POS 4258: Politics in Fiction and Film
Class Periods: Wednesdays periods 8-10, 3:00-6:00 pm ET
Location: Zoom (id circulated in Canvas)
Academic Term: Fall 2020

Instructor:
Stephen C. Craig
sccraig@ufl.edu
(352) 273-2377 (infrequently monitored in Fall 2020)
Office Hours: Tu/Th 9:30-10:30, We 2:00-3:00 and by appointment, Zoom id 831-661-6708
Web Page: http://users.clas.ufl.edu/sccraig

Assigned Works:
Books (5):
Philip Roth, *The Plot Against America* (2004)
Christopher Buckley, *Boomsday* (2007)
Roland Merullo, *American Savior: A Novel of Divine Politics* (2008)
David Pepper, *The People's House* (2016)
Thomas Mullen, *Lightning Men* (2017)

Each of these titles can be purchased either new or (more cheaply) used on amazon.com. All except *American Savior* are available on kindle. If you choose to buy a used copy from a private seller, keep in mind that delivery could take up to two weeks or more.

Research articles (2):
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).

A copy of these articles (which also can be accessed directly through Smathers Library) are posted in the Files folder on Canvas (https://elearning.ufl.edu).

Films (14):
All the President's Men (Robert Redford/Dustin Hoffman, 1976)
Guilty by Suspicion (Robert DeNiro, 1991)
Primary Colors (John Travolta, 1998)
Thirteen Days (Kevin Costner, 2000)
Milk (Sean Penn, 2008)
Lincoln (Daniel Day-Lewis, 2012)
Eye in the Sky (Helen Mirren, 2015)
Truth (Cate Blanchett/Robert Redford, 2015)
Confirmation (Kerry Washington, 2016)
Detroit (John Boyega, 2017)
The Post (Tom Hanks/Meryl Streep, 2017)
The Front Runner (Hugh Jackman, 2018)
Bombshell (Charlize Theron/Nicole Kidman/Margot Robbie, 2019)
The Hunt (Betty Gilpin/Hilary Swank, 2019)

All titles can be streamed on amazon prime, though some are only available for purchase (not rental) or are free

with a 7-day trial subscription to HBO or Starz. New and used copies of the dvd's for these films also can be purchased either directly from amazon or from private sellers (again, take the delivery window for the latter into account when ordering).

Television (1):
The West Wing (Martin Sheen, selected episodes 1999-2006)

You can stream this series on Netflix or purchase it (dvd or streaming) on amazon prime.

Course Overview:
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 mainly on *process* (political competition and decision making) rather than *substance* (policy), and each of the stories we encounter raises issues that are as 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 <u>not</u> 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: Some of the assigned books and films contain strong language and/or adult themes. Students who might find these things offensive should consider taking another course.

Several changes have been made in this course to accommodate the fact that it is being taught online. In the past, much class time was spent watching an assigned film and then discussing it immediately after. With the online version, students must <u>access and watch films on their own</u>, with <u>breakout groups</u> being created during the designated class period to allow for discussion.

Realistically, however, a 3-hour discussion is unlikely to hold anyone's attention from start to finish. As a result, I will spend some time at the beginning of each class session "lecturing" (though I use this term loosely) on one or two issues raised by the week's assigned works – after which we will move to the breakout sessions. Discussion will also be facilitated by (a) "<u>talk points</u>" written by students and distributed by me to the class and (b) one or two short <u>internet articles</u> relating to the week's topic(s) that everyone is expected to read and be prepared to comment on. Additional information about how this is going to work will be provided at our first meeting on September 2.

Another change is that students will be required to <u>watch more films</u> – but also write <u>fewer short essays</u> (5 rather than 8) – than in the past. Looking at the course overview, you will see that the semester begins at a fairly leisurely pace: an introductory session (during which students will be able to ask questions) in week #1 followed by a discussion of just one movie, *Primary Colors*, in week #2. After that, however, two works (usually either two films, or one film and one book) will be discussed most weeks. Since it takes longer to read a book than it does to watch a movie, book discussions are scheduled 2-3 weeks apart.

