

The Politics of the “Seventies” Film

The ten years from 1967 to 1976 were an extraordinary time both in the history of American politics and in the history of American film. In the same period that the country was rocked by the Vietnam War, the feminist and civil rights movements, Watergate and economic crisis, the end of Hollywood censorship along with demographic and economic change in the industry ushered in what many call “the last golden age” of American film. In this class we study both film theory and political history to examine these remarkable films and the political context in which they were forged. The goal of the course is to take seriously *both* the films and their politics.

We will screen one film a week, Tuesday evenings at 7:30. **Attendance is required. Screenings will be in Goldwin-Smith, Hollis E. Cornell Auditorium.** In fact, students are encouraged to see each film twice – once on their own and once at the screening. For films that you will write essays about, multiple viewing will be essential, especially for some crucial passages. All of the videos are on Uris library and/or can be streamed from the course blackboard site. They are also all readily available for purchase from on-line outlets; many stream on-line as well.

There are five principal requirements for the course:

- An **in class exam**, Monday February 27 (15%)
- A **short essay**, due Monday March 13 (20%)
- An **in class exam**, Monday May 1 (25%)
- A **long paper**, due Monday, May 15 (30%)
- Section attendance/class participation (10%)

A note on the requirements: the short essay (8-10 pages/about 2,000-plus words), will involve a political reading of one of our screened films. The long essay (about 16-20 pages, but no less than 5,000 and no more than 7,000 words) will be devoted to the close analysis of a different film from the period. You will be given a list of “seventies” films and choose one of them. Each paper will briefly discuss the background of the film’s production, place the film in the context of the careers of the principal players, address the film’s commercial and critical reception, and, most importantly, present and support a political reading of the film. (More instructions for each paper will be provided.)

The in-class exams will emphasize material covered in the lectures and readings. Students are also required to attend discussion sections over the course of the semester. Active and thoughtful participation in class and section accounts for 10% of the final grade; films will also be discussed in class most Wednesdays. It is therefore wise to complete each week’s required readings before class on Wednesday.

NOTE that this is an electronics free class – no laptops, no phones, no anything – in lecture, in section, or at the film screenings.

Each student in this course is expected to abide by the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity: “Absolute integrity is expected of every Cornell student in all academic undertakings.” Students unfamiliar with or uncertain about specific attributes of the code should review it on-line at: <http://newstudentprograms.cornell.edu/dos/cms/nsp/Initiatives/upload/AcademicIntegrityPamphlet.pdf>

The readings for the course are primarily from the books listed below. They are available for purchase at the Campus store and are also on 3-hour reserve in Uris library. Additional readings will be posted on the class blackboard site (marked [BB] below).

- Cook, *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam*
- Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (Rev ed. 1993)
- Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape* (2nd Edition, Chicago, 1987)
- Hoberman, *The Dream Life: Movies, Media and the Mythology of the Sixties*
- Monaco, Paul, *The Sixties* (History of the American Cinema)
- Reeves, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House*
- Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture/Society/Politics*

Also at the campus store and Uris reserve (mostly recommended and supplementary reading):

- Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex-Drugs-and-Rock 'n' Roll Generation Saved Hollywood*
- Kirshner, *Hollywood's Last Golden Age*
- Monaco, James, *How to Read a Film* (4th ed. 2009)
- Stuart, Jan, *The Nashville Chronicles*

Course Outline

Week 1: Introduction and Course Overview (Wednesday, January 25)

Required Readings:

- Phillip Lopate, "Anticipation of *La Notte*: The 'Heroic' Age of Moviegoing," in his *Totally, Tenderly, Tragically*, pp. 3-25. [BB]
- Susan Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema," *New York Times*, 2/25/1996. [BB]
- David Thomson, "The Decade When The Movies Mattered," reprinted in Elsaesser, *The Last Great American Picture Show*, 73-82. [BB]
- Peter Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*, pp. 13-51.
- David Cook, *Lost Illusions*, pp. 1-23.

