

POS 4258  
Politics in Fiction and Film  
Fall 2015

Mr. Craig  
209 Anderson Hall  
Phone: 273-2377  
Office Hours: Tu/Th 10:30-11:30,  
We 2:00-3:00, and by appointment  
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Novels:

Anonymous/Joe Klein, *Primary Colors* (1996)  
Brendan DuBois, *Resurrection Day* (1999)  
Frank M. Robinson and John F. Levin, *The Great Divide* (2004, out of print)  
Philip Roth, *The Plot Against America* (2004)  
Christopher Buckley, *Boomsday* (2007)  
Roland Merullo, *American Savior: A Novel of Divine Politics* (2008)

Research articles:

Kenneth Mulligan and Philip Habel, "The Implications of Fictional Media for Political Beliefs," *American Politics Research* (January 2013).  
Diana C. Mutz and Lilach Nir, "Not Necessarily the News: Does Fictional Television Influence Real-World Policy Preferences?" *Mass Communication and Society* (2010).  
Stanley Feldman and Lee Sigelman, "The Political Impact of Prime-Time Television: 'The Day After,'" *Journal of Politics* (May 1985).  
Silvo Lenart and Kathleen M. McGraw, "America Watches 'Amerika': Television Docudrama and Political Attitudes," *Journal of Politics* (August 1989).  
R. Lance Holbert et al., "The West Wing as Endorsement of the U.S. Presidency: Expanding the Bounds of Priming in Political Communication," *Journal of Communication* (September 2003).  
Michael Pfau et al., "Influence of Prime-Time Television Programming on Perceptions of the Federal Government," *Mass Communication & Society* (2001).

Films:

*Wag the Dog* (Dustin Hoffman/Robert DeNiro, 1997)  
*Syriana* (George Clooney, 2005)  
*Milk* (Sean Penn, 2008)  
*Nothing But the Truth* (Kate Beckinsale, 2008)  
*State of Play* (Russell Crowe, 2009)  
*Casino Jack* (Kevin Spacey, 2010)  
*The Ides of March* (Ryan Gosling/George Clooney, 2011)  
*The Hunger Games* (Jennifer Lawrence, 2012)  
*Lincoln* (Daniel Day-Lewis, 2012)  
*Snowpiercer* (Chris Evans, 2014)  
*Merchants of Doubt* (documentary, 2014)

Television:

*The West Wing* (Martin Sheen, selected episodes, 1999-2006)

This course uses the sometimes true but usually make-believe stories told in popular novels and Hollywood motion pictures to provide insights into the nature of real-life politics in the United States. The focus is on *process* (political competition and decision making) rather than *substance* (public policy), and each of the stories we encounter raises issues that are relevant today as they were when the tale was originally told. We will consider, for example, whether the temptations of politics and power are beyond the capacity even of

fundamentally decent people to resist; whether the actions of organized interest groups promote or undermine the principles of representative government; whether the media glare of contemporary politics weakens the capacity of our leaders and institutions to govern; and whether modern candidate-centered campaigns pose as great a threat to popular democracy as some critics believe. Our goal is not to use politics as a basis for studying the mass culture; that is a course better taught elsewhere (say, in English or Fine Arts). Instead, we will be using elements of the mass culture as a means for better understanding the character of our politics.

Warning: Several of the assigned books and films contain strong language and/or adult themes. Students who might find this offensive should consider taking another course.

Grades will be based on the following:

Periodic short essays	50 percent
Attendance and participation	30 percent
Thematic Essay/Final Exam	20 percent (due Friday, December 11, 4:00 p.m.)

Students are required to write a short essay (2-3 pages each, featuring issues or themes raised in the book/film) for any four books and any four films (including *The West Wing*) among the titles listed on the previous page; a hard copy of these essays must be turned in at my office (209 Anderson Hall) by 11 a.m. on the Tuesday following our discussion of a book/film. The thematic essay (5-7 pages) involves a similar but somewhat more in-depth review of at least one additional book and one additional film (or two books, or three films) drawn from the supplemental list provided below or approved by the instructor. The nature of these assignments, and of the (optional) final exam, will be discussed more fully in class. All essays will be graded for content and grammar and returned to students with comments.

CAVEAT 1: To promote class discussion (and to engage as many students as possible), anyone who plans to write an essay on a particular book/film must submit at least one discussion point (question, observation, whatever) to me via email by 2 p.m. on the day the discussion is scheduled to occur. If we watch a film and discuss it on the same day (as with *The Ides of March*), I will ask you to write down your discussion point and give it to me following the end of the film. Discussion points should (a) be substantive, i.e., dealing with an issue raised by the book/film rather than bad acting, continuity errors, or anything along those lines; and (b) do more than pose an open-ended question (what do you think of so-and-so? is this or that aspect of the book/film realistic?), i.e., asking a question is fine, but let me know what you think the answer to that question might be. Failure to submit a discussion point in a timely manner disqualifies you from writing an essay on that work.