Grades:
Grades will be based on the following:

Periodic short essays	50 percent
Class participation	20 percent

Thematic Essay/Final Exam   30 percent (due Friday, December 11, 4:00 p.m.)

Minus grades <u>will</u> (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

The nature of the different components on which your grade is based are as follows:

<u>Short essays</u>: Students will submit a 2-page essay (typed, single-spaced, 12-point font, with a bibliography at the end that is not included in the page count) on <u>five assigned works, at least two of which must be books</u>. Each essay should examine one or two important themes raised in or suggested by the film/book. If multiple works assigned for a particular week are connected in a way that you find interesting, then you're free to reference both – but don't force the issue unless the connection makes sense (example: anyone who can find common ground between *Lincoln* and *Boomsday* on September 16 is smarter than I am). Strong essays from past students will be posted from time to time on Canvas so you can get a sense of what I'm looking for. In the meantime, here are some basic guidelines that you may find helpful:

- <u>do not summarize at length</u> (assume that I've read/watched the works you're writing about);
- <u>do not review</u> 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;
- <u>do not simply regurgitate</u> points made by myself or by other students during class discussion – bring some insight(s) of your own to the task; at the same time . . .
- <u>purely personal opinions are bad</u> (e.g., you're opposed to the U.S. 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);
- <u>try to focus on a single theme</u> (two at the most, and only if they're related) so that you're able to do it justice;
- <u>referencing outside sources</u> isn't required, but it can strengthen your essay – especially if you're dealing with a topic about which you do have little personal knowledge (e.g., the Cuban Missle Crisis);
- <u>cite any book</u>, article, internet source, film, TV show, or idea that is not your own; moreover . . .
- any assertion or observation that you make requires a <u>supporting reference</u> unless it is "common knowledge," e.g., Donald Trump was elected president in 2016 (a known fact) vs. the possibility that media coverage may have contributed to his success (supporting reference needed); and
- always remember that your challenge is to discuss the political process and government through the prism of what you have watched and read; <u>making connections to the real world is very important</u> here, i.e., provide examples (all the better if they're not the most obvious ones).

Essays should be submitted to the appropriate Assignments folder in Canvas **no later than 3 p.m.** on the day they are due. In most cases, they will be read, graded, and returned to students within a week of their completion. **Anything submitted after the deadline will be penalized one full letter grade, plus one additional letter grade if turned in the following day – after which the essay will not be read or graded at all.**

With so many choices built into the structure of the course, there is no excuse for failing to complete all five short essays. Any missing essay will therefore receive a grade of zero, so don't lose track of where you stand. There will be <u>no opportunities for extra credit</u> at the end. On the other hand . . . Students who complete their five required essays by **November 4** will receive a <u>one-half letter grade bonus</u> on either the thematic essay or final exam (whichever you choose to complete). **Any assignment that does not constitute original work by the author will be subject to penalties consistent with the UF Code of Student Conduct.**

Class Participation: As this is <u>not a lecture course</u> but instead relies heavily on discussion, the challenge is to find an approach that works with the online format. As noted earlier, it is not realistic to expect that we would be able to maintain a free-flowing give-and-take for our full 3-hour running time on Wednesday afternoons. My solution is, first, to plan on beginning each class by presenting material and introducing ideas relevant to the week's topic(s) -- not a "lecture" exactly (or at least not long one) but some ideas that might provide some guidance when we shift into breakout groups.

