

The American Civil War And the Cinemagraphic Imagination

The popularity recently of films such as *Apocalypto* , *American History X*, *Amistad*, *Bamboozled*, *Brave Heart*, *Broke Back Mountain* , *Beloved*, *Boycott*, *Focus*, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, *Letters From Iwo Jima* , *Troy*, *300 Hundred* , and *Malcolm X*, indicate how central film is in shaping the American peoples understanding of their past. Popular culture has always played a central role in Americans understanding of history. In the nineteenth century, for example, the minstrel show told white people who they were and were not. Film today, like the minstrel show, tells us how Americans regardless of their color, understand historical representations. The films that we will view in this class depict how Americans have interpreted and understood the Civil War 1861- 1865. Was this a war, for example, about slavery or states rights ? What do people mean when they say the war was about states rights?

In this class film will be treated as if it were a historical document. Movies tell us a great deal about the moments in which they are produce. For example, no one can view *Triumph OF the Will* and claim it is just about the Olympics. The images projected on the screen were not innocent .The movie

was about more than bodies and the way they can be viewed . *Triumph OF The Will* was about race, politics, and nationalism. In short, this is not a film class where the central concerns are production technique, acting, camera angles, etc. Rather we will examine the meaning of these films in their social and historical context.

Class meetings : I will show the films on Tuesday and Wednesdays 2:10 to 4:40 and lead a discussion .Class attendance is mandatory . I expect all of the students to participate in the class discussions and ask questions and comment on what they have seen. Come and hear my brilliant lectures and get out of the heat for 2 & 1/2 hours.

Requirements: Students enrolled in History 174D must also be enrolled in 174DD.The writing requirement is two six page essays and a final essay of six pages. The essays will be based on the articles in the reader, the class discussions, and the films. I have not put the films on reserve so class attendance is important. Do not ask to borrow my copies. If you need to see a film go to Block Buster or Forty Niner Video.The reader can be purchased at Navins copy shop.