HTS 3803-C  
Civil Rights Goes to the Movies  
Spring Semester 2013

Dr. Eleanor Alexander  
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Class Meets: Tuesday & Thursday  
Time: 1:35 p. m. to 2:55 p. m.  
Classroom: Old Engineering Building, Room 104  
Office: Old Engineering Building, Room 123  
Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday, 11:00 a. m. to 12:00 p. m.; also by appointment

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. 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 on the Civil Rights Movement.

Therefore, this course examines Hollywood feature films and television movies as historical evidence. Students view films on aspects of
the Civil Rights Movement and write essays comparing that film evidence to information in more traditional sources. This includes articles from history, political science, and sociology journals; and book chapters. 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?

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 more about the Civil Rights Movement
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

RECOMMENDED FOR WRITING COMPETENCY


OR


OR

On line sources

COURSE FORMAT

I begin each topic with a brief introduction to 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. You may view/borrow all from the Georgia Tech Library. At least one of this semester’s films may be downloaded. Check to see if there are others. Former students found reading a film’s summary before viewing it helpful.

Discussion of the film[s] and assigned readings conclude each unit.
CLASS ROOM COURTESY
I run a tight ship. Class begins at **ON TIME at 1:35 p. m.** Lateness is penalized as an absence. Students are allowed three absences and/or late entries without penalty. **On the fourth, students lose 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. These include religious holidays, job interviews, illness, death in family, etc. 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, lose five points on their final grade. The same applies to students caught texting, using ear phones etc. You are in this class to increase your knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement, to critically evaluate related material, and to improve your analytical writing skills. 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 nine (9) double spaced essays, minimum length—five (5) pages. You may write more. Please note, four and one-half pages or four and three-quarters pages is not a **five page essay!** Papers of less than the required minimum length get low scores.

The essays evaluate the films as historical sources based on information in the unit’s articles. Submit on paper, not electronically. **No late essays are accepted; not even those brought to class by late comers.** I start class on time. That is when I collect essays. If you are not in class
when I begin collecting them, your paper is late and will not be accepted. 

**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 our classroom. Afterwards, they are considered late and will not be graded. A classmate may submit your essay; but I can return a graded paper only to its author.**

**AVERAGE UNIT READINGS ARE 125 PAGES.**

**ESSAY FORMAT**

Since this is a history class, expect not only to view history, but also to read and write about it. Each essay must have a title relevant to the subject of the films & assigned readings. Essays include a **BRIEF ONE PARAGRAPH SUMMARY** of the film’s plot. **BRIEF MEANS NOT MORE THAN FIVE TYPED LINES.** Your summary may be shorter; but if it is more than five typed double spaced lines, you lose essay points. Give the film’s essence, not a blow-by-blow account. Number pages and don’t forget to include you name on the front page. No cover is necessary. **Include and document at least one quote from every reading accompanying the unit.** Consider some of the following when writing essays:

1. What is true or false about Hollywood’s version of history according to the unit’s assigned readings?
2. What is missing in Hollywood’s account of history that would contribute to the film’s historical accuracy?
3. Is the film presentation biased? If so, provide proof from the readings.
4. You may comment on the unit’s articles. Do the authors 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?
5. Did the article[s] provide necessary background information? If so, cite/discuss it.
6. You may disagree with an author. Support your position with fact, not opinion.

**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.**
Each essay must end 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. Copy the bibliography for each unit just as it is written in this syllabus.

**PLEASE NOTE: I RESERVE THE RIGHT TO SUBSITUTE FILMS AND/OR ARTICLES, AND TO DELETE ARTICLES FROM UNIT READING LISTS. 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 and are easily recognized. Also, someone else in the class will have found and used the same material.

Essays are usually due every two weeks. See assignment schedule below.

**DUE DATES FOR ESSAYS**

1. **UNIT I: Before the Civil Rights Movement**
   - January 24
   - *The Court-Martial of Jackie Robinson*
   - *The Jackie Robinson Story*

2. **UNIT II: The Brown Decision**
   - February 7
   - *Separate But Equal*

   - February 14
   - *The Ernest Green Story*

   - February 28
   - *Ruby Bridges*

5. **Unit V: Montgomery Bus Boycott**
   - March 14
   - *Boycott*
   - *The Long Walk Home*

6. **UNIT VI: Murder in Mississippi**
   - March 28
   - *Murder in Mississippi*
   - *Mississippi Burning*

7. **UNIT VII: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Early Years**
   - April 11
   - *King, Part I*

8. **UNIT VIII: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**
   - April 25
   - *King, Parts II & III.*
SUGGESTION: Read a summary of the film[s] before viewing, and take notes when watching the movie[s].

FILMS & UNIT READINGS

Unit I: Before the Civil Rights Movement—1944 & 1947

FILM: The Court-Martial of Jackie Robinson (1990) 95 minutes

READINGS


FILM: The Jackie Robinson Story (1950) 77 minutes

READINGS


“Baseball’s Noble Experiment.” American History (March/April 1997) 32: 1, 32-44.


Lamb, Chris. “I Never Want to Take Another Trip Like This One: Jackie Robinson’s Journey to Integrate Baseball.” *Journal of Sport History* (Summer 2008) 40:1, 177-191.

**Unit II: The Brown Decision—1954**

**FILM:** *Separate But Equal* (1991) 200 minutes

**READINGS**


Unit III: School Desegregation: The Little Rock Nine--1957

FILM: The Ernest Green Story (1993) 101 minutes

READINGS


Brady, Tom P. “Segregation or Amalgamation . . . .” Eyes On The Prize Civil Rights Reader, 83-94.


**Unit IV: School Desegregation: New Orleans—1960**

**FILM:** *Ruby Bridges* (1998) 90 minutes

**READINGS**


Unit V: Montgomery Bus Boycott—1956

Films: Boycott (2001) 118 minutes
The Long Walk Home (1990) 118 minutes

Readings
Abernathy, Ralph. “”The Montgomery Bus Boycott.” And the Walls Came Tumbling Down, 131-165.

Unit VI: Murder In Mississippi—1964

Films: Murder In Mississippi (1990) 97 minutes
Mississippi Burning (1988) 127 minutes

Readings


Unit VII: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Early Years

FILM: King, Part I (1978) 185 minutes

READINGS


* Farris, Christine. My Brother Martin: A Sister Remembers Growing Up With Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

King, Coretta Scott. My Life With Martin Luther King, Jr., 66-71, 72-77, 206-211.


Unit VIII: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

FILMS: King, Parts II & III (1998) 150 minutes

READINGS

Abernathy, Ralph. “Chicago.” And the Walls Came Tumbling Down, 362-399.


King, Coretta Scott. My Life With Martin Luther King, Jr., 329-339.

* King, Dexter. Growing Up King.


Unit IX: Armed Resistance--1965

**FILM:** *Deacons For Defense* (2003) 95 minutes

**READINGS**


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