In addition, students are expected to develop <u>at least one talk point for each assigned work</u> by **5 p.m. the day prior to our class discussion on Wednesday**. Talk points should (a) <u>be substantive</u>, i.e., dealing with an issue raised by the book/film rather than bad acting, continuity errors, or anything along those lines; and (b) <u>go beyond simply posing a question</u> (what do you think of so-and-so? is this or that aspect of the book/film realistic?). While asking a well-thought-out question is fine, let me know what you think the answer to that question might be. Each talk point should be presented in a <u>single-spaced (12-point font), full-bodied paragraph</u> where you briefly – but not <u>too</u> briefly – present your thought(s) regarding whatever the topic happens to be. Failure to follow these guidelines will have the same result as not submitting talk points at all: You will receive a zero for the assignment. **Talk points should be submitted to the appropriate Assignments folder in Canvas by the deadline noted above. They will be reviewed and some will be shared with the class on Thursday as possible discussion topics.**

Final Exam/Thematic Essay: Although the thematic essay (8-10 pages in length) is similar to the weekly essays, it involves a similar but more <u>in-depth discussion of at least one additional book and one additional film (or two books, or three films)</u> drawn from the supplemental list provided in the course syllabus or approved by the instructor. The word <u>thematic</u> is important here: The works you select should be substantively linked in some reasonably clear-cut way. I will be happy to discuss this more fully with students later in the semester, though after you write a few shorter essays it should not be too difficult to figure out how to approach the assignment. The f<u>inal exam will be open-book, take-home, and in essay format</u>. Questions will ask you to explain which assigned works best illustrate a particular idea, and whether those works are realistic in their portrayal of contemporary American politics.

Students often ask me to explain the difference between a thematic essay and a take-home final exam. To me, it's fairly straightforward: While both require you to discuss broad themes relevant to politics today, (a) the essay means a little more work but allows you to control the agenda; in contrast, (b) the exam does not require any additional reading or movie-watching on your part but allows me to determine what you write about. If it were me, I'd probably opt for the essay – but it's your call as to which approach you're most comfortable with.

Also note the following**:**
- Students may submit only one essay based on an episode (or both episodes) of *The West Wing*.
- Those who write a short report on an assigned film (such as *Primary Colors*) should <u>not</u> choose the corresponding book version for their thematic essay.
- For the two <u>research articles</u> to be discussed in class on December 9, I will ask some specific questions that you should answer and submit as your "talk points" for the week. These articles are not eligible for short essay topics (stick with the movies/TV and books).
- If you cite one or more outside sources in any of your essays, be sure to include an alphabetical <u>list of references</u> at the end just as you would with a term paper in another class. <u>In-text cites</u> should take the following form: (Craig 2020) – do not use footnotes or insert full article/book titles in the text. If I want to know what (Craig 2020) is, I should be able to find out by looking at your list of references.

Some concluding points:
- Attendance in the Zoom class meetings with cameras turned on is required. Students who can reasonably anticipate an absence should inform me by email as soon as is practical and prior to the anticipated absence. Absences may be excused with documentation of a University, military, or legal obligation, illness, or bereavement.

- 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.

- There will be times when I need to communicate with the class as a group. In those instances, I will do so through Outlook (using a listserv) and/or via Canvas. Students should check their incoming mail regularly so as not to miss any important information. The best way for students to connect with me directly is through Outlook (sccraig@ufl.edu). If a reply is needed, I will try to get back to you fairly quickly.

- A *word about office hours:* Students who wish to talk with me should sign in via Zoom (my personal ID is 831-661-6708) during the hours indicated above. You will then be placed in a "waiting room" and I will get to you in the order of your arrival. If you are unable to connect with me during office hours, or if you wish to discuss matters that are confidential, feel free to request a one-on-one meeting and we will determine a time that works for both of us.

COURSE OUTLINE

September 2
- General discussion

September 9
- Film: *Primary Colors*
- Jill Lepore, "The Lie Factory: How Politics Became a Business," *The New Yorker* (9/24/12).

September 16
- Film: *Lincoln*
- Book: *Boomsday*
- Jay David Bolter, "Social Media Are Ruining Political Discourse," *The Atlantic* (5/19/19).

September 23
- Film: *All the President's Men*
- Film: *The Post*
- Mark Jurkowitz et al., "U.S. Media Polarization and the 2020 Election: A Nation Divided," Pew Research Center (1/24/20).

