

SOCS 619: Foreign Policy at the Movies

and

SOCS 619W Foreign Policy At the Movies -- Foundational Course Option

Spring 2011
Wednesday 6-8:30 PM
Class Location: PAC 422

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Course Description

Does the public “learn” about foreign policy by watching movies? If it does, what does it learn? Recent research on public opinion has suggested that public attitudes about foreign affairs are informed by many “nonnews” sources (such as largely entertainment oriented television programs). This course considers the role of movies in formulating attitudes toward foreign policy events and concepts. The course addresses four topic areas: nuclear weapons, foreign policy decision making, the domestic politics of foreign policy and current issues in international politics. Movies will be watched by students before attending class. For each topic, we’ll discuss core findings in the relevant scholarly literature, watch a movie engaging this topic, and consider the messages and information provided by movies.

The course is organized around four core questions. First, what are the messages about international politics sent by the movies? Second, to what extent do these messages reflect the particular social context in which the movie was created? In other words, do they reflect the particular cultural milieu of the moment in terms of the prevailing political sentiments? Third, are these messages consistent with the understanding of the events and processes within the political science literature? Finally, what are the implications of movies and the information they provide for democratic governance?

Course Grading

Grades will be based on three short papers (20% each), an essay final (20%), and participation (20%).

Class periods will be devoted to discussion. Students must come to class prepared to discuss the day's assigned reading.

The reading and movie listed under the date and day title are assigned for that day's class. Students should do the assigned reading for the day first. Then, students should watch the assigned movie. We'll spend the first half of class discussing the reading. We'll spend the second half of class discussing the movie in the context of the reading.

In watching the movies, students should consider the following questions:

- (1) What are the messages that the movie makes about foreign policy? Do they seem “true” to you? Why or Why not?
- (2) Does the movie seem consistent with the material in the reading (whether it is conceptual material or historical material)? How is it consistent and how is it inconsistent? How do you think reading the material before watching the movie affected your understanding of it?
- (3) To what extent do you think the movie reflected the historical times at which it was released? Did it run counter to the times? Does the movie seem anachronistic today? Why?

Short Papers

Short Papers: The short papers should be 5-6 pages in length. Students are required to write **one** paper in **three** of the **four** course sections (three papers in total). The paper topic can address any one of the daily discussion questions listed in the class schedule below or questions 1 or 2 listed under grading above. Please use the question you are answering as your paper title.

Papers may be submitted to me through the course Moodle (preferred) or to me personally in paper form. Papers are due at the beginning of class where the question is discussed. If submitted through the Moodle, papers should be uploaded before the beginning of the class when the paper is due. If submitted in paper form, papers should be turned in at the beginning of class. If Moodle fails you, you may e-mail the paper to me as an attachment to my e-mail address above.

Papers should be typed, double-spaced, single-sided, 12 point font, 1 inch margins, and stapled together (if submitted in paper form). All pages should be numbered.

Comments will be provided through e-mail attachment. Grades will be provided through the Moodle.

References to material assigned for the course can be of the form: (Author Name, page number). Any references to material not assigned for the course should conform to the style outlined in: Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual For Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Final

Take-Home Essay Final: A take-home essay final will be due on Friday, May 6 at 10 p.m. The essay should be submitted on the Moodle (preferred) or as an e-mail attachment to my e-mail address. Comments and grades will be provided through the Moodle. The page limit is 6-8 pages. The question is:

Given what you have learned in this course, does what the public “learns” about foreign policy from watching movies facilitate an accurate understanding of foreign policy issues the problems associated with them? Why or Why not?

Participation

Participation will be evaluated based upon the student's contribution to discussion, responsiveness to other students, and quality of insight.

If a student has more than one excused absence from class, the student has the option of completing extra work to make up for the missed participation. The make-up work is a 1 page reaction paper to one of the readings. Essentially, pick one of the readings from the day missed and give your view on why the article is useful, not useful, etc. (e.g., "Professor Murray completely misses the point that...").

Readings

There are no books to purchase for this course. Additional readings will be available on the Moodle. Given the nature of this course, students are encouraged to subscribe to an on-line movie rental service (Netflix or Blockbuster) for the duration of the course.

You will need to purchase at a nominal cost: ISD Case 334 "The Cuban Missile Crisis" Available for purchase through <http://www.guisd.org/>

The following item is available for purchase (in paper or pdf format) directly from the Kennedy School of Government at <http://www.ksgcase.harvard.edu/>. Make sure you purchase the 28 page case study (listed as a "case" for type).

Case 271.0 Richard Neustadt, "Americanizing the Vietnam War"

Contemporaneous movie reviews for each film are available on the Moodle.

Movies: You may check them out from Olin Library on reserve if you wish.

