

Soci 3000: Sociology in Film
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Office Hours: Tues/Wed, 4:30-5:30
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Course Syllabus Summer 2009

This course is designed to supplement and to reinforce some of the lessons learned in the 1000-level sociology courses, particularly Introduction to Sociology (Soci1101). The distinctive feature of this course is its extensive use of feature-length films to illustrate sociological concepts and issues. This semester, the course will be organized both by film genre and by sociological concepts. We will discuss the distinctive aspects of various film genres and the ways in which an application of the sociological imagination can increase our understanding of the cultural effects that movies produce. We will also consider various sociological ideas, including modernization, anomie, social class and social mobility, cultural capital, gender roles, social identity, subcultures, and assimilation. Throughout the course, we will pay particular attention to the ways in which forces of social reproduction and social transformation continually operate to make and remake American society.

For our purposes in this course, there are certain types of film that work less well than others. I try to focus on movies that are contemporary, which is to say that they are made and set in our time. Historical dramas are of less interest for this course since they typically do not focus on contemporary American society. Documentaries are also excluded from our syllabus. Since documentaries come already packaged with a definite point-of-view, they work less well in this course, in which we strive to apply the sociological imagination to films that were not intended to be analyzed sociologically. Many of the movies we'll discuss could be called *genre* films, a label that refers to low-cost movies that appeal to a specific audience – whether for horror, romance, science fiction, rude laughs or detective mysteries – by fulfilling expectations more than challenging them. I make no claims for the quality or importance of any of the films we will view and discuss in class; the films included on our syllabus have been chosen only because in one way or another they say something about American culture.

Getting Started

Your primary responsibilities in this course are (1) to come to class with something to say about the assigned readings; and (2) to view all assigned films and to contribute to our analysis of the sociological content of these films. We will be reading material and viewing films that are thought provoking, contradictory, and sometimes controversial. Consequently, our discussions will be most productive if we all come to class prepared and willing to contribute. Doing this not only will make our class time more enjoyable but will also prepare you for the exam and improve your final grade.

Get the Readings. All of the readings are available either in paper from the reserve desk in the main library, on e-reserve that is accessible through GIL, or through a direct link from this syllabus to the reading. The e-reserve password for this course is *summerfilm*. You are free to get the readings any way you wish, but please note that computer problems are not an excuse for not reading. If you are having trouble getting the readings in electronic format please go to the

reserve desk where you can get a hard copy or contact one of your classmates who may already have printed out a copy.

Explore the eLC page set up for this course. This website will serve as the definitive source of information about the course. I will be posting some of the course notes and also changes to the syllabus if necessary. So please refer to eLC for the most up-to-date information, links to assignments, supplementary material, and much more.

Make Sure Your E-mail Is Working. During the semester, there are almost always occasions when we will be communicating via e-mail. It is your responsibility to check your e-mail regularly to make sure you do not miss any important announcements or personal communications. Be sure to clean out your mailbox from time to time. If your mailbox is full, emails will not reach you.

Course Requirements

Film Critiques

During the course of the semester, you will be asked to write a film critique on **four** of the six out-of-class films that you will see. In each paper, your goal should be to demonstrate a good understanding of the relevant course material and the ability to analyze the particular film from a sociological perspective. The keys to a good critique will be clarity, quality insights, and information. Although short critiques are similar to film reviews that one might read in the newspaper, these two forms of writing are *not* the same. A film review in a newspaper or magazine typically attempts to describe for the reader the story line of the movie, the quality of the acting, writing, and direction, and other similar information that might affect the reader's decision to see the movie. The critiques you will be writing, in contrast, are *not* concerned with the dramatic aspects of the movie (whether Tom Cruise or Julia Roberts does a good job in the film is simply not relevant for these assignments) but instead should focus in some way on the sociological content of the film. Since the sociological aspects of a movie are rarely foremost in the minds of the film maker, they may not always be immediately apparent. Rest assured, however, that all of the films included on our syllabus have been chosen because they contain, among other issues, some pertinent sociological theme or situation.

All papers should be typed and double-spaced and must be turned in at the beginning of class on the day they are due. Since each of these critiques is relevant to a particular class meeting, *I will not accept late papers*. Guidelines for writing these critiques appear at the end of this syllabus. Each film critique counts 15% of the final course grade. One of the critique grades will be dropped, for a total of 45% of the course grade. I'll have more to say on the film critiques in class.

