the films (and not lose any points during the other four films).

If you do not attend class you will automatically get a zero for class participation for that day (regardless of whether you post to the discussion board).

Civility

As you can see, discussion is a major part of this course. Further, we will be discussing contentious issues. Indeed, I have purposely selected films that will antagonize, challenge, and disturb you. Inevitably, you will be further surprised and—perhaps—upset with some of the views of one or more of your classmates. There is **nothing wrong** with passion and strongly held feelings. There is **nothing wrong** with being alarmed and surprised with the views of one or more of your classmates. The question is, what do you do with your

¹I discuss civil discussion in the following subsection.

emotions? That is, do you ‘fly off the handle’ and attack the person, or do you **challenge the ideas** raised, using a level tone of voice?

A website dedicated to classroom instruction offers the following description of a civil classroom: “A civil classroom is conducive to student expression. Classroom civility fosters an environment where students feel comfortable asking questions and proposing solutions without fear of being shouted down, made fun of, or brushed aside” (http://taproject.rutgers.edu/services_tips/FAQ.php3). We have all experienced biting sarcasm, personal attacks, insulting asides to neighbors, etc. And we all know how it makes us feel to be the object of such comments.

I work hard to create a civil classroom—without it I cannot teach effectively. But I also value freedom of speech and I reject arguments that claim that there are ideas that are too offensive to be entertained. Instead, I submit that there are presentations (tone of voice, insults, etc.) that are offensive. Creating a civil classroom is **not** about placing restraints on what can be said, but rather involves recognition by all members of the classroom their obligation to take other peoples’ ideas seriously and challenge them with a respectful tone of voice and choice of words. I welcome passionate debate, but will penalize those who engage in hurtful speech. Phrases such as “Oh, please!” “Come on!!” “Get off it!” “You’ve got to be kidding!” “Do you *really* believe that?!?” “Are you a moron?” “That’s idiotic!” “People who claim that are either ignorant or lying,” “I can’t believe you just said that!” “That’s naïve!” etc. are out of bounds.²

How does one passionately challenge ideas one finds poorly considered, irritating or offensive? One great technique is to ask clarifying questions: “I don’t understand why you contend that... Could you elaborate?” Another one is to expose unstated assumptions: “It seems to me that view assumes that...” A different approach is to say (sincerely), “That’s an interesting view, but I see it differently” and then state your own position. The most important things to avoid are [1] attacking the speaker (we want to be critical of ideas, not people) and [2] using a disrespectful tone of voice.

Along these lines, the FSU Department of Political Science has produced the following statement. In my opinion it is a bit over the top in spots, but I am sure you get the point.

Acceptable classroom behavior is an integral part of success in the college experience. Not only does an individual’s behavior reflect on her/his own maturity, it can also add to or detract from the experiences of others. The following outline presents the very basic expectations for student behavior relative to class

²In a classic *Saturday Night Live* sketch from 1978 Dan Aykroyd and Jane Curtin parodied a *60 Minutes* segment titled “Point/Counterpoint” which was a precursor to shows such as *The Capital Gang* and *Crossfire*. Those shows glorified supposedly witty, but definitely uncivil, speech. You can read a transcript of the *SNL* skit at the bottom of this page: <http://snltranscripts.jt.org/78/78eupdate.phtml>. If you are a fan of shows like *The Capital Gang* and *Crossfire* then be sure to check that type of rhetorical style at the door for this course.

attendance, fellow-students, and instructors. The Department of Political Science supports these standards and holds each student accountable for her/his behavior. Each instructor will determine for him/herself how to implement these guidelines; but each student is advised to adopt them as their own standards regardless of enforcement measures.

Students are expected to:

- treat one another with respect:
 - do not inflict personal insults in word or gesture;
 - show tolerance for all opinions and points of view;
 - do not speak out of turn.
- treat the classroom setting with respect:
 - arrive on time and stay for the entire class;
 - turn off cell phones (or set for a silent alarm in emergency situations);
 - do not read or chat;
 - pay attention;
 - bring the appropriate supplies and equipment;
 - wear appropriate attire.
- treat the academic experience with respect:
 - do not engage in plagiarism or cheating;
 - attend class;
 - complete readings before class;
 - submit assignments on time;
 - know the course requirements and due dates.
- treat the instructor with respect:
 - visit during scheduled office hours or by appointment;
 - inform of disabilities or other factors that might affect performance;
 - inform of times when you will have to arrive late for class or leave early;
 - inform of expected absences according to the class attendance guidelines;
 - do not ask for exceptions to the established course standards;
 - do not criticize teaching or grading methods;
 - complete course evaluations honestly.