Foundational Course Option Modifications

For students enrolled in the foundational course option (SOCS 619W), the requirements and grading are modified as follows.

Number of papers: Students should write 5 short papers of 5-6 pages each. They will be worth 15% of the course grade each (60% of the total course grade. The weighting of the take-home final and participation are unchanged). Students will write a paper for each of the 4 course sections. Students will also pick one other week in which to write a paper. See the general guidelines above regarding this process.

Instructor Meeting: Students should contact the instructor to schedule a meeting to discuss their work. The first meeting should occur after writing the first paper and receiving feedback on it. The second meeting should occur after receiving feedback on the 4th paper. Additional meetings will be scheduled as warranted by the student's individual circumstances.

Instructor Comments: Students will receive extensive feedback on their papers including style, structure, phrasing suggestions, and line-editing.

CLASS SCHEDULE

1. January 26

Introduction: Why Movies on Film? (note – no papers for this day)

Robert Gregg, International Relations on Film, pp. 1-24 (Moodle)

Jean-Michel Valentin, Hollywood, The Pentagon, and Washington, pp. 1-57 (Moodle)

Douglas A. Van Belle & Kenneth M. Mash, A Novel Approach to Politics, pp. 1-17 (Moodle)

Have you ever “learned” about foreign policy from watching a movie?
How do you know what you “learned” is accurate?

What does it mean for a movie to be “accurate”?

Why is watching movies a good tool to study international politics?

Why are movies made and what relationship does that have to the messages they include?

I. Nuclear Weapons

2. February 2

Nuclear Weapons and Morality

“Effect of Nuclear War,” Office of Technology Assessment, 1979
(Executive Summary – read the rest as interests you) (Moodle)

U.S. Bishops Pastoral Letter, 1983. (Moodle)

Albert Wohlstetter, "Bishops, Statesmen, and Other Strategists on the Bombing of Innocents," Commentary, Vol. 75, No. 6 (June 1983), pp. 15-35. (Moodle)

David Hoffman, The Dead Hand, 2009, pp. 90-91 (Moodle)

Movie: *The Day After* (1983)

Movie (Reserve)

What are the main arguments about nuclear strategy made by the U.S. Bishops and Wohlstetter’s response? Which side do you find more convincing? Why?

The reading and material from the day were produced in the context of *The Day After*. To what extent does the movie reflect the social and political context of the time it appeared?

After doing today’s reading and watching the movie, do you believe that nuclear weapons can be considered rationally? Why or why not?

3. February 9

The Joy of “Discovery” and the Fate of the Earth

Moral Dilemma of the Bomb, (web article and interviews with Manhattan Project scientists Frank Oppenheimer and Robert Wilson)
<http://www.pbs.org/hollywoodpresents/copenhagen/story/bomb.html>
(link in Moodle course documents – feel free to poke around the website a bit too)

Dwight MacDonald, “The Bomb: The Decline to Barbarism” in Memoirs of a Revolutionist, 1957 pp. 169-79 (Moodle)

Jonathan Schell, The Fate of the Earth, 1982, pp. 179-231 (Moodle)

Movie: Terminator 2 (1991)

Review (Moodle)

Was the creation of the nuclear bomb moral in the context of history at the time? Why or why not? Does your viewing of *Terminator 2* cause you to reconsider your view? Why or why not?

Do the readings and movie have a relevance to today? Why or why not?

4. February 16

Nuclear Strategy

Thomas C. Schelling, “The Diplomacy of Violence,” Arms and Influence, pp. 1-34. (Moodle)

Bruce Kuklick, Blind Oracles, 2006 (pp. 55-64, 107-109, 136-142 (Moodle)

David Hoffman, The Dead Hand, 2009, pp. 151-154, 421-423. (Moodle)

Carol Cohn, “Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals” Signs (Moodle)

Movie: Dr. Strangelove (1964)

Review (Moodle)

Fred Kaplan, “Truth Stranger than Strangelove,” New York Times October 10, 2004 (Moodle).

What does Schelling mean by “the diplomacy of violence”? What assumptions does he make about how leaders make decisions? Do the leaders you read about comply with these assumptions? Why or why not?

To what extent does the concept of gender underlie the readings and movie?

II. Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy

5. February 23

The Military, Society, and Government

Andrew J. Bacevich, The New American Militarism 2005, selections (Moodle)

Chapters by Cohen, and Feaver/Kohn, Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn, editors Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security, (Moodle)

Movie: *Seven Days in May* (1964)
Review (Moodle)

How would you describe the nature of civil-military relations as described in today's reading? In this context, do you believe the events as portrayed in the movie could happen today? Why or why not?