CAVEAT 2: With so many choices built into the structure of the course, there is no excuse for failing to complete the required eight short essays. Any missing essay will therefore receive a grade of zero, so don't lose track of where you stand. There will be no opportunities for extra credit at the end. On the other hand . . . Students who complete all eight short essays by November 4 will receive a one-half letter grade bonus on any two of them (their choice, so long as the accompanying quiz grade was not a zero).

FOUR MORE CAVEATS: (1) Students may submit only one essay based on an episode (or both episodes) of *The West Wing*. (2) Those who write a short report on an assigned film (such as *The Hunger Games*) should not choose the original book version (or in this case, trilogy) for their thematic essay. (3) You may write about either *Casino Jack* or *Merchants of Doubt*, but not both – unless you want to discuss the two in a single essay, which is permissible. (4) Although there will be a quiz on the research articles discussed in class on December 9, no written assignment will be accepted for this topic.

QUIZ PROTOCOL: In the past, some students have assumed that they are only required to read four books,

and to watch four films. This is incorrect: You are expected to read/watch all of the assigned books/films. In an effort to encourage everyone to do so, there will be a pop quiz prior to the discussion of each one. The questions will be simple, and easily answered by anyone who has completed the assignment; there even may be a few occasions when students are invited to submit possible quiz questions. Incorrect answers (or unexcused absences) will be treated as evidence that the work was not done, and taken into account when that portion of your grade based on attendance and participation (see above) is calculated. Further, if someone turns in an essay but fails the quiz for a particular book/film, it will suggest that shortcuts may have been taken in writing the essay – and the grade for that essay will be adjusted accordingly.

Minus grades will (if appropriate) be assigned in this course. Information about grades and grading policies at UF can be found at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Students are bound by the University of Florida's Student Code of Conduct. Anyone who commits an act of academic dishonesty, such as cheating on exams or committing plagiarism on the written essays, will suffer appropriate sanctions and be referred to university authorities for further action.

Any student with a handicap or special need should notify me (and coordinate with Student Services at 202 Peabody Hall) as soon as possible at the beginning of the semester. Every effort will be made to accommodate your situation within the guidelines set forth by the university.

A class listserv has been established so that I can send you occasional announcements and keep you informed about any changes that might occur in the schedule. You are automatically on the list by virtue of being enrolled in this course. You must, however, be sure either to check the email in your gatorlink account on a regular basis, or to forward all gatorlink messages to an account that you use more frequently.

## COURSE OUTLINE

Aug 26	General discussion
Sep 2	Film: <i>The Ides of March</i> (101 min., watch/discuss)
Sep 9	Film: <i>Lincoln</i> (150 min., watch/discuss)
Sep 16	Book: <i>Primary Colors</i> (discuss) Film: <i>Wag the Dog</i> (96 min., watch/discuss)
Sep 23	Film: <i>Milk</i> (129 min., watch/discuss)
Sep 30	Book: <i>Boomsday</i> (discuss) Film: <i>Casino Jack</i> (108 min., watch)
Oct 7	Film: <i>Casino Jack</i> , continued (discuss) Film: <i>Merchants of Doubt</i> (93 min., watch/discuss)
Oct 14	Book: <i>Resurrection Day</i> (discuss) Film: <i>Nothing But the Truth</i> (108 min., watch/discuss)
Oct 21	Film: <i>Syriana</i> (128 min., watch/discuss)

Oct 28	Book: <i>The Great Divide</i> (discuss) Film: <i>State of Play</i> (127 min., watch)
Nov 4	Film: <i>State of Play</i> , continued (discuss)* Film: <i>Snowpiercer</i> (126 min., watch) * essays due Thursday, Nov 12 (electronic and hard copies)
Nov 11	No class
Nov 18	Film: <i>Snowpiercer</i> , continued (discuss)** Film: <i>The Hunger Games</i> (142 min., <u>discuss only</u> )** Book: <i>The Plot Against America</i> (discuss)** ** essays due Tuesday, Nov 24 (electronic and hard copies)
Nov 25	No class
Dec 2	TV: <i>The West Wing</i> , "Pilot" (watch/discuss) TV: <i>The West Wing</i> , "The Supremes" (watch/discuss) Book: <i>American Savior</i> (discuss)
Dec 9	Article: "The Implications of Fictional Media" (discuss)*** Article: "Not Necessarily the News" (discuss)*** Make-up quizzes, other business TBA *** quiz only, not eligible for one of the written assignments
Dec 11 (Friday)	Thematic essays and final exams due