September 30
- Film: *Guilty by Suspicion*
- Book: *The Plot Against America*
- Ronald Inglehart, "The Coronavirus May Trigger Tribal Instincts. In Times of Crisis, People Want Strong Leaders," *Monkey Cage* (4/10/20).

October 7
- Film: *Milk*
- Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "Christian Conservatives Rattled after Supreme Court Rules against LGBT Discrimination," *Washington Post* (6/15/20).
- Susan Miller, "The Young Are Regarded As the Most Tolerant Generation. That's Why Results of This LGBTQ Survey Are 'Alarming,'" *USA Today* (6/24/19).

October 14
- Film: *Eye in the Sky*
- Film: *Thirteen Days*
- Lauren Cassani Davis, "Would You Pull the Trolley Switch? Does It Matter?" *The Atlantic* (10/9/15).

October 21
- Film: *Detroit*
- Book: *Lightning Men*
- Michael Tesler, "Support for Black Lives Matter Surged during Protests, But Is Waning among White Americans," fivethirtyeight.com (8/19/20).

October 28
- Film: *Confirmation*
- Film: *Bombshell*
- Erin C. Cassese et al., "How 'Hostile Sexism' Came to Shape Our Politics," *Monkey Cage* (10/2/18).

November 4
- Book: *The People's House*
- David E. Sanger et al., "Amid Pandemic and Upheaval, New Cyberthreats to the Presidential Election," *New York Times* (6/10/20).
- Katie Glueck, "A 2020 Question 100 Days Out: Will the Elections Be Free and Fair?" *New York Times* (7/25/20).

November 11
- No class: Veterans' Day

November 18
- Film: *The Front Runner*
- Film: *Truth*
- Margaret Sullivan, "Media Coverage of the 2016 Campaign Was Disastrous. Now's the Last Chance to Get 2020 Right," *Washington Post* (7/25/20).
- Margaret Sullivan, "The Data Is In. Fox News May Have Kept Millions from Taking the Coronavirus Threat Seriously," *Washington Post* (6/28/20).

November 25
- No class: Thanksgiving

December 2
- TV: *The West Wing*, "Pilot" (S01 E01) and "The Supremes" (S05 E17)
- Book: *American Savior*

- Jeremiah J. Castle et al., "Why Young White Evangelicals Aren't Likely to Leave the Republican Party," *Monkey Cage* (9/3/19).
- note that students may <u>write only one essay</u> on *The West Wing*

December 9
- Film: *The Hunt*
- 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).
- research articles cannot be used for a written (book) essay
- final exam will be posted on Canvas immediately after class

December 11
- Thematic essays and final exams are due.

Supplemental List for Thematic Essays:

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 (Anonymous), *Primary Colors* (1996) / *The Running Mate* (2000)
Jim Lehrer, *The Last Debate* (1995)
Jeff Greenfield, *The People's Choice* (1995)
Ev Ehrlich, *Big Government: A Novel* (1998)
Tom Lowe, *Spin* (1998)
Brendan DuBois, *Resurrection Day* (1999)
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)
William R. Forstchen, *One Second After* (2009)
Allan Airish, *The Faithless: A Political Thriller* (2012)
Thomas Mallon, *Watergate: A Novel* (2012)
Steven Jacques, *Advance Man* (2014)
James R. Duncan, *Blood Republic: A Political Thriller* (2016)
Thomas Mullen, *Darktown* (2016)
Stuart Stevens, *The Innocent Have Nothing to Fear: A Novel* (2016)
Jennifer Close, *The Hopefuls* (2016)
Ben H. Winters, *Underground Airlines* (2016)
Jake Tapper, *The Hellfire Club* (2018)
David Pepper, *The Wingman* (2018); *The Voter File* (2020)

