

# POL 4310 American Politics: The View From Hollywood

**Blegan Hall 415**  
**M-TH 8:15-11:00**

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## *Purpose:*

Politics has always been a major theme for the American film industry. This course will analyze several films, deliberately spanning the time period from the end of World War II to the present, to see what they tell us about the political culture of their time, and what messages (if any) they have for contemporary politics. To that end, we will read about, watch, talk about, and write about films. Our goal is to attempt to understand the political messages of the films we watch, but also to understand the place of the movie industry in American politics.

*The Politics IN this Class:* The films chosen for this class all cover rather big events in American politics and history, events that you might already know something about – The Red Scare, Three Mile Island, Watergate. Other films carry interesting political content without parroting a real event – *Dr. Strangelove* for instance. In most cases, all of the necessary information is presented within the movie. I will supply additional information as needed for you to understand and appreciate the political messages of the movie. More specifically, during this term we will watch films about 3 main themes: candidates running for office, the media and politics, and the cold war.

*The Politics OF this Class:* Read assigned material, don't fall asleep during movies, show up everyday, and your future is secure. Our discussions will take place AFTER the movies are shown.

*Attendance:* Be here everyday and on time.

*Readings:* To be handed out in class.

*Grading:* You will write three short papers. Each is worth 25% of the grade. Participation encompasses the other 25% of the grade.

Papers: You will write three short papers. Each should be between 4-5 pages, but no shorter than 4 complete pages. The topics are listed at the end of this syllabus. You may write about any three, as long as they do not both focus on the same movie – they both

may involve the same movie, but one cannot deal with it as its main focus. You can write about something not listed, just ask me first. **DUE DATES ARE LISTED ALONG WITH THE ASSIGNMENT!**

Participation: You will be graded on your contribution to class discussions about the movies!

### *Schedule*

Date	Movie	Reading
May 22	None: Introduction and Overview	
May 23	<i>All the King's Men</i>	
May 24	<i>The Candidate</i>	
May 25	<i>Bulworth</i>	
May 30	<i>Bob Roberts</i>	<u>Hollywood's America</u> pp 1-5, Ch 2, and pp 40-52
May 31	<i>The Manchurian Candidate</i>	<u>Hollywood's America</u> , ch. 4
June 1	<i>Dr Strangelove</i>	<i>Past Imperfect</i> entry
June 5	<i>The Hunt for Red October</i>	
June 6	<i>The China Syndrome</i>	<u>Hollywood's America</u> , ch 8
June 7	<i>All the President's Men</i>	<i>Past Imperfect</i> entry
June 8	Final Papers Due/Final Discussion/Evals	

## Daily Regimen

- ☒ Class will begin promptly, and will end when we are finished, but it should not go more than 2 and a half hours. If discussion is going extra-well, we may extend class a little finish it
- ☒ We will watch the movies first then discuss them afterwards.
- ☒ Watching movies for content may demand more attention than you would normally use going to the theatre. **Therefore:**
  - ☺ You can eat, but consider your fellow students when doing so. Unwrap noisy candy before the movie starts.
  - ☺ Keep talking to a minimum during the movies.
  - ☺ You may want to take some notes during the films you want to write about. I hope there's enough light for you to do so.
- ☒ I think none of the movies have sex scenes, though many use potentially offensive language. I hope that you can see beyond the language, but I know that my wife sometimes cannot, so you can be excused if it bothers you significantly.

## Papers

- ☒ As noted previously, they should be 4-5 pages in length. They must be typed, double-spaced, with 1 inch margins – don't play the margin and font game.
- ☒ Do NOT include a title page or place the paper in a plastic binder, merely put the title at the top of your paper with your name and a date. Please number your pages.
- ☒ Make sure that your paper is free of grammatical and spelling errors and typos. That means that you should spell check and then read it through yourself. Perhaps have a friend read it through as well.
- ☒ If you happen to use outside references, **which are not required**, then you should cite the material properly, using either footnotes, endnotes, or my favorite in text citations. Citations are needed whenever the thought is not your own. If in doubt, cite it! If still unclear ask your professor. You need not cite common knowledge, such as World War II lasted from 1939-1945. The notes should include full bibliographic information, though the in text cites should appear as follows. Say you read Ronald Reagan's autobiography in which he said he liked jellybellys. The quote and cite would look like this:

“I have always liked Jellybellys” (Reagan 1992, 25).

