

Advanced English: Reel Politics - Ideological Discourse in Hollywood

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This course is meant for students of the advanced C1 level. Theme-based language classes aim at developing written and oral skills through the study of a specific topic.

Course Objectives

This is a 12-week course that introduces students to film analysis and politics in the context of Hollywood.

The main objectives of this course are:

- Introducing students to extensive film analysis and criticism (both oral and written).
- Expanding the students' knowledge of Hollywood and political agendas in the cinematic industry.
- Identifying overt and covert political messages in films.

Background

Throughout the 20th century, Hollywood movies and entertainers within the industry have influenced the political landscape, forged narratives that are integral to the fabric of American culture, and catalyzed societal transformations. Explicitly political films like the documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11* by Michael Moore and the historical drama *The Butler* have filled theaters and gained recognition. American audiences are directly exposed to political content on screen, which influences their voting patterns (as shown by Todd Adkins and Jeremiah J. Castle). Even if many films are not made to send a clear political message, virtually all films may be considered vehicles of a political theory, whether it be overt or covert. Some directors such as Oliver Stone, Spike Lee, and Robert Redford follow a well-known agenda. More recent directors, like Ben Affleck, Lee Daniels, Kathryn Bigelow, and George Clooney, have also explored political themes. Even directors with less obvious interest in such themes, like Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese, have created films with interesting political implications.

Course Description

This course will focus on the construction of a political ideology and the creation of national identity through films. It will also explore the ties between Hollywood and the American government, as exemplified during the McCarthy era and, later, the War on Terror.

Here are a few themes that will be analyzed:

- The definition of a “political film” and its characteristics: how do film directors convey ideologies through films?
- Techniques: how is the cinematic language used to send a political message?
- The impingement of politics into the world of film: the McCarthy era and the Hays Code
- The manipulation of history in films for political reasons
- The representation of slavery and the Antebellum South: evolving from a revisionist point of view to a more accurate portrayal
- Westerns: the frontier myth, Manifest destiny, and the promotion of the conquest of the West
- The Reagan era: Conservatism and populism onscreen within the context of the New Right
- The justification of the War on Terror: the influence of neoconservatism in *Zero Dark Thirty* and *American Sniper*
- The Department of Defense’s influence: examining the Pentagon’s active participation in films, including *Black Hawk Down*.

Students will be given a film syllabus and are expected to watch movies from home to foster class discussion and give them arguments for their final essay.

Organization

Prior knowledge of Hollywood and films is not required for this course.

Activities will cover the four language skills:

- Speaking: film presentation and participation in class discussion
- Writing: film reviews, article synthesis, and final essay
- Listening: understanding scenes taken from the syllabus and video essays
- Reading: most of the reading will be done at home to prepare for class discussion.