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)
Born Yesterday (Judy Holliday/Broderick Crawford, 1950)
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/Cliff Robertson, 1964)
Dr. Strangelove (Peter Sellers, 1964)
Fail Safe (Henry Fonda, 1964)
Seven Days in May (Kirk Douglas/Burt Lancaster, 1964)
The Candidate (Robert Redford, 1972)
The Conversation (Gene Hackman, 1974)
The Parallax View (Warren Beatty, 1974)
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)
Matewan (Chris Cooper/James Earl Jones, 1987)
RoboCop (Peter Weller, 1987)
Betrayed (Debra Winger/Tom Berenger, 1988)
Born on the Fourth of July (Tom Cruise, 1989)
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)
Lone Star (Chris Cooper/Kris Kristofferson, 1996)
Wag the Dog (Dustin Hoffman/Robert DeNiro, 1997)
Bulworth (Warren Beatty, 1998)
Pleasantville (Tobey Maguire, 1998)\
Election (Reese Withespoon, 1999)
The Insider (Al Pacino/Russell Crowe, 1999)
The Contender (Joan Allen, 2000)
Deterrence (Kevin Pollack, 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)
Syriana (George Clooney, 2005)
Babel (Brad Pitt, 2006)
Thank You for Smoking (Aaron Eckhart, 2006)
The State Within (Jason Isaacs, 2006)
V for Vendetta (Natalie Portman, 2006)
Charlie Wilson's War (Tom Hanks, 2007)
The Kingdom (Jamie Foxx/Jennifer Garner, 2007)
Rendition (Reese Witherspoon/Jake Gyllenhaal, 2007)
Body of Lies (Leonardo DiCaprio/Russell Crowe, 2008)
Frost/Nixon (Frank Langella/Michael Sheen, 2008)
Nothing But the Truth (Kate Beckinsale, 2008)
Recount: The Story of the 2000 Presidential Election (Kevin Spacey, 2008)
W. (Josh Brolin, 2008)
District 9 (Sharlto Copley, 2009)
State of Play (Russell Crowe, 2009)
Casino Jack (Kevin Spacey, 2010)
Fair Game (Naomi Watts/Sean Penn, 2010)
The Company Men (Ben Affleck, 2010)
The Ides of March (Ryan Gosling/George Clooney, 2011)
The Iron Lady (Meryl Streep, 2011)
Too Big to Fail (William Hurt/Paul Giamatti, 2011)
Boss season one (TV/Starz, Kelsey Grammer, 2011)
Game Change (Julianne Moore, 2012)
The Newsroom season one (TV/HBO, 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/Netflix, Kevin Spacey, 2013)
Cesar Chavez (Michael Peña, 2014)
Selma (David Oyelowo, 2014)
Snowpiercer (Chris Evans, 2014)
Madam Secretary, season one (TV/CBS, Téa Leoni, 2014-15)

Our Brand Is Crisis (Sandra Bullock, 2015)
The Runner (Nicholas Cage, 2015)
Sicario (Emily Blunt, 2015)
Spotlight (Michael Keaton/Rachel McAdams, 2015)
Suffragette (Carey Mulligan, 2015)
Trumbo (Bryan Cranston, 2015)
All the Way (Bryan Cranston, 2016)
The Birth of a Nation (Nate Parker, 2016)
The Handmaid's Tale season one (TV/Hulu, Elisabeth Moss, 2016)
Miss Sloane (Jessica Chastain, 2016)
Snowden (Joseph Gordon-Levitt, 2016)
Chappaquiddick (Jason Clarke, 2017)
The Circle (Emma Watson/Tom Hanks, 2017)
Get Out (Daniel Kaluuya, 2017)
Blackkklansman (John David Washington/Adam Driver, 2018)
The Oath (Ike Barinholtz, 2018)
On the Basis of Sex (Felicity Jones, 2018)
The Hate U Give (Amandla Stenberg, 2018)
Vice (Christian Bale/Amy Adams, 2018)
Dark Waters (Mark Ruffalo, 2019)
Just Mercy (Michael B. Jordan, 2019)
The Assistant (Julia Garner 2020)
Irresistible (Steve Carell, 2020)