I close by offering one more reason why civility matters. A 2005 study reports that it affects the level of trust in a political community (Mutz & Reeves, “The New Videomalaise,” *American Political Science Review*, Feb 2005, 99(1):1-15):

Does incivility in political discourse have adverse effects on public regard for politics? If so, why? In this study we present a theory suggesting that when viewers are exposed to televised political disagreement, it often violates well-established face-to-face social norms for the polite expression of opposing views. As a result, incivility in public discourse adversely affects trust in government. Drawing on three laboratory experiments, we find that televised presentations of political differences of opinion do not, in and of themselves, harm attitudes toward politics and politicians. However, political trust is adversely affected by levels of incivility in these exchanges. Our findings suggest that the format of much political television effectively promotes viewer interest, but at the expense of political trust.

Papers

There will be three paper assignments and your grade will be composed of the best two grades you earn. Each of those two papers will comprise 35% of your course grade.

The papers will be analytic/critical essays. I will pass out a list of 3 to 4 prompts and you will select one of them and write your paper in response to it. You will have a great deal of latitude on these essays: the prompts will not be questions that have a correct answer. Rather, they will invite you to stake out a position with respect to an issue raised by the films and readings. Different students will want to advance and defend different positions, and thus peoples' essays are going to be different.

They will be graded on the extent to which they are well argued (i.e., begin with a thesis and advance the thesis in a clear manner in the body of the paper) and well written (crisp, clear prose with proper grammar).

The first assignment will be distributed in class on Tuesday 20 September and will be due in my mailbox in the Department of Political Science (Bellamy 534) by 5:00 p.m. on Friday 30 September (you also need to deposit a copy at turnitin.com—see below).

The second assignment will be distributed in class on Tuesday 25 October and will be due in my mailbox in the Department of Political Science (Bellamy 534) by 5:00 p.m. on Friday 4 November (remember to deposit a copy at turnitin.com—see below).

The third assignment will be distributed in class on Tuesday 29 November and will be due in my mailbox in the Department of Political Science (Bellamy 534) by 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday 14 December (remember to deposit a copy at turnitin.com—see below).

Rules for the Take-Home Essays

In addition to turning in a paper copy to my mailbox you must also submit an electronic copy to turnitin.com. You can find instructions for submitting a paper to [turnitin](http://turnitin.com) via Blackboard at: <http://home.oddl.fsu.edu/~ckidwell/WorkshopMaterials/TechnologyIntegration/Turnitin+Blackboard.student.pdf>

The take-home essays must be typewritten (dot matrix is fine) and meet the following specifications:

- ◇ Pages must be numbered
- ◇ Text must be double spaced
- ◇ The paper must be bound with 1 staple in the upper left hand corner.

Papers that do not meet these specifications will not be accepted.

With respect to format and style, your paper should conform with either American Political Science Association's (APSA) *Style Guide* (a summary is available online at: <http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocAPSA.html>), or APA style (see Babington & Levy, 2002, the optional style guide recommended for this course).

PLEASE NOTE: Late work will be marked down 1 letter grade per day late (e.g., A- → B-). These policies will only be excepted when genuine medical excuses, or emergencies beyond your control prevent you from completing the work on time. Written documentation is required.

Plagiarism The Florida State Student Handbook explains that plagiarism is a violation of the academic honor system. More specifically,

...violations of the Academic Honor Code shall include representing another's work or any part thereof, be it published or unpublished, as one's own. It shall also include presenting or submitting any academic work in a manner that impairs the instructor's ability to assess the student's academic performance. For example, plagiarism includes failure to use quotation marks or other conventional markings [such as the double-indent used here] around any material quoted from any source (*Florida State Student Handbook*, 1998, p. 75).

