

Prof. Samiparna Samanta

1. Course Description/Vision:

As an integral part of popular culture, films can enthrall, intrigue, and present exciting opportunities for interpreting the past. While films have the potential to address an array of historical experiences, can we, however, view them as “authentic” representations of the past? Do films deliver the kind of multifaceted interpretations that historians seek when they address essential subjects about the past? This course will seek to answer these questions by explaining some of the key moments and ‘turning points’ in global history through carefully selected world cinema. Towards that end, this course has two aims: One, to evaluate films as a source of history, and secondly, to ‘read’ film as a sub-text of history. By situating the ‘historical film’ within the narrative of world history, we will unravel the complexities of both the medium and the moment. To sum up, we will contextualize, interrogate, and interpret some of the great films across the globe to show how they were both a product of the times in which they were created and a statement of quotidian understanding of that culture, as well as examine the lasting legacy they left behind. This course is designed for students interested in history, world cultures, and cinema.

2. Course Aims

We aim to develop *analytical thinking skills*, not merely knowledge of content. We will focus especially on understanding and interpreting the *contexts shaping world cinema*. We will also consider the *role of histories* in shaping public understanding of cinema.

3. Teaching Methodology/Pedagogical Approaches:

The course is divided into five broad thematic and chronological sections, each encapsulating significant ‘turning points’ in the history of the world. We will open each class with a **short lecture** on the historical context and the broad issues that are raised in the film to be screened that day. We will then **view the selected film** and have an extensive **in-class discussion**. There will be assigned readings for each day focused on the *historical context, primary sources, and cinematic narratives*. For example, a screening of D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* requires a discussion of Abraham Lincoln, slavery, the U.S. Civil War, and racism in the United States in 1915, and the readings will be grounded in the historical analysis of those moments as well as in primary sources. **Throughout the course, we will look for interpretative interventions that help students contextualize and interrogate the chosen cinema.**

4. Intended Learning Outcomes

| Intended Learning Outcomes | Learning Activities | Assessment Tasks |
|--|---|---|
| By the end of the course students should be able to: ➤ ‘Read’ historical films critically and analytically describe and explain the various historical moments and readings covered in class | A list of selected films and readings will be provided for each week. Students will be given strong guidance on their viewing, reading and research through lectures and tutorials | Students’ ability to interrogate, interpret and reflect on the films and readings covered in the syllabus will be tested by the following modes of assessments: 1. End-of-term research paper– 30% of grade 2. Written Film reviews – 30% |

A History of the Modern World in Ten Films

| Intended Learning Outcomes | Learning Activities | Assessment Tasks |
|---|---|--|
| ➤ Clearly and coherently communicate in written and verbal form their reflections on the chosen cinema and 'turning points' in the history of the modern world | Students will write reflective papers on the films, and prepare 'thought questions' on the screenings | 1. Film Analysis/Presentation – 25% 2. Written Reviews – 30% 3. Oral Discussions - 15% |
| ➤ Critically apply lessons learned in this course. | Students will, by responding to questions, develop their analytical and critical capabilities. | All the above |

4. Weekly Lesson Plans (Assigned Films & Selected Readings):

Week 1-2: Part I: Reordering the World: Civil War/Reconstruction 1750-1850

= **Film # 1:** Steve McQueen, *12 Years a Slave* (USA, 2013)

Selected Course Readings:

- Henry Louis Gates and Steve McQueen, "12 Years a Slave," *Transition*, no. 114 (2014): 185-96.
- Brenda E. Stevenson. "12 Years a Slave: Narrative, History and Film," *The Journal of African American History* 99, no. 1-2 (2014): 106-18.
- Robert Brent Toplin, "12 Years a Slave Examines the Old South's Heart of Darkness," *AHA Perspectives on History* <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2014/12-years-a-slave-examines-the-old-souths-heart-of-darkness>
- Ida B. Well's speech, "Lynch Law in America" (1893); <https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/wellslynchlaw.html>

