



SELF PROGRAM 2023/2024

French History in Film

C. Jon Delogu
c.jon.delogu@gmail.com

Course information

Number of credits: 6 credits

Contact hours: 30 hours

Hours taught per week: 2,5 hours

Teaching period: spring semester 2024

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 inventing and innovating. This course will examine major events in French history 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. 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 & syllabus:

- Week 1 French history + film history entwined since Dreyfus Affair (1894) and cinématographe (1895)
- Week 2 The Algerian War (1954-1962); La Bataille d'Algiers (1966, Pontecorvo)
- Week 3 30 Glorieuses, Nouvelle Vague – A bout de souffle (1960), Ascenseur pour l'échafaud (1958)
- Week 4 French colonialism -- Chocolat (1988), Roseaux sauvages (1994), Inch'Allah dimanche (2001)
- Winter Vacation:** week of February 26 -- no class
- Week 5 WWII – A Man Escaped (1956), Army of Shadows (1969), Casablanca (1942)
- Week 6 MID-TERM exam (in-class, 20 factual questions) WWI – Paths of Glory (1957, Kubrick)
- Week 7 Dreyfus and Anti-Semitism: J'accuse (2019), Georges Méliès (1899), Un sac de billes (1975)
- Week 8 The myth and reality of Napoleon: Napoleon (1927, Abel Gance)
- Week 9 Revolution: Danton (1983, Wadja) (1st draft of paper sent to peer reader)
- Week 10 Ancien Régime era: Marie-Antoinette (2006, S. Coppola) (1st draft returned to author)
- Week 11 Pre-Enlightenment era: La passion de Jeanne d'Arc (Dreyer, 1928)
- Week 12 Final Exam in class + final version of paper due April 21, noon.

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 commentary of conflict-filled periods in French history and cinematic treatments of those conflicts.

Assessment:

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

1. **Mid-term exam (20 factual questions)** about the movies in the first half of the course)
2. **Final exam** (in class, **scene analysis** - 2.5 hours in the 12th and final week of class)
3. **Final paper** (review of a movie or of a scholarly book or article; 1000 to 1500 words, max.)

The paper: guidelines

Option A: witnessing a witness

Identify the argument of ONE **scholarly** journal article, book, or chapter of book on *a cinematic treatment of some chapter of French history* and assess its strengths and weaknesses.

Option B: you are the witness

Craft your own argument about *the cinematic treatment of some crucial chapter in French history*. Whether you choose Option A or B, **please respect word limits**.

Please include your name and email address at the top of your mid-term exam and paper so that it can be easily copied/pasted by me to return work (NOT in the header of your file).

Attendance:

In order to participate, students must be **present in class**. Nevertheless, a maximum of 2 (two) unexcused absences will be allowed; otherwise no mark will be given. An unexcused absence at a test (final test or continuous assessment) means no credits for the course.

Students must also **watch the films**.

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

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

2021 FHF mid-term Chen

2021 FHF paper CHEN (CHEN sends to Mary Daniels)

2021 FHF paper CHEN md (Daniels sends paper with feedback to CHEN and Delogu)

2021 FHF paper CHEN v2 (CHEN sends definitive version of paper to Delogu)

Bibliography/Books/Screenings:

If online viewing proves impossible to organize, screenings for films will be scheduled at a mutually convenient time, and excerpts will be viewed in class. 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 good “square one” on just about any topic – and it’s often instructive to compare the French and English entries for the same topic.