Exams.

There will be two exams in this class. The first test is a take-home essay, which is worth 15% of the course grade. I will post the essay on Friday, July 17th. It will be due at the beginning of class on Monday, July 20th. The second test is the final exam, which is scheduled for Friday, July 31st. The exam will include essays and short-answer questions. The exam is worth 25% of

the final course grade.

Class Participation

Class participation includes attendance, contribution to class discussions, and willingness to answer questions posed about the readings and films. I expect everyone to be in class for every class meeting, prepared and willing to take part in our discussion of the assigned readings and films. We all know that courses in the social sciences and humanities in which no one participates are almost invariably dull. This course, even more than others, depends upon your willingness to take part in the discussion of the films and to learn and apply the sociological perspective.

Part of our class work in this course is the discussion of required readings. I should emphasize that the success of class discussions depends at least as much on the active listening and participation of the audience as it does on the introduction to the discussion that I will provide. Students who are reluctant to respond to the questions are not actively participating. Class participation is weighted 15% of the final course grade. Of the 15 participation points, five are earned simply through attendance (5 points = 0-1 absences; 4 points = 2-3 absences; 3 points = 4-5 absences; 2 points = 6-7 absences; 1 point = 8 absences; 0 points = >8 absences. I will take attendance at the beginning of class and then again after the break.

If any student is participating in a sponsored school activity that requires periods of time away from campus, please see me *during the first week of the semester during office hours* so that we may discuss the ways in which missed classes will be made up. Concerning any other absence, I always presume, unless convinced otherwise, that there is a good reason for a student's having missed class. For this reason, then, I do not need to see excuses for class absences.

Final grades for the course are based on the following scale:

A	≥93	C+	77-79.9
A-	90-92.9	C	73-76.9
B+	87-89.9	C-	70-72.9
B	83-86.9	D	60-69.9
B-	80-82.9	F	<60

Miscellaneous Policies

1. Academic Honesty. All students are responsible for maintaining the highest standards of honesty and integrity in every phase of their academic careers. Everything you do in this class must be done within the letter and spirit of the UGA academic honesty policy. In particular, I expect everyone to abide by the student honor code (section 7 of the honesty policy). Cheating or assisting someone who cheats is serious; penalties are severe, and ignorance is not an acceptable excuse. A link to more detailed information about academic honesty can be found at: <http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/honesty/acadhon.htm>

2. Grievances. Any student who feels that he or she has not been treated in a fair or professional manner should follow the Department of Sociology grievance procedures, the first step of which

is to discuss the matter with the professor.

3. Classroom Behavior.

Please be in your seat prior to the start of class. More important, ***if you come to class stay until the end.*** It is distracting for everyone when individuals leave class while it is still in progress. Use common sense in this regard. If you become suddenly ill, by all means leave the room.

Please turn off all cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices during class. Note: This prohibition applies to laptop computers as well.

Course Structure

In this course we will view and discuss films in six different areas (either a film genre or a sociological concept). One film from each section will be shown during class and a second film will be viewed outside of class. Students will be assigned to Outside Viewing groups in order to increase the number of films included in our class discussions and also to increase access to the outside films. Each group will be assigned one of the out-of-class films to view and discuss for each section of the course. I suggest that you cooperate with other members of your group to assure that everyone has a chance to view the film before class. I will place a copy of most of the out-of-class films on reserve (7th floor of the library). Students may choose to view the film in the library or to rent the film from a local video store or other video source.

Class Calendar

Date	Topics & Agenda	Viewings	Readings
Monday, July 6	Introduction, Overview, etc.	Films to be discussed: <i>Dead Poets' Society</i> <i>A Few Good Men</i>	
Tues., July 7	The Romance Genre		Wartenberg, Thomas E. 1993. "A Fairy Tale with a Difference? Class and Gender in <i>Pretty Woman</i> ."
Wed., July 8	Romance	In-class viewing: <i>Before Sunset</i>	