#### Supplemental List

##### Books:

Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (1946)  
 Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (1951)  
 Edwin O'Connor, *The Last Hurrah* (1956)  
 Allen Drury, *Advise and Consent* (1959)  
 Robert A. Heinlein, *Starship Troopers* (1959)  
 Philip K. Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* (1962)  
 Irving Wallace, *The Man* (1965) / *The R Document* (1976)  
 Gore Vidal, *Washington, D.C.: A Novel* (1967) / *Lincoln: A Novel* (1984)  
 William Safire, *Full Disclosure* (1977) / *Scandalmonger* (2000)  
 Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986)  
 John Buckley, *Family Politics* (1988) / *Statute of Limitations* (1990)  
 Ward Just, *Jack Gance* (1989) / *Echo House* (1997)  
 Christopher Buckley, *Thank You for Smoking* (1994) / *The White House Mess* (1995) / *Florence of Arabia* (2004) / *Supreme Courtship* (2008)  
 Joe Klein, *The Running Mate* (2000)  
 Jim Lehrer, *The Last Debate* (1995)  
 Jeff Greenfield, *The People's Choice* (1995)  
 Charles McCarry, *Shelley's Heart* (1995)  
 Ev Ehrlich, *Big Government: A Novel* (1998)

Tom Lowe, *Spin* (1998)  
 S. V. Date, *Smokeout* (2000)  
 Richard North Patterson, *Protect and Defend* (2000) / *Balance of Power* (2003) / *The Race* (2007)  
 William Kennedy, *Roscoe* (2002)  
 Max Barry, *Jennifer Government* (2003)  
 Jeffrey Frank, *Bad Publicity: A Novel* (2004)  
 David Mizner, *Political Animal* (2004) / *Hartsburg, USA: A Novel* (2007)  
 Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The Power Game: A Washington Novel* (2004)  
 Hannes Artens, *The Writing on the Wall* (2007)  
 Brendan DuBois, *Twilight* (2007)  
 Jeffrey Frank, *Trudy Hopedale* (2007)  
 Jamie Malanowski, *The Coup* (2007)  
 Thomas Mallon, *Fellow Travelers* (2007)  
 Tom Perrotta, *The Abstinence Teacher* (2007)  
 Dennis Lehane, *The Given Day* (2008)  
 Ralph Reed, *Dark Horse: A Political Thriller* (2008) / *The Confirmation* (2010)  
 Curtis Sittenfeld, *American Wife: A Novel* (2008)  
 Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008, 2009, 2010)  
 John Birmingham, *Without Warning* (2009)  
 James T. Shea, *Corruptions: A Novel of Washington* (2010)  
 Allan Airish, *The Faithless: A Political Thriller* (2012)  
 Thomas Mallon, *Watergate: A Novel* (2012)

Movies and TV:

*The Birth of a Nation* (Lillian Gish, 1915, 180-minute version)  
*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (James Stewart, 1939)  
*The Grapes of Wrath* (Henry Fonda, 1940)  
*All the King's Men* (Broderick Crawford, 1949) / (Sean Penn 2006)  
*A Face in the Crowd* (Andy Griffith, 1957)  
*The Last Hurrah* (Spencer Tracy, 1958)  
*Advise and Consent* (Henry Fonda, 1962)  
*The Manchurian Candidate* (Frank Sinatra, 1962) / (Denzel Washington, 2004)  
*The Best Man* (Henry Fonda, 1964)  
*Dr. Strangelove* (Peter Sellers, 1964)  
*Fail Safe* (Henry Fonda, 1964)  
*The Candidate* (Robert Redford, 1972)  
*The Conversation* (Gene Hackman, 1974)  
*The Parallax View* (Warren Beatty, 1974)  
*All the President's Men* (Robert Redford/Dustin Hoffman, 1976).  
*Network* (Faye Dunaway, 1976)  
*Being There* (Peter Sellers, 1979)  
*Norma Rae* (Sally Field, 1979)  
*The Seduction of Joe Tynan* (Alan Alda/Meryl Streep, 1979).  
*Missing* (Jack Lemmon/Sissy Spacek, 1982)  
*Silkwood* (Meryl Streep/Cher, 1983)  
*Power* (Richard Gere, 1986)  
*Betrayed* (Debra Winger/Tom Berenger, 1988)  
*Born on the Fourth of July* (Tom Cruise, 1989)  
*Guilty by Suspicion* (Robert DeNiro, 1991)

