

Cold War Cinema

SWARTHMORE COLLEGE
FALL 2015
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OFFICE: TROTTER 319
OFFICE HOURS: TUESDAY, 11:30 – 2:00
AND BY APPOINTMENT
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Erica Mason: You American?

Col. Andrew Tanner: [Indicating the American flag on his flight suit] Red-blooded.

Mason: What's the capital of Texas?

Tanner: Austin.

Mason: [*proceeds to kick Col. Tanner*] Woah, commie; it's Houston!

Red Dawn

President: [*Laughs*] Now then, Dmitri, you know how we've always talked about the possibility of something going wrong with the bomb. The *BOMB*, Dmitri. The *hydrogen* bomb.

Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb

Rocky IV. Dr. Strangelove. Rambo: First Blood. Rambo: First Blood Part II. Red Dawn. Films that today might be viewed ironically, if not uncomfortably, as kitsch from a bygone and paranoid age were in their own time sincere expressions of very real anxieties about the future survival of the "free world" against the Soviet threat. This course looks at the Cold War cinema of the United States and Europe before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc in order to understand how representations of the "foreign enemy" informs, shapes, and challenges domestic notions of national identity. We will examine not only how cinema made manifest the latent conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, but also how this cinema allowed Americans to reconcile themselves to failures overseas, in particular the Vietnam War. Special consideration will be given to westerns, both as celebrations of American exceptionalism as well as subversions of the Cold War tropes of freedom and bravery, good and evil.

Requirements:

Short Reaction Paper, 3-5 pages (30%)

Final Essay, 7-10 pages (30%)

Weekly Recaps and Participation (40%)

Yes, you get to watch movies for this class. No, you don't get to watch them (for the most part) *in* class. Most of our in-class viewing will be scenes, or parts of scenes; when possible, I will try to arrange one screening of a complete film outside of class time.

Your work will involve watching, analyzing, and "reading" two films a week. You will be assigned a session in which to produce a short background paper for your classmates, a memo as a precursor to class discussion, if you will, of the particular intellectual and historical context in which that week's

films were produced. These essays must be distributed to the class **by Monday, no later than 12 pm**. For the remainder of the term you will produce brief weekly recaps. These should not be summaries but inductive, first-cut interpretations of the week's features. Recaps will be posted online, and are due **on Monday at noon**.

Keep in mind Croce's pronouncement that "all history is contemporary." The same might be said for film. As you watch the movies ask yourself: How is the film constituted by its own era? In what ways might the feature transcend its present?

These questions reveal the only slightly-hidden normative claim underlying this course, namely that since 2001 Americans have been living in a political, social, and cultural era reminiscent of the Cold War. Is this so, and does this mean that films being made today will someday meet the same derided fate as so many of the films on this syllabus?

Readings:

The following books are available for purchase at the bookstore. All other readings are available on Moodle.

- Tony Shaw and Denise J. Youngblood, *Cinematic Cold War: The American and Soviet Struggle for Hearts and Minds*
- John Le Carre, *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*

WEEK ONE Invasion USA

Tuesday, September 1

- *Invasion USA*
- In-class screening of Cold War artifacts in music and television

WEEK TWO Fail Safe No More

Tuesday, September 8

- *Atomic Café*
- *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*

WEEK THREE It's the End of the World As We Know It (and I feel fine?)

Tuesday, September 15

- *The Day After*
- *On the Beach*

WEEK FOUR Science and Fiction at the Edge of the Apocalypse

- *WarGames*
- *The Day the Earth Stood Still*

WEEK FIVE

Cold War Sports: I Must Break You

Tuesday, September 30

- *Rocky IV*
- *Red Army*

WEEK SIX

Espionage and the Malaise of Late-Era Cold War Politics

Tuesday, October 6

- *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*
- *The Lives of Others*

Fall break!

WEEK SEVEN

Guerillas, Ideology, and the Violence of Youth

Tuesday, October 20

- *Baader Meinhof Complex*
- *Vamos a matar, compañeros*

WEEK EIGHT

The Paranoid Style of Cold War Politics

Tuesday, October 27

- *The Manchurian Candidate*
- *High Noon*

WEEK NINE

Once Upon a Time in the West: The Western as Allegory

Tuesday, November 24

- *Once Upon a Time in the West*
- *The Wild Bunch*

WEEK TEN

American Intervention and the Plight of the Third World

Tuesday, November 30

- *The Green Berets*
- *The Magnificent Seven*

WEEK ELEVEN

Getting Over Vietnam

Tuesday, November 10

- *Platoon*
- *Rambo: First Blood Part II*

WEEK TWELVE

The Second Time as Farce

Tuesday, November 3

- *Spies Like Us*
- *Moscow on the Hudson*

WEEK THIRTEEN

Melancholic Kitsch

Tuesday, November 17

- *Goodbye Lenin!*

WEEK FOURTEEN

Wolverines!!!

Tuesday, December 7

- *Red Dawn*