Recommended Reading:

- James Monaco, *How To Read a Film*, pp. 24-73, 170-249.
- Chris Wiegand, *French New Wave* (2001), pp. 7-20. [BB]

Week 2: Talkin Bout My Generation (January 20 – February 1)

Required Readings:

- Jonathan Rosenbaum, "New Hollywood and the Sixties Melting Pot," in *The Last Great American Picture Show*, pp. 131-52. [BB]
- Paul Monaco, *The Sixties*, pp. 168-92.
- Lester Friedman, *Bonnie and Clyde* (BFI Modern Classics, 2000) [BB]
- Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*, pp. 52-80.
- Terry Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties* (1995), pp. 87-130. [BB]

Recommended Reading:

- Paul Schrader, "Canon Fodder," *Film Comment*, 2006, pp. 33-49. [BB]

Film (Tuesday, January 31):
The Graduate (1967)

Week 3: Hard Times in New York Town (February 6 – February 8)

Required Readings:

Vincent Cannato, *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and His Struggle to Save New York* (2001), pp. 443-53, 466-78, 525-38. [BB]
Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties*, pp. 195-221, 242-60.
Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies*, pp. 1-20.
Monaco, *The Sixties*, pp. 56-66.

Recommended Reading:

James Sanders, *Celluloid Skyline: New York and the Movies*, 366-98. [BB]

Film (Tuesday, February 7):
Midnight Cowboy (1969)

Week 4: Tin Soldiers and Nixon's Coming (February 13 – Feb 15)

Required Readings:

Joseph Palermo, *In His Own Right: The Political Odyssey of Senator Robert F. Kennedy* (Columbia, 2001), pp. 161-87. [BB]
Gitlin, *The Sixties*, pp. 285-361.
J. Hoberman, *The Dream Life*, pp. 186-222, 247-77.

Recommended Reading:

Renata Adler, "Fracas at the Cannes Film Festival," *New York Times*, 1968 [BB]
Monaco, *How to Read a Film*, pp. 252-317.

Film (Tuesday, February 14):
Medium Cool (1969)

Week 6: No Direction Home (February 27 – March 1)

Required Readings:

Cook, *Lost Illusions*, pp. 67-157.
James Monaco, *American Film Now* (1979), pp. 81-137. [BB]

Recommended Reading:

Monaco, *How to Read a Film*, pp. 434-477.

In Class Exam Monday, February 27

Film (Tuesday, February 28):
The King of Marvin Gardens (1972)

Week 7: I Used to Care . . . Realism, Revisionism, and Cynicism (March 6 – March 8)

Required Reading:

- David Thompson, *Altman on Altman*, pp. 44-94. [BB]
Jan Stuart, *The Nashville Chronicles: The Making of Robert Altman's Masterpiece*, pp. 128-56, 206-32, 257-72.
Jonathan Kirshner, *Hollywood's Last Golden Age*, pp. 182-88. [BB]
Stephen Prince, *Savage Cinema: Sam Peckinpah and the Rise of Ultraviolent Movies* (1998), pp. 1-41. [BB]

Recommended Reading:

- Cook, *Lost Illusions*, pp. 159-257.

Film (Tuesday, March 7):

- The Long Goodbye* (1973)

Week 8: Find Out What it Means to Me (March 13 – March 15)

Required Readings:

- Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (Penguin, 2000), pp. 63-93. [BB]
Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, pp. 1-42, 323-371.
David Denby, "Men without Women," *Harpers*, 1973. [BB]
Gitlin, *The Sixties*, pp. 362-76.

Recommended Reading:

- Cook, *Lost Illusions*, pp. 259-97.

Film (Tuesday, March 14): [***This Week's Screening is in GS142***]

- Klute* (1971)

First Essay Due in Class, Monday, March 13.

