Description: What does American culture say about what it means to be an American? Film is the quintessential American cultural form, yet it creates as many contradictory messages and fictions as it reveals reality. We will explore what nation, class/capitalism, ethnicity/race and gender mean in film. We will especially consider the relationship between fact and fiction within the history of film as text and context.

Required Readings: 1). Graeme Turner, Film as Social Practice, Routledge.  
2). Mark Carnes Editor, Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies, Henry Holt.  

Requirements for your grade: Your grade will be based on the successful completion of four short (5 page) out of class papers on the films we screen in class, one in-class essay exam, and one oral presentation of a film of your choice (turn in your presentation notes for full credit). Your essays must cite the required readings for full credit. Requirements are based on points--16 points for each assignment that equals 96 points, with four points for attendance total of 100 possible points. IMPORTANT NOTE: Any time you use someone else’s ideas as well as quotations you MUST CITE YOUR SOURCES. The university honor code has severe penalties for plagiarism—an automatic F (Fail) in the course.

Course Outline


May 17: Screening of John Singleton’s “Rosewood” (1997). RR: Website: www.displaysforschools.com/rosewood.html; or www.dlis.dos.state.fl.us/fglis/rosewood. Use in your paper. Question for Paper #1 (due May 24): Compare and contrast Griffith and Singleton for what they say about race relations in the U.S. at the beginning and end of the 20th century. What do they say about what it means to be an American, and the meanings of

May 19: Screening of Orson Welles’ “Citizen Kane” (1941)
Extra Credit: Finish the crossword puzzle for 5 extra credit points.

May 24: Screening of Michael Moore’s “Roger and Me” (1989)
Paper #1 Due.
Question for Paper #2 (due May 31): Both Welles and Moore critique American capitalism and class relations. Compare and contrast their critiques. What do these films say about class privilege and the American Dream?

May 26: Screening of Fleischer/Masuda/Fukasaku’s “Tora! Tora! Tora!” (1970)
RR: Iriye in Carnes, pp. 228-231. Use in your paper.

May 31: Screening of Ridley Scott’s “Black Hawk Down” (2001)
Paper #2 Due
Question for Paper #3 (due June 7): Two genre war films give different perspectives on war: “Tora!” presents both U.S. and Japanese perspectives on what started World War II for the Americans. “Black Hawk” presents the U.S. view on a failed Somalia engagement. (Scott believes he created an anti-war movie—is it?) What do the concepts of nation and citizenship mean for each of these perspectives? What is the effect of this genre on patriotism and nationalism?

June 2: Screening of Pakula’s “All the President’s Men” (1976)

June 7: Screening of Mike Nichol’s “Primary Colors” (1998)
Paper #3 Due
Question for Paper #4 (due June 14): Pakula and Nichols present the effects of two different American presidencies. Compare and contrast them for what they say about the American presidency and American political culture.

June 9: Screening of “Real Women Have Curves” (2002) and discussion of Bulman.
RR: Bulman All.

June 14: Screening of “Mean Girls” (2004)
Paper #4 Due
RR: Bulman All.
June 16: Assignment #5: In-class essay exam. Bring a blue book to class.

June 21-23: Oral presentations of a film of your choice. Answer this question: How does the film you have chosen depict culture? What kind of sociological impact does it have on the culture being depicted?