



SELF PROGRAM 2021/2022

French History in Film

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Course information

Number of credits: 6 credits

Contact hours: 30 hours; instruction in English

Hours taught per week: 2.5 hours x 12 weeks = 30 hours

Teaching period: Fall 2021

Course description:

Film – whether fictional or historical dramas, documentaries, TV images, or Internet age video footage – is an important medium for learning about French history. It is also a medium that French people played a large role in inventing and developing. This course will examine major events in French history (mostly post-1789) by means of iconic movies and other visual media. Topics to be treated will include France in World War II (*Casablanca*), the Algerian War (*La Bataille d'Algiers*), French colonialism (*Chocolat* by Claire Denis), as well as films set in Lyon such as *Hotel Terminus* (Ophuls). Equal weight will be given to (1) the importance of certain events for understanding the history of France and the French and to (2) the history-making quality of the film itself that treats a particular time, place, and emotional-political-social-economic milieu. Student input on the movie list is welcome.

Prerequisites :

No prerequisites.

Course objectives and Class time:

Students will be given the opportunity to learn more about French history and French cinema. Students will be given practice at writing about and discussing French history and cinema. Students are expected to attend ALL classes and participate with questions and comments. Class time will be devoted to historical and filmic analysis, together and in smaller groups.

Class schedule:

Week 1 Introduction; *Un village français* (TV series extract from season 1, 2009)

Week 2 World War II; discussion of *Un village français* and *Casablanca* (1942)

Week 3 The Dreyfus Affair and French Anti-Semitism; G. Méliès + *Hotel Terminus* (1988)

Week 4 The Algerian War; *La Bataille d'Algiers* (1966)

Week 5 French colonialism; *Chocolat* (1988)

Week 6 “30 Glorieuses” / “Nouvelle Vague”: *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* **MID-TERM exam**

Week 7 WWI era: *Paths of Glory* (Kubrick)

Week 8 *Napoleon* (Abel Gance)

Week 9 Revolution: *Danton* (Wadja) **(1st draft of paper sent to peer reader)**

Week 10 Ancien Régime era: *Marie-Antoinette* (S. Coppola) **(1st draft returned to author)**

Week 11 Pre-Enlightenment era: *Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*

Week 12 **Final Exam** in class + **final version of paper**

Assessment:

The final grade will be the equally weighted average of four assignments:

1. Mid-term exam (48-hour take-home commentary or essay; 800 words)
2. Final exam (in class, 2.5 hours in the 12th and final week of class)
3. Final paper (review of a movie or a scholarly book or article; up to 1600 words)
4. Oral presentation (15 minutes max; up to 3 people per group)

Mid-term exam (800 words +/- 10%, 24-hour take home), **Oral Presentation** (10-15 minutes, up to three-person team), **Final Exam** (in class, 2.5 hours), **Final Paper** (1600 words +/- 10%). The **Mid-term** will be a choice between essay and commentary; the **Oral** will present your paper or another “French history through Film” related topic; the **Final exam** will be like the mid-term but in class.

The Paper: guidelines

You can confine yourself to summarizing and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the argument of ONE **scholarly** journal article, book, or chapter of book... OR you can craft your own mini-research paper about *the cinematic treatment of some crucial chapter in French history*. Please avoid using basic journalism as your target text. **Please respect word limits.**

Please include your name and email address at the top of your mid-term exam and paper (NOT in the header of your file).

Attendance:

In order to participate, students **must be present in class** and **must watch the films** discussed either at the screenings organized or own their own somehow. An unexcused absence at a test (final test or continuous assessment) means a “0” on that assignment; two missing assignments means zero credit for the class.

The final papers will be prepared in two drafts – to increase quality and prevent cheating via ghost-writing.

On labeling and sending and receiving papers (.docx files or similar, not pdf), Example:

2019 FF mid-term Chen

2019 FF paper CHEN (CHEN sends to Mary Daniels)
2019 FF paper CHEN md (Daniels sends paper with feedback to CHEN and Delogu)
2019 FF paper CHEN v2 (CHEN sends definitive version of paper to Delogu)

Bibliography/Books/Screenings:

Screenings for films will be scheduled at a mutually convenient time in addition to class time. Attendance at screenings is not exactly required, however it is highly recommended. How will we discuss a movie that many have not seen? No textbook is required for this course, but short readings on cinema and French history will be assigned and distributed via links or attachments.

It is strongly recommended that you read at least one general history of modern France. A good one is *Sixty Million Frenchmen Can't Be Wrong* (2003) by Jean-Benoît Nadeau and Julie Barlow. In French, I recommend the *Histoire Mondiale de la France* (ed. P. Boucheron). The English translation (published in April 2019 by Other Press) is *France in the World: A New Global History*. Another insider-outsider perspective is *The Discovery of France* (2007) by Graham Robb.

Sixty Million Frenchmen can be purchased online and is available to download here:

https://archive.org/details/sixtymillionfren00nade_0

or here:

<https://epdf.pub/sixty-million-frenchmen-cant-be-wrong-why-we-love-france-but-not-the-french.html>

... and of course there is Wikipedia – a much maligned but in my view excellent “square one” on just about any topic – and it’s often instructive to compare the French and English entries for the same topic.