

The assignment in brief: You will select an American movie either created during the 1918-1952 period or set in that time period. You will then analyze the movie for its assumptions and ideology, draw connections between the movie and our class readings, and formulate your ideas in a 3-4 page essay (typed, double-spaced, about 300 words per page).

Selecting a Movie: Give me a brief email or a slip of paper with your proposed movie by the start of class on Thursday, 23 February. Any movie is fine, so long as it fits the time-period requirement. If you want to propose a foreign movie, you may do so, but only if it in some way depicts Americans or the United States.

Tips on Developing Your Analysis:

Movies as a primary source:

If your movie depicts events taking place at roughly the same time as its original release (e.g. a 1935 movie describing the events in the Great Depression), you will want to treat your movie as a primary source. **Do NOT treat your film as a simple reflection of historical reality.** Instead, examine your movie as a reflection of the concerns, biases, assumptions, and ideology of the filmmaker(s). For instance, how does the movie represent diversity within the United States (e.g. race, class, gender, or religious differences, etc.)? What subtle or overt messages in the movie convey the filmmakers' definition of the "good life," and how does that definition of the good life relate to readings and lecture topics we've explored in class? What political messages does the movie convey about government, capitalism, foreign peoples, and so on? If we were to think of the movie as having a thesis statement, what would it be? You can address other questions; these are just suggestions to guide your thinking.

Movies as a secondary source: If your movie was made later (e.g. a 1970s or 2000s movie describing World War II or the Great Depression), you should analyze the movie as a secondary source. Evaluating a movie as a secondary source involves asking whether the film shows any particular bias in how it represents the past. However, if you follow this route, you should also consider the primary-source questions above. That means asking how the film's representation of the past reflected the filmmakers' concerns about the present day (e.g. how did a 1970s movie about WWII reflect the filmmakers' concerns about the Vietnam War era; or how does a 2012 movie about the Great Depression reflect concerns about today's society?) Analyzing a movie as a secondary source can be tricky, because it requires saying something intelligent about both the 1918-1952 period and the period when the film was made. Think carefully before selecting this option.

-Do NOT provide lengthy plot summary. Instead, assume that your audience has a basic familiarity with the movie's plot. When you describe details from the movie, those details should help illustrate the filmmaker's ideology, assumptions, concerns, and biases.

-If you criticize a movie for factual inaccuracies, please do so with a spirit of humility and with an understanding of movie-making as a genre. A typical two-hour movie has a script that amounts to only 10 to 20 pages of single-spaced text. This constraint means that movie-makers, as a matter of necessity, must simplify events and even combine multiple characters into one figure. Thus, you should not criticize a movie if it simplifies the past, when compared to a lengthier historical reading. However, you can criticize a movie if its chosen strategy of simplification betrays a noticeable ideological bias.

Other Rules:

-Your paper should draw specific ideas and brief quotations from **at least two different class readings.** (A reading refers to an article, book, or primary-source packet. Different primary sources in one .pdf packet count as just one reading for the purposes of this assignment.) One way to incorporate the readings is to ask if your filmmaker's ideology and assumptions seem similar to (or radically opposed to) other historical viewpoints that we've studied in class. You can be creative in how you use the readings, but your emphasis should be on finding interesting parallels and contrasts.

-Please provide simple parenthetical page citations to our readings, just like in the other essays. You do not need to provide a citation for the movie, but your essay should convey the full title and year of release for the movie. There is no expectation that you do outside research for this project, beyond analyzing your movie. However, if you do cite any non-HIST 474 readings, please provide a full citation and bibliography for that outside work.