6. March 2

The Cold War, McCarthyism, and Public Opinion

Beverly Merrill Kelly, Reelpolitik II, pp. 205-214 (Moodle)

Ronnie D. Lipshutz, Cold War Fantasies: Film, Fiction, and Foreign Policy, pp. 35-53 (Moodle)

Victor Navasky, "Cold War Ghosts," The Nation, July 16, 2001 (Moodle)

Movie: *Manchurian Candidate* (1962)
Review (Moodle)

How would you describe the political and social context of the late 1950s and early 1960s? To what extent does the *Manchurian Candidate* reflect the political and social context of the day?

How are the public, the media, and politicians portrayed in the *Manchurian Candidate*? To what extent do you feel these claims are "true" both at the time of the movie's release and now?

7. March 9

The Diversionary Use of Force (note: we are meeting during this week of Wesleyan's Spring Break but not one week during April. See the syllabus below.)

Chiam Kaufman, "Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War," International Security (Summer 2004), (Moodle).

Levy, Jack. "Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique." (Moodle)

Movie: Wag The Dog (1998)

Review (Moodle)

How is the diversionary use of force thought to operate? What factors are most important and what assumptions does it make about the various actors (public, leaders, media)? Does the movie accurately capture this dynamic?

How able to control information is the president as portrayed in the reading? How does this align with the movie portrayal as well as your assessment about how these processes are thought to work?

Spring Break (No Class -- March 16)

III. History On Film

8. March 23

Crisis Decision Making

ISD Case 334 "The Cuban Missile Crisis" Available for purchase through <http://www.guisd.org/>

See also, http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/

Movie: *Thirteen Days* (2001)

Review (Moodle)

Does the movie *Thirteen Days* provide a "true" depiction of the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis? Why or why not?

9. March 30

Vietnam

Richard Neustadt, "Americanizing the Vietnam War" (case study for purchase – the basic story)

Bruce Kuklick, Blind Oracles, 2006, pp. 206-220 (Moodle)

Gordon Goldstein, Lessons in Disaster, pp. 144-185 (Moodle)

Selections from McNamara, In Retrospect (Moodle)

Fredrick Logevall, "Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam," Presidential Studies Quarterly, March 2004, pp. 100-112. (Moodle)

Movies (note 2): Path to War (2002)

The Fog of War (2004)

Reviews (Moodle)

How does the *Path to War* and the *Fog of War* differ in its portrayal of the decisions associated with Vietnam? What do you think accounts for these differences?

Which movie more accurately captures the "core truths" about American decision making regarding Vietnam? Why?

IV. Current Issues

10. April 6

Cyberterrorism and Cyberwar

John Carlin, "A Farewell to Arms," Wired (May 1997) (Moodle).

Richard Clark, Cyberwar, selections,(2010) (Moodle)

Movie: Live Free or Die Hard (Die Hard 4) (2007)

Review (Moodle)

What is the nature of cyberwar and how is it different than traditional warfare? Does the movie *Live Free or Die Hard* capture this core difference?

11. April 13

Climate Change

Joshua Busby. Who Cares about the Weather?: Climate Change and U.S. National Security. Security Studies, Volume 17, Number 3 (2008), pp. 468-504 (Moodle)

Mark Townsend and Paul Harris, "Now the Pentagon Tells Bush: Climate Change Will Destroy Us," The Guardian, February 22, 2004 (Moodle).

Peter Schwartz and Doug Randall, "An Abrupt Climate Change Scenario and Its Implications for United States Security," 2003 (Moodle)

Movie: *Day After Tomorrow* (2004)

Review (Moodle)

What is the nature of the threat to security posed by climate change?
How well does the movie *Day after Tomorrow* capture this threat?
Why?

April 20

No Class (We meet during the break on March 16).

12. April 27

1st half of Class: *Zombies* (Ok, disease)

Daniel Drezner, "Night of the Living Wonks," Foreign Policy, 2010 (Moodle).

Munz, et. al., "When Zombies Attack!: Mathematical Modeling of an Outbreak of Zombie Infection" In: *Infectious Disease Modeling Research Progress*, 2009 (Moodle).

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/body/pandemic-flu.html> (watch the short video, poke around).

<http://www.flu.gov/professional/federal/pandemic-influenza.pdf>

Movie: *28 Weeks Later* (2007)

Review (Moodle)

2nd Half of Class: Conclusion -- "Learning" by Going to the Movies?

Terry Christensen and Peter J. Haas, Projecting Politics: Political Messages in American Films, 2005, selections (Moodle)

28 Weeks Later is a relatively recent movie. To what extent do you feel that it captures the true nature of the threat from zombies (disease)? Does its portrayal seem to capture the core "truths" of the threat? Why or why not?