You would use the same cite if you paraphrased the quote:  
Reagan shows through his words and deeds that he likes Jellybellys (Reagan 1992, 25).

Just notice the essential parts of the cite: (author's last name, year of publication: page number). Don't forget the period AFTER the citation.

☒ The bibliography should look something like this:

BOOK Reagan, Ronald. *Jellybellies in the White House*. HarperCollins, 1992.

MAGAZINE Reagan, Ronald. "Jellybellies in the White House." *Newsweek*, Nov. 1992: pp. 20-25.

☒ PAPER GRADES: are based primarily on the substance of your papers. A good paper does not attempt to summarize movies and their political content, but addresses a specific question, a consistent theme, one topic. That question may involve several movies, which is fine. Focus on themes and questions rather than on movies for your papers. A good paper would also address the opposite viewpoint.

☒ Most of your papers are based on your personal observations and thoughts without support from outside references. You must justify your opinions, however, with more than "it is just what I think." Rather, you need to find support or evidence for your arguments in the movies, in society, or in your experience.

## *Essay Questions*

Pick Any Three

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### **Movie: *All the King's Men, Bulworth* (May 30)**

Question: Compare the forces that drive Willie Stark and Jay Bulworth. Does politics necessarily corrupt its participants? Are the forces internal or external – are they simply driven people who will stop at nothing, or is it the nature of the arena? You may add further arguments from *The Candidate* and *Bob Roberts*.

### **Movies: *All the King's Men, The Candidate, Bob Roberts* (June 5)**

Question: OK, it has to come in sometime: Does art imitate life or life imitate art – How have artists' conceptions of political campaigns and candidates changed over the last 50 years? Does that conception matter to current politics? Do you think these movies were attempting to promote reform?

Limited Evidence:

*Bob Roberts* (1992) appears during accusations of Religious Right stealth campaigns.

*The Candidate* (1972) appears not long before politicians attempt to clean up campaigns.

*All the King's Men* (1949) appears just after the HUAC hearings.

### **Movie: *The Manchurian Candidate* (June 6)**

Question: This film shows forces attempting to takeover or overthrow the US government. Would the same movies play to audiences today, or are they particular to the time period (Cold War)? What is John Frankenheimer trying to say about these forces and how the threats they pose can be averted?

**Movies: *Dr Strangelove*, *Hunt for Red October* (June 7)**

Questions (pick one):

- 1) Evaluate how the argument made in *Hollywood's America* about current Hollywood views of the military applies to these two movies. Do these movies suggest that the trends the authors find are on target?
- 2) This movie portrays the military command negatively. Are those fears warranted? What is the effect on the public of such portrayals? Compare these movies with *The Hunt for Red October*. Are the images of military brass different, the same, or what?

**Movie: *The Hunt for Red October* (June 7)**

Question: The movie can certainly be called a patriotic film, the US wins a major battle with the Soviet Union. But, there are a number of other messages that come through about the military, ambassadors, enlisted soldiers (sailors), officers, etc. Dig beneath the "us vs. them" and decipher the other important messages.

**Subject: *Women's Roles* (June 8)**

Movies: *Manchurian Candidate*, *The Candidate*, *Bulworth*, *Bob Roberts*, *China Syndrome*.

Question: How do these movies portray the role(s) of women in politics? Do these portrayals influence young women and society?

**Movies: *The China Syndrome* and *All The President's Men* (June 8)**

Question: What is the role of the press in American politics? What do the filmmakers suggest that role be? When does the press go beyond its proper role? Where do you fall on the issue of media activism versus simple reporting?

**Movies:** Others you might want to watch, all of the below are good and worth renting (subject to my approval if you want to watch others for a paper).

Themes: 1) Business in America: *Wall Street*, *Norma Rae*, *Roger and Me* or others. A paper would deal with the period when the movie was released, the filmmaker's goals, and comparisons between two movies (if you watch two).

2) Justice system: *And Justice for All*, *Twelve Angry Men*, *Gideon's Trumpet*, *First Monday in October* or some others dealing with lawyers, judges and the *system*, not just one case. A paper would deal with the period when the movie was released, the filmmaker's goals, and comparisons between two movies (if you watch two).

3) Any other topic and movie that you can convince me is relevant to this class.

**Due:** Thursday June 8.