*Bob Roberts* (Tim Robbins, 1992)  
*Hoffa* (Jack Nicholson, 1992)  
*The American President* (Michael Douglas, 1995)  
*Nixon* (Anthony Hopkins, 1995)  
*City Hall* (Al Pacino/John Cusack, 1996)  
*Bulworth* (Warren Beatty, 1998)  
*Pleasantville* (Tobey Maguire, 1998)  
*Primary Colors* (John Travolta, 1998)  
*The Insider* (Al Pacino/Russell Crowe, 1999).  
*The Contender* (Joan Allen, 2000)  
*Deterrence* (Kevin Pollack, 2000)  
*Erin Brockovich* (Julia Roberts, 2000)  
*Thirteen Days* (Kevin Costner, 2000).  
*The Day Reagan Was Shot* (Richard Dreyfuss, 2001)  
*Path to War* (Michael Gambon/Donald Sutherland, 2002)  
*The Quiet American* (Michael Caine/Brendan Fraser, 2002)  
*Silver City* (Chris Cooper, 2004)  
*Good Night, and Good Luck* (David Strathairn, 2005)  
*Babel* (Brad Pitt, 2006)  
*The State Within* (Jason Isaacs, 2006)  
*Thank You for Smoking* (Aaron Eckhart, 2006)  
*V for Vendetta* (Natalie Portman, 2006)  
*Rendition* (Reese Witherspoon/Jake Gyllenhaal, 2007)  
*Charlie Wilson's War* (Tom Hanks, 2007)  
*Body of Lies* (Leonardo DiCaprio/Russell Crowe, 2008)  
*Frost/Nixon* (Frank Langella/Michael Sheen, 2008)  
*Recount* (Kevin Spacey, 2008)  
*W.* (Josh Brolin, 2008)  
*District 9* (Sharlto Copley, 2009)  
*Fair Game* (Naomi Watts/Sean Penn, 2010)  
*The Company Men* (Ben Affleck, 2010)  
*The Conspirator* (James McAvoy, 2011)  
*The Iron Lady* (Meryl Streep, 2011)  
*Too Big to Fail* (William Hurt/Paul Giamatti, 2011)  
*Boss* season one (TV, Kelsey Grammer, 2011)  
*The Newsroom* season one (TV, Jeff Daniels, 2012)  
*Argo* (Ben Affleck, 2012)  
*The Company You Keep* (Robert Redford, 2012)  
*Elysium* (Matt Damon, 2013)  
*The Fifth Estate* (Benedict Cumberbatch, 2013)  
*House of Cards* season one (TV, Kevin Spacey, 2013)  
*Cesar Chavez* (Michael Peña, 2014)  
*Selma* (David Oyelowo, 2014)  
*Madam Secretary*, season one (TV, Téa Leoni, 2014-15)  
*The Runner* (Nicholas Cage, 2015)

Note: Students may be tempted to take advantage of the large number of book and movie reviews that are available on the internet. In an effort to remove that temptation, all written assignments must be submitted to an online plagiarism service called turnitin.com. Here is how it works:

The first step is that you need to create a student profile:

1. go to [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com)
2. click on create user profile
3. fill in your personal email address
4. fill in your personal password
5. type of user: choose student
6. enter class ID (10264713) and password (thumbsup)
7. follow instructions

To log in after creating profile:

1. enter your personal email and password in the box on the upper right hand corner of the home page [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com)
2. click on POS 4258
3. from there you can submit your paper, just like adding an attachment to an email

Each essay has its own assignment folder. The procedure that you should follow is to (1) give a hard copy of the essay to me *during class on the designated date*, and (2) submit an electronic copy to [turnitin.com](http://turnitin.com) at some point on the same day. Any assignment that is turned in late (without approval of the instructor) will be penalized. *Any assignment that does **not** constitute original work by the author will be subject to penalties consistent with the UF Code of Student Conduct.*

Over the years, some people have had a difficult time understanding exactly what I'm looking for in their essays. To assist students who chose to take the final exam last fall, I laid out several guidelines that I thought might be helpful – and, in an effort to clear up any confusion, it seemed like a good idea to adapt those guidelines to the individual essays and give them to you right up front this time around. Here they are:

do not summarize (assume that I've read/watched the works you're writing about);

do not review the book/film, except insofar as you think that it does or does not provide insights into the governmental or political process in the United States;

do not simply regurgitate things I said during the class discussion – bring some insight(s) of your own to the task; at the same time . . .

purely personal opinions are bad (e.g., you're opposed to using nuclear weapons), analytical discussions are good (e.g., what does the book./film tell us about the likelihood that they will be used in a particular situation, or about the political consequences if they are used);

focus on a single theme (two at the most, if they're related) so that you're able to do it justice;

referencing outside sources isn't required, but sometimes it can strengthen your essay – especially if it involves a topic about which you do have little personal knowledge (e.g., the Cuban Missile Crisis);

cite any book, article, Internet source, film, TV show, or idea that is not your own; and

remember that your challenge is to discuss the political process and government through the prism of what you have watched and read; making connections to the real world is good here, i.e., examples are good (all the more so if they're not the most obvious ones)