Week 3-4: Part II: An Unsettled World: Nations and Empires 1850-1914

- **Film # 2:** Satyajit Ray, *Charulata* (India, 1964)
- Tanika Sarkar, "A Book of Her Own," *History Workshop* no. 36 (1993): 35-65.
- Brinda Bose, "From *Noshto Neerb* to *Charulata*," in Mohd Asaduddin and Anuradha Ghosh (eds), *Filming Fiction* (Oxford University Press, 2021).
- Partha Chatterjee, "The Nationalist resolution of the women's question", in Sudesh Vaid and Kumkum Sangari (eds), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, pp 233-237, 242-53.

Week 5-7: Part III: Of Masses and Visions of the Modern, 1910-1975

- **Film # 3:** Ken Loach, *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (United Kingdom, 2006)
- Donal Ó Drisceoil, "Framing the Irish Revolution: Ken Loach's *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*," *Radical History Review* 1 January 2009 (104): 5–15
- James Chandler, "Cinema, History, and the Politics of Style: Michael Collins and The Wind That Shakes the Barley." *Field Day Review*, vol. 7 (2011): 102–121.
- **Film # 4:** Isao Takahata, *Grave of the Fireflies* (Japan, 1988)
- Wendy Goldberg, "Transcending the Victim's History: Takahata Isao's 'Grove Of the Fireflies.'" *Mechademia*, vol. 4 (2009): 39–52.

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- Andrew Gordon, Ch: "Japan in Wartime," in *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (Oxford University Press, 2003) pp. 204-224.
- **Film # 5: Chen Kaige, *Farewell My Concubine*** (China, 1993)
- Glennys Young, *The Communist Experience in the Twentieth Century: A Global History through Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) Pages TBA
- **Film # 6: Gillo Pontecorvo, *The Battle of Algiers*** (Algiers, 1966)
- Edward Said, "The Quest for Gillo Pontecorvo," Interview 18.11 (November 1988): 90-93
- Franz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (1961) Pages TBA
- Eid, Haidar, and Khaled Ghazel, "Footprints of Fanon in Gillo Pontecorvo's 'The Battle of Algiers' and Sembene Ousanne's *Xala*," *English in Africa* 35, no. 2 (2008): 151-61

Week 8-9: Part IV: Anxious Borders

- **Film # 7: Farah Nabulsi, *The Present*** (Palestine, 2020) AND **Ahmad Habash, *Fatenah*** (Palestine, 2009)
- <https://balfourproject.org/bp/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Balfour-Declaration-pages-18-25.pdf>
Primary source - the Balfour Declaration, 1917
- Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2020). Pages TBA

Week 10-12: Part V: Globalization, Culture and Power

- **Film # 8: Ashgar Farhadi, *A Separation*** (Iran, 2011) OR **Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*** (France, 2007)
- Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," *American Anthropologist* 104.3 (2002): 783-90.
- Ervand Abrahamian, Chapter 6 "The Islamic Republic," in *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge University Press, 2008). Pages TBA
- Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon Press, 1978) Pages TBA
- **Film # 9: Spike Lee, *Do the Right Thing*** (USA, 1989)
- Howard Beach incident, 1989
https://archive.nytimes.com/cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/18/a-racial-attack-that-years-later-is-still-being-felt/?_r=0
- [Love/Hate, New York, Race and 1989- Wilson Quarterly](#)
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, "A Case for Reparations"
(<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>)
- **Film # 10: Aparna Sen, *Mr. and Mrs. Iyer*** (India, 2002)
- Gyanendra Pandey, "Can a Muslim Be an Indian?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Oct., 1999), pp. 608-629.
- Neelam Srivastava, "Bollywood as National(ist) Cinema: Violence, Patriotism and the National-Popular in Rang De Basanti," *Third Text*, Vol. 23, No. 6 (November 2009), pp. 703-716.

Week 13: Research & Peer Review Workshop