If you have any questions about plagiarism (e.g., if you do not know the difference between citation and quotation), please see Professor Sanders' plagiarism page on his website: <http://www.nd.edu/~msander1/plag.html>

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense that is, unfortunately, endemic in today's universities. Anyone found guilty of plagiarism will receive an F for the course. In addition, a letter describing the offense will be sent to the Dean of Students. The student may also be subjected to additional sanctions deemed appropriate by the relevant authorities. For more information, please see the *Student Handbook*.

If you have any questions regarding citation, please stop by my office hours and ask for help.

Administrative Stuff

Posting Grades

During the semester I will post both attendance and participation grades on the Blackboard site. At the end of the semester I will post all of the course grades on the site.

Students with Challenges

Students with challenges who require individualized testing or other accommodations should identify themselves and express their needs during the first week of the semester. Where the challenge is not immediately apparent, verification will be required.

Grading Scale

Excellent		A = 100-93	A- 92-90
Good	B+ = 89-88	B = 87-83	B- = 82-80
Average	C+ = 79-78	C = 77-73	C- = 72-70
Below Average	D+ = 69-68	D = 67-63	D- = 62-60
Unacceptable		F = 59-0	

Reading

The reading assignments can be found on the Blackboard website for this course under the Course Library tab. I am also recommending that you purchase a style manual, which is available at Bill's Bookstore: Babington, Doug & Don LePen. 2005. *The Broadview Pocket Guide to Writing*, third edition, Orchard Park: Broadview Press (earlier editions of this text are also useful, and if you have another style guide there is no reason to buy a new one—I recommend this for students who do not own one).

Course Schedule

The daily assignments are listed below along with the film that will be shown during each class period. In parentheses I list the year the film was released, the director, the MPAA rating, and—where applicable—its ranking among the top 100 films of all time according to the American Film Institute. The readings are due on the day they are listed (i.e., we will be discussing those readings that day after viewing the film).

Tue 30 Aug: No assigned reading.

Tue 6 Sep: *The Birth of a Nation* (1915, D.W. Griffith, Not Rated, #44)

Rogin, Michael. 1985. "'The Sword Became a Flashing Vision': D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*" *Representations*, 9:150-195.

Levitt, Stephen D. and Stephen J. Dubner. 2005. *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explains the Hidden Side of Everything*, New York: J. Morrow, pp. 55-66.

Dessomes, Nancy Bishop. 1999. "Hollywood in Hoods: The Portrayal of the Ku Klux Klan in Popular Film," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 32(4):13-22.

Tue 13 Sep: *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962, David Lean, PG, #5)

Shaheen, Jack. 2003. "Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 588:171-193.

Tue 20 Sep: *The Battle of Algiers* (1965, Gillo Pontecorvo, Not Rated)

Bowden, Mark. 2003. "The Dark Art of Interrogation," *The Atlantic Monthly*, October, 292(3).

Lelyveld, Joseph. 2005. "What We *Don't* Talk About When We Talk About Torture," *The New York Times Magazine*, 12 June, pp. 36-43, 60, 66-69.

Tue 27 Sep: *Breaker Morant* (1980, Bruce Beresford, PG)

Arreguín-Toft, Ivan. 2001. "How the Weak Win Wars," *International Security*, 26(1): 93-128.

Fri 30 Sep: First paper due, 5:00 pm.

Tue 4 Oct: *The Green Berets* (1968, Ray Kellogg & John Wayne, G)

Kosonen, Roy T. 2003. "Funeral for a Great Anti-Communist Crusader," APFN Messageboard (www.apfn.org), Wednesday, 18 June.

Schultz, Richard H., Jr. 1999. "Putting Together an All Star Team" and "Fighting it Out with the NVA on the Trail," in *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, New York: Harper Collins, pp. 218-223, 228-230.

Last, Jonathan V. 2003. "War. What War? Hollywood Ignores Today's Biggest Storyline," *Opinion Journal*, www.wsj.com, Friday, 10 October.

Wetta, Frank J. and Martin A. Novelli. 2003. "'Now a Major Motion Picture': War Films and Hollywood's New Patriotism," *The Journal of Military History*, 67: 861-882.