Thursday, July 9	Discussion of <i>Before Sunrise</i> , the out-of-class romance films, and the readings by Wartenberg and Deleyto.	Out-of-class Romance films: <i>The Notebook</i> <i>You've Got Mail</i> <i>Sabrina</i> <i>Message in a Bottle</i> <i>Bridges of Madison County</i>	Impt.: <i>Film critique #1 due today.</i> This critique is required of all students. Reading: Deleyto, Celesstino. 2009. "Contemporary romantic comedy and the discourse of independence."
Friday, July 10	Social Class and Social Mobility in the Movies. Discussion of the Giroux reading.		Reading: Giroux, Henry A. 2002. "Culture, class, and pedagogy in <i>Dead Poets' Society</i> ."
Monday, July 13	In-class viewing	<i>Good Will Hunting</i>	
Tuesday, July 14	Discussion of <i>Good Will Hunting</i> , the out-of-class social class films, and the Dowd reading on practical consciousness.	Out-of-Class Social Class films: <i>An Officer and a Gentleman</i> <i>Junebug</i> <i>Five Easy Pieces</i> <i>Lady and the Tramp</i> <i>Maid in Manhattan</i>	<i>Film critique #2 due today.</i> Reading: Dowd, James J. 2009. "Practical Consciousness, Deep Culture, and Popular Film:"
Wed., July 15	Gender Issues Discussion of the Liggett reading on <i>Titanic</i> .		Reading: Liggett, Lori. 2002. "Maiden voyage: From Edwardian girl to millennial woman in <i>Titanic</i> ."
Thurs., July 16		In-class viewing: <i>Kramer vs. Kramer</i>	
Friday, July 17	Discussion of <i>Kramer vs. Kramer</i> , the out-of-class gender films and the Mitchell paper on <i>Rebel Without a Cause</i> .	Out-of-class Gender films: <i>Mona Lisa Smile</i> <i>Something's Gotta Give</i> <i>The Contender</i> <i>Rebel Without A Cause</i> <i>Beauty and the Beast</i>	<i>Film critique #3 due today.</i> Reading: Mitchell, Jon. 2005. "Jim Stark's 'barbaric yawp:' <i>Rebel without a Cause</i> and the Cold War Crisis in masculinity."

Monday, July 20	Race/Ethnicity Discussion of the Wartenberg reading; and issues of race and ethnicity.		Reading: Wartenberg, Thomas E. 1999. "Politics and race in <i>Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?</i> ."
Tuesday, July 21		In-class viewing: <i>The Human Stain</i>	
Wed., July 22	Discussion of <i>The Human Stain</i> ; the reading by Wartenberg; and the out-of-class ethnicity films.	Out-of-class Ethnicity films: <i>Crash</i> <i>Smoke</i> <i>Snow Falling on Cedars</i> <i>Grand Canyon</i> <i>Do the Right Thing</i>	<i>Film critique #4 due</i> Wartenberg, Thomas E. 2001. "Humanizing the Beast: King Kong and the Representation of Black Male Sexuality."
Thursday, July 23	Alienation in Contemporary Society Discussion of the concept of alienation, and paper by Giroux and Szeman.		Reading: Giroux, Henry A. and Imre Szeman. 2001. "Ikea boy fights back: <i>Fight Club</i> , consumerism, and the political limits of Nineties cinema."
Friday, July 24		In-class viewing: <i>The Good Girl</i>	
Monday, July 27	Discussion of <i>The Good Girl</i> , the out-of-class alienation films and the paper by Suzanne Leonard.	Out-of-class alienation films: <i>Ghost World</i> <i>Revolutionary Road</i> <i>Lost in Translation</i> <i>About Schmidt</i> <i>American Beauty</i>	<i>Film critique #5 due today.</i> Reading: Suzanne Leonard. 2007. "'I hate my job, I hate everybody here:' ..."
Tuesday, July 28	The War Film genre Discussion of the Auster reading.		Reading: Auster, Albert. 2005. " <i>Saving Private Ryan</i> and American triumphalism."

Wed., July 29		In-class viewing: <i>Three Kings</i>	Reading: McCrisken, Trevor B. and Andrew Pepper. 2005. “Hollywood’s post-Cold War history:”
Thursday July 30	Discussion of <i>Three Kings</i> ; the out-of-class war films; and the readings by McCrisken & Pepper and Dowd.	Out of class war films: <i>The Deer Hunter</i> <i>Sands of Iwo Jima</i> <i>Black Hawk Down</i> <i>Courage under Fire</i> <i>In the Valley of Elah</i>	<i>Film critique #6 due today</i> Reading: Dowd, James J. 2008. “Patriotic Gore: War Movies and the American Flag.”
Friday, July 31	Final exam		

Required Readings

All readings are available at the reserve desk in Main Library, through e-reserve, or through JSTOR. The password to access the on-line versions of these readings through GIL is *summerfilm*.

