

**Course GS-09 POLITICS ON THE BIG SCREEN: FILM AS PROPAGANDA
THROUGHOUT HISTORY (45 horas lectivas)**

Objectives

This course presents an introduction to the use of cinema throughout history as a medium for the transmission of political ideas, values, and attitudes. It follows a chronological approach, taking students from the beginning of the 20th century to modern-day film with a threefold objective. First, to introduce students to the concept of propaganda, the theoretical models regarding its methods and effectiveness, and its applications in audio-visual media. In the second place, to approach the History of the last century through case studies, by analysing each film screened in its specific historical context and by understanding movies both as products and as contributors of the culture surrounding them. Lastly, to foster critical analysis regarding the role of cinema in transmitting ideas and attitudes, as well as the ability to identify underlying messages in filmic production.

Specific goals:

- Students will become familiar with the origins of political propaganda, its techniques and its historical evolution.
- Students will be introduced to the exploitation of cognitive biases underlying the successful use of propaganda.
- Students will be provided with the analytical tools to identify the differences between information and propaganda, as well as propaganda techniques at work in past and current mass media.
- Students will become familiar with the propaganda of distinct historical contexts throughout the twentieth century.
- Students will be able to understand how film language can be used for propaganda purposes.
- Students will be invited to analyse and evaluate the role of film propaganda as a means for transmitting political values, attitudes, ideas or convictions and to discuss the extent of its effectiveness.
- Students will be able to understand and analyse film as inseparable from the historic context in which it is produced.
- Students will acquire the ability to critically analyse films in order to detect underlying messages in their plot, characterization, and technique.

– Students will be provided with an awareness of the enduring use of cinema for propaganda purposes after and beyond their intensive use by totalitarian regimes.

Methodology

Each week, the course will combine theoretical lectures (including powerpoint presentations), in-class activities, the screening of films as case studies, and active discussion of the use of propaganda in specific historical contexts. Typically, one in-class screening will take place per topic. Light reading assignments will be used as preparation for class discussion.

Syllabus

1. Introduction. What is propaganda and how does it work? Cognitive biases and propaganda. The evolution of propaganda throughout history. Cinema as propaganda.
2. Early propaganda films.
3. The importance of propaganda in “total war”: propaganda films of World War I.
4. Revolution and totalitarianism on the big screen: propaganda films in the Soviet Union.
5. National Socialist film propaganda: the use of cinema by the Third Reich
6. The war front and the home front: propaganda in Allied documentary films of World War II.
7. Hollywood and World War II: commercial hits and wartime propaganda.
8. The Cold War, McCarthyism, science fiction and propaganda.
9. Current-day cinema (I): propaganda in the new “comic documentary”
10. Current-day cinema (II): social realism or propaganda?

Bibliography

Given the structure of a course centered on case studies, students will be provided with specific readings for each topic. Nevertheless, the following is valuable as a general reference:

Reeves, N.: The Power of Film Propaganda: Myth or Reality? London: Cassell, 1999.

Assessment

20%: Continued attendance and participation in class activities and

discussion

25%: Mandatory final essay (topic must be submitted for approval)

25%: Mid-term exam

30%: Final exam