Cinema in the Age of Trump  
CMA 3892, Fall 2017  
Prof. Jennifer Fay

Course Description:
We are witnessing the resurgence of extreme politics and visions for America’s future. Mainstream and centrist positions appear to be giving way to partisanship that finds expression at rallies, on social media, in political documentaries, and through news pundits. Mass media, in other words, has fragmented into particularized, partisan media in parallel with contemporary politics. “Cinema in the Age of Trump” takes stock of partisan film culture and the legal history of how cinema attained the status of political speech while news itself veered ever closer to mediated forms of entertainment. This course explores cinema as both an entertainment form and as a forum for political expression, one that has found new primacy in our current culture (especially in the wake of the Supreme Court’s decision in 2010 *Citizens United v. Federal Election Committee*). This state of affairs requires us to rethink the distinctions between the politicization of film and the aestheticization of politics (to recall Walter Benjamin’s famous formulation), between personal and corporate expression, and the relationship between partisan film and democratic commitments.

From Michael Bay to Ava DuVernay, from Michael Moore’s proletariat protest to the “Queen of Versailles”: What are the film genres, directors, and character types that reflect and shape our current political moment? What is the relationship between the popular arts and populist sentiment, between emotion and political thought, and between artistic practice and civic engagement?

Grade Distribution:
Paper #1: 20%  
Paper #2: 30%  
Final, comprehensive exam: 15%  
Minimum of five discussion posts: 15%  
Robust class participation: 20%

Key due dates:
Paper 1: Friday, Sept. 29, 5:00 p.m.  
Paper 2: Friday, Nov. 17, 5:00 p.m.  
Final exam: Saturday, Dec. 16, 3:00-5:00 p.m.

Course Policies:
Participation: This course presupposes an active and participating student body. Our aim is to create a respectful intellectual community. In order to achieve this, you are expected to come to class on time, having done the reading, and ready to jump into class discussion with comments, questions, and connections you have made between this reading, the film, and other texts we have discussed in class. We may have periodic in-class writing exercises and/ or reading quizzes just to keep you on your toes. I expect everyone to participate in our conversations and be considerate to me and to the other students in the class. Attendance does not count towards your participation grade. If you are shy, then you may post on Brightspace before class more often.
than the minimum requirement offset your in-class performance (see Brightspace postings below).

Always bring the reading with you to class in print form. Please no eating during class. Beverages are fine.

**Laptop computers, cell phones, tablets, are banned during class meetings and screenings.** Please take notes the old-fashioned way. Why? Such electronic distractions are disruptive to me and other students. Furthermore, as this study demonstrates, we pay a “mental price” for multi-tasking: [http://news.stanford.edu/pr/2009/multitask-research-release-082409.html](http://news.stanford.edu/pr/2009/multitask-research-release-082409.html)

**Attendance:** You are expected to attend all scheduled class sessions and the one weekly screening. A student who sleeps through class will be marked absent. Students who come late will be marked absent. Attendance does not count towards the participation grade. A student who misses more than two classes may expect a penalty of .1 for every subsequent absence on the final grade. A student who misses six or more classes will fail based on attendance alone.

**Assignments:** The principle assignments for this class are a final exam and two papers. Failure to write three papers and the final will result in a failing grade regardless of the grades earned on other assignments.

**Brightspace Postings:** In addition to these formal papers and the final exam, I ask that you post responses to readings (and films in relation to the readings) at least five times during the course of the semester. These posting, which should be at least two substantial paragraphs, should be submitted to the Brightspace no later than 10 p.m. the day before class. Anything posted after 9 am will not count towards this requirement. Your posts, which are ungraded, will serve as prompts for our class discussions and they will help you to formulate your ideas before we meet. If you find yourself too shy to participate in class discussion, additional postings (posted by the deadline before class) may boost your participation grade. Students are expected to read the discussion posts before class.

**Students with Special Instructional Needs:** I am committed to accommodating students who have special instructional needs. If you need course accommodations due to a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me and with the Disability Serves Department (EAD: 2-4705) as soon as possible.

**Religious Holidays:** Students who expect to miss classes, examinations, or any other assignment as a consequence of their religious observance should provide me with notice (via email) of the dates of religious holidays in the first two weeks of the semester.

**Books:**

All other readings for this class posted on Brightspace.

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**Reading and Screening Schedule**
This syllabus is intended to give you a schedule of topics, readings, and film to be covered during the semester and I will follow it as closely as possible. I reserve the right, however, to modify, supplement and make changes as needs arise and as our discussion and group dynamic takes shape.