Auster, Albert. 2005. “*Saving Private Ryan* and American triumphalism.” Pp. 205-213 in Robert Eberwein (ed.) The War Film. New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press.

Baumann, Shyon. 2009. “Hollywood Highbrow: From Entertainment to Art.” American Journal of Sociology 114 (May): 1894-1896.

Deleyto, Celesstino. 2009. “Contemporary romantic comedy and the discourse of independence.” Pp. 148-176 in The Secret Life of Romantic Comedy. N.Y.: Manchester Univ. Press.

Dowd, James J. 2009. “Practical Consciousness, Deep Culture, and Popular Film: Understanding social mobility through the movies.” Forthcoming in Kathryn Feltey and Jean-Anne Sutherland (eds.) Cinematic Sociology. Sage.

Dowd, James J. 2008. “Patriotic Gore: War Movies and the American Flag.” Cultural Sociology. In press.

Giroux, Henry A. and Imre Szeman. 2001. “Ikea boy fights back: *Fight Club*, consumerism, and the political limits of Nineties cinema.” Pp. 95-104 in The End of Cinema as We Know It: American Film in the Nineties. Jon Lewis (ed.). New York University Press.

- Giroux, Henry A. 2002. "Culture, class, and pedagogy in *Dead Poets' Society*." Pp. 75-99 in Breaking in to the Movies: Film and the Culture of Politics. Blackwell Publishers.
- Giroux, Henry A.. 1999. "Animating Youth: the Disnification of Children's Culture." Available online at <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed253a/Giroux/Giroux2.html>.
- Leonard, Suzanne. 2007. "'I hate my job, I hate everybody here:' Adultery, boredom, and the 'Working Girl' in Twenty-First-century American cinema. Pp. 100-131 in Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (Eds.) Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture. Duke Univ. Press.
- Liggett, Lori. 2002. "Maiden voyage: From Edwardian girl to millennial woman in *Titanic*." Pp.183-199 in Frances Gateward and Murray Pomerane (eds.) Sugar, Spice, and Everything Nice: Cinema of Girlhood. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- McCrisken, Trevor B. and Andrew Pepper. 2005. "Hollywood's post-Cold War history: The 'righteousness' of American interventionism." Pp. 187-210 in American History and Contemporary Hollywood Film. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press.
- Mitchell, Jon. 2005. "Jim Stark's 'barbaric yawp:' *Rebel without a Cause* and the Cold War Crisis in masculinity." Pp. 131-145 in J. David Slocum (ed.) Rebel Without a Cause. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Wartenberg, Thomas E. 1993. "A Fairy Tale with a Difference? Class and Gender in *Pretty Woman*." Pp. 245-266. in Roger Gottlieb (ed.) Radical Philosophy: Tradition, Counter-Tradition, Politics. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Wartenberg, Thomas E. 1999. "Politics and race in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?*." Pp. 111-130 in Unlikely Couples: Movie Romance as Social Criticism. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Wartenberg, Thomas E. 2001. "Humanizing the Beast: King Kong and the Representation of Black Male Sexuality." In Daniel Bernardi (ed.) Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press.

Film Critiques.

The four required film critiques are not intended to be term papers but, rather, exercises to help organize your thinking for class discussion. Each critique should be 2-3 typed pages and organized around one or two key questions. Although you may choose any sociological issue as a theme for your film critique, here are some questions you might consider:

1. What central social or cultural issues does the film raise? If the film seems to emphasize

psychological over social themes, does it also attempt to place the psychological issue within a broader social or cultural context?

2. Is social class a factor in the movie, either as part of the story of the movie or as part of the overall tone of the movie?
3. Are gender roles a factor in the movie, either as part of the story of the movie or as part of the overall tone of the movie?
4. What does the film suggest about the cultural mood of the time in which the story was set?
5. In order to analyze this film, what about the context of the times in which the film is set must the viewer understand?
6. Are the issues raised by the film similarly relevant within American culture today?
7. Does the film contain any apparent ideological or utopian themes?
8. Does the film contain any apparent political biases?
9. Are the central themes in this movie similar to – or different than – the themes of any of the other films from this era?
10. Are the central themes in this movie similar to – or different than – the themes of other films in this *genre*?