Tue 11 Oct: *Apocalypse Now* (1979, Francis Ford Coppola, R, #28)

Thomson, David. 2001. "'Apocalypse' Then and Now," *The New York Times*, 13 May.

Carruthers, Susan L. 2003. "Bringing it All Back Home: Hollywood Returns to War," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 14(1): 167-182.

Tue 18 Oct: *Chinatown* (1974, Roman Polanski, R, #19)

Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. nd. "The History of Water and Power in LA," LADWP website (<http://www.ladwp.com/ladwp/cms/ladwp001559.jsp>).

Libecap, Gary D. 2005. "*Chinatown*: Transaction Costs in Water Rights Exchanges; The Owens Valley Transfer to Los Angeles," unpublished paper, available online at: <http://gsbwww.uchicago.edu/research/workshops/wae/LibecapFeb232005.pdf>

Cooper, Stephen. 1989. "Sex/Knowledge/Power in the Detective Genre," *Film Quarterly*, 42(3): 23-31.

Tue 25 Oct: *The French Connection* (1971, William Friedkin, R, #70)

Grant, Judith. 2003. "Assault Under Color of Authority: Police Corruption as Norm in the LAPD Rampart Scandal and Popular Film," *New Political Science*, 25(3): 385-405.

Tue 1 Nov: *Network* (1976, Sidney Lumet, R, #66)

Baum, Matthew A. 2003. "Soft News and Political Knowledge: Evidence of Absence or Absence of Evidence?" *Political Communication*, 20:173-190.

Fri 4 Nov: Second paper due, 5:00 pm.

Tue 8 Nov: *A Clockwork Orange* (1971, Stanley Kubrick, X, #46)

Elsaesser, Thomas. 1973. "Screen Violence: Emotional Structure and Ideological Function in 'A Clockwork Orange'," in C.W.E. Bigsby (ed.) *Approaches to Popular Culture*, Bowling Green University Popular Press, pp. 171-200.

Brisbin, Richard A. Jr. 2002. "Censorship, Ratings, and Rights: Political Order and Sexual Portrayals in American Movies," *Studies in American Political Development*, 16: 1-27.

Tue 15 Nov: *Midnight Cowboy* (1969, John Schlesinger, X, #36)

Floyd, Kevin. 2001. "Closing the (Heterosexual) Frontier: *Midnight Cowboy* as National Allegory," *Science & Society*, 65(1):99-130.

Tue 22 Nov: *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988, Martin Scorsese, R)

LaMarche, Gara. 1991. "Some Thoughts on the 'Chilling Effect'," *Art Journal*, 50(4): 56-58.

Viswanathan, Gauri. 1995. "Blasphemy and Heresy: The Modernist Challenge," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37(2): 399-412.

Iannone, Carol. 1996. "The Last Temptation Reconsidered," *First Things*, 60: 50-54 (<http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9602/articles/iannone.html>).

Tue 29 Nov: *The Passion of the Christ* (2004, Mel Gibson, R)

Smith, Jeffrey A. 2001. "Hollywood Theology: The Commodification of Religion in the Twentieth Century," *Religion and American Culture*, 11(2): 191-231.

Watts, Rikk. 2004. "'Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall...': A Review of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, 2(2): 209-218.

Tue 6 Dec: *Dr. Strangelove* (1964, Stanley Kubrick, PG, #26)

Pells, Richard. 2005. "Not with a Whimper: Visions of Mass Destruction in Fiction and Film," *eJournal USA: Foreign Policy Agenda*, March (<http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itps/0305/ijpe/pells.htm>).

Rademaker, Steven G. 2005. "Controlling the World's Most Dangerous Weapon," *eJournal USA: Foreign Policy Agenda*, March (<http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itps/0305/ijpe/rademake.htm>).

Cameron, Gavin. 2005. "Nuclear Terrorism: Weapons for Sale or Theft?" *eJournal USA: Foreign Policy Agenda*, March (<http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itps/0305/ijpe/cameron.htm>).

Uchitelle, Louis. 2005. "American and Israeli Share Nobel Prize in Economics," *New York Times*, October 11, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/11/business/11nobel.html>.

Wed 14 Dec: Third paper due, 5:00 pm.