**Week 1 (Aug. 24): Why Cinema in the age of Trump?**
R. Intro to class.

**Week 2 (Aug. 29, 31): The Rise of the Partisan Documentary**
T. Read: Benson and Snee, “New Political Documentary: Rhetoric, Propaganda, and the Civic Prospect”

Screen: *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Moore, 2004. 122 min)

R. Read: Parry-Giles and Parryy Giles, “Virtual Realism and the Limits of Commodified Dissent in *Fahrenheit 9/11*”
Rosteck and Frentz, “The Conversion of Lila Lipscomb in *Fahrenheit 9/11*”

**Week 3 (Sept. 5, 7): Partisan Affect**
T. Read: Borda, “Documentary Dialectics or Dogmatism?: *Fahrenheit 9/11, Celsius 41.11*, and the New Politics of Documentary Film.”
Overby “Are Fahrenheit 9/11 Ads Campaign Spots?”

Screen: *Hillary: The Movie* (Peterson, 2008, 90 min.)

R. Read: Iyengar and Westwood, “Fear and Loathing Across Party Lines”

**Week 4 (Sept. 12, 14): Corporate People**
T. Read: Rucker, “Citizens United Used ‘Hillary: The Movie’ to Take On McCain Feingold”
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/21/AR2010012103582.html
Barnes, “Hillary: The Movie’ to get a Supreme Court Screening”
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/14/AR2009031401603.html
Toobin, “Money Unlimited.”
NPR, “When Did Corporations become People?”

Screen: *Roger & Me* (Moore, 1989, 91 min.)

R. Read: Bernstein, “Documentaphobia and Mixed Modes: Michael Moore’s *Roger & Me.*”

**Week 5 (Sept. 19, 21): The Corporate Mindset**
T. Read: Brown, “Undoing Democracy: Neoliberalism’s Remaking the State and Subject.” And “Law and Legal Reason.”

Screen: The Corporation (Achbar and Abbott, 2003, 145 min.)

R. Read: Cauklin, “Portrait of a Corporate Psychopath.”
https://www.theguardian.com/business/2004/oct/24/politics.money

Week 6 (Sept. 26, 28): The First Amendment and Media Convergence.

Screen: Citizen Kane (Welles, 1941, 119 min.)


Paper #1 Due Friday, September 29, 5:00 p.m. on Brightspace

Week 7 (Oct. 3, 5): Savant Populism
T. Read: Müller, What is Populism? Introduction and Ch. 1

Screen: Face in the Crowd (Kazan, 1957, 126 min.)

R. Read: Müller, What is Populism? Ch. 2

Week 8 (Oct. 10, 12): Popular Media and Populist Sentiment
T. Read: Müller, What is Populism?, Ch. 3 and Conclusion (“Seven Theses”).

Screen: Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (Capra, 1939, 129 min.)

R. Fall Break!

Raoul Peck Visit!
Monday, Oct. 16, 7:30 I Am Not Your Negro at International Lens.
Wednesday, Oct. 18, Raoul Peck public lecture 4:00 p.m. room, TBA.

Week 9 (Oct. 17, 19): Steve Bannon’s Cinematic World

Screen: Generation Zero (Bannon, 2010, 90 min.)

Patternson, “For Haters Only.”

Week 10 (Oct. 24, 26): Truth, Lying and Politics
T. Read: Arendt, “Truth and Politics”
   No screening.
R: No class, I have a conference.

Week 11 (Oct. 31, Nov. 2): Bubbles and Crashes
T. Read: Rajan, “introduction” and “Let them Eat Credit” from Fault Lines
   Schimpach, “Reality Reality: HGTV and the Subprime Crisis”
   Screen: Queen of Versailles (Greenfield, 2012, 55 min).
R. Read: Allen, “The Lure of Versailles”
   Edelstein, “Let them Eat it.”

Week 12 (Nov. 7, 9): Post-Racial Fiction
T. Read: Coates, “Donald Trump is the First White President.”
   Coates, “My President was Black.”
   Screen: Get Out (Peele, 2017, 104 min.)
R. Interview with Peele:
   Bruni: “The Horror of Smug Liberals”

Week 13 (Nov. 14, 16): White Trash/ White Rage
T. Read: Anderson, Intro + Ch. 5 “How to Unelect a Black President.” From White Rage
   Screen: 13th (DuVernay, 2016, 100 min.)
R. Read: Isenberg, Preface + “Outing Rednecks” from White Trash
   Thanksgiving Break- Nov. 22, 22

Week 14 (Nov. 28, Dec. 1): Bay’s Movie War
T. Read: Koepnick, Michael Bay
   Screen: 13 Hours (Bay, 2016, 144 min.)
R. Read: Koepnick, Michael Bay, cont.

Week 15: (Dec. 5, 7): Aesthetics and Politics
T. Guest speaker: Professor Lutz Koepnick to talk about Michael Bay, action aesthetics, and partisan cinema.