Week 9: Privacy, Paranoia, Isolation and Despair (March 20 – March 22)

Required Readings:

- Hoberman, *The Dream Life*, pp. 315-333.
Richard Reeves, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House*, pp. 329-39, 458-64, 478-85, 501-42, 556-609.
Stanley Kutter, *Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes* (1997), pp. xiii-xxii, 3-6, 247-59. [BB]

Recommended Reading:

- Mark Feeney, *Nixon at the Movies* (Chicago, 2004), pp. 297-325. [BB]

Film (Tuesday, March 21):

- The Conversation* (1974)

Final Confirmation of Film Choice for Long Paper Due in Class, Wednesday, March 22

Week 10: Decline and Fall (March 27 – March 29)

Required Readings:

- Edward Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (Columbia, 2006), pp. 53-83. [BB]
Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home* (2007), pp. 71-105. [BB]
William Graebner, "A Nation in Existential Despair," in Bailey and Farber, *America in the 70s* (Kansas, 2004), pp. 157-75. [BB]
Schulman, *The Seventies*, pp. 23-77.

Film (Tuesday, March 28):

Mikey and Nicky (1976)

Week 11: Businessmen Drink My Wine (April 10 – April 12)

Required Readings:

- Beth Bailey, "She Can Bring Home the Bacon: Negotiating Gender in the 70s," in *America in the 70s*, pp. 107-25. [BB]
Peter Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened* (2000), pp. 161-84. [BB]
Schulman, *The Seventies*, pp. 121-189.

Film (Tuesday, April 11):

Network (1976)

Week 12: Who Do You Love? (April 17 – April 19)

Required Readings:

- Charles Kaiser, *1968 in America* (Grove, 1988), pp. 190-214. [BB]
Nick Bromell, *Tomorrow Never Knows* (Chicago, 2000), pp. 15-35. [BB]
Nick Hornby, "Pop Quiz," *The New Yorker*, September 4, 2001. [BB]
Barney Hoskyns, *Hotel California* (2006), pp. 217-44. [BB]
Gitlin, *The Sixties*, pp. 420-38.
Schulman, *The Seventies*, pp. 193-217.

Recommended Reading:

Cook, *Lost Illusions*, pp. 25-65.

Film (Tuesday, April 18):

Shampoo (1975)

Week 13: Mean Streets (April 24 – April 26)

Required Reading:

Amy Taubin, *Taxi Driver* (BFI Film Classics, 2000). [BB]
David Thompson/Ian Christie (eds) *Scorsese on Scorsese*, pp. 38-67. [BB]
Kevin Jackson (ed.) *Schrader on Schrader* (2004), pp. 108-40. [BB]

Film (Tuesday, April 25):
Taxi Driver (1976)

Week 14: A Cinema of Despair (May 1 – May 3)

Required Reading:

Michael Eaton, *Chinatown*, (BFI Film Classics, 1998). [BB]
Dana Polan, “Chinatown: Politics as Perspective, Perspective as Politics,”
in Orr/Ostrowska, *Cinema of Roman Polanski*, pp. 108-20. [BB]
“Interview with Robert Towne,” in Joel Engel (ed.) *Screenwriters on
Screenwriting* (1995), pp. 197-223. [BB]

Recommended Reading:

Vernon Shetley, “Incest and Capital in Chinatown,” *MLN* 114:5
(December 1999), pp. 1092-1109. [BB]

In Class Exam Monday, May 1

Film (Tuesday, May 2):
Chinatown (1974)

Week 15: Bringing it all Back Home (May 8 – May 10)

Required Readings:

Peter Cowie, *Annie Hall*, (BFI Film Classics, 1996). [BB]
Pauline Kael, “On the Future of the Movies,” August 5, 1975, reprinted in
Pauline Kael, *Reeling*, pp. 309-331. [BB]
Pauline Kael, “Why are Movies So Bad? Or, the Numbers,” *The New
Yorker*, June 23, 1980. [BB]

Recommended Reading:

Dade Hayes and Jonathan Bing, *Open Wide: How Hollywood Box Office
Became a National Obsession* (2004), pp. 1-15. [BB]
Jonathan Kirshner, “When Critics Mattered: Kael, Ebert, and 70s Film,” *Boston
Review* 37:2 (March/April 2012), pp. 59-64. [BB]

Film (Tuesday, May 9):
Annie Hall (1977)

Final